The Rise and Fall of Giovanni Maria Versace

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Gianni Versace, birth name Giovanni Maria Versace was one of the most well known and influential designers of his time, using materials and textures that were considered unthinkable in the 1980s and 1990. Without him fashion would not be what it is today. He explored a new world of fashion culture by sewing the world of fashion with celebrity high life. Thus creating the high end fashion of the twenty first century. Unfortunately his life was cut short in the summer of 1997 when serial killer Andrew Cunanan killed him right outside of his Miami mansion. The fashion world mourned his death for many years.

On the coast of Italy sits Reggio Di Calabria a small province of the country with rich greek/roman heritage; which was Gianni Versace’s hometown. Just down the road from his house sat an ancient greek temple that inspired many of his future designs as well as the label for his company. As a baby boomer born in december of 1946 one year after World War II was over. Gianni grew up in a postwar community full of sorrow and dullness that was lacking glamor and refinement, Versace found beauty right below his home, his mother’s dress shop.  

Franca Versace was a couture dressmaker with fortyfive women working alongside her. She owned a clothing shop called Elle. And Gianni’s father Antonio was making a living as a methane gas and coal merchant. Rather than playing in the greek temple ruins with older sibling Santos Versace and younger sister Donatella; Young Gianni (see appendix A) would stay in the dressshop making puppets out of the remains of fabrics that sat under the design tables at the boutique. Whenever his mother would cut a piece of fabric she would say a small prayer. With creating a elegant one shoulder velvet dress at the age of nine. Gianni knew he would pursue a career in the fashion industry.

After Versace graduated high school, he stayed at home working with his mother in the boutique. Later in 1972 Gianni, after moving to Milian, was hired by multiple Italian fashion indualiasts to make collections of clothing. During this time he designed clothing for many Italian operas and shakespearean plays at the Teatro Alla Scala in Milan additionally designing clothing for many ballets as well. Six years subsequent to that Versace created his own collections for men and women with help from his brother Santos who had studied administrations for businesses at the university of Messinia not far from their home town of Reggio di Calabria. And by the late eighties and early nineties Versace managed to combine couture fashion with affordable pricing towards clothing, small leather goods, perfume and home

Versace said he got many of his ideas from Italian women of the street. But that didn’t last for long because many A list celebrities where wearing the clothing much supply and demand issues came into play, so the company was labeled as a highly expensive luxury designer brand. His designs where gaining lots of popularity when he started creating pieces of passion and articles of clothing that truly came from the heart. He put sexuality first which inspired many of his punk rock leather looks and his neon bright 90’s colors (see appendix B). As well as gaining many inspiration from famed artist Andy Warhol. Gianni did the unthinkable when he used polyvinyl chloride in his handbags and applying countless other textiles that were not yet introduced in the fashion world. Versace also brought in the idea of a supermodel into the 1990’s which then opened a new wave of celebrities such as Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford, Kendall Jenner and the Hadid sisters. As well as gaining the likes of many 80’s/90’s pop star icons such as Elton John, Bon Jovi, Sting, Tupac Shakur and Madonna. By doing this the name Versace showed up everywhere making headlines in Vogue and countless other fashion magazines. The Versace empire was prospering in the public eye and with his earnings, Versace bought a six million dollar mansion on Ocean Drive in Miami Florida, with a estimated thirty two million in refurbishments and total new section to the home along with building the pop legend, Madonna a custom made bathroom simply because she only took baths and not showers, by calling miami his fourth home many lavish restaurants and countless modeling agencies opened up in Miami, desperately seeking exploration and recognition from the designer. Versace loved to be surrounded with elation and excitement and he loved to be hosting high profile parties and charity events. The mansion was the place to be for anyone who was the luminary limelight of the nineteen nineties.

During the time Versace was thriving in the spotlight, Gianni was fusing the fashion world with pop culture. Rather than focusing on the street like many other designers Versace looked at the people walking the street, which influenced many of his colorful and rock star like designs. A good friend of Versace, Anna Wintour once said “He relished media attention and masterminded it, and everybody followed in his footsteps.” The population of aspiring male and female models would hang around Gianni desperately trying to become an iconic Versace model. Because Versace would occasionally hand out a modeling contact to one of them. People started to put their attention on the high profile celebrities sitting in the front

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5 Belafonte, Gina, and Jordan Belafonte. "La Dolce Vita" ["The Sweet Life"]. Time, vol. 150, no. 4 Accessed 28 July 1997. Article: La Dolce Vita, The Sweet Life
row of the fashion shows because Versace introduced that idea into the fashion world. Versace was one to take a controversial celebrity at the time such as Princess Diana of Wales and gave them the love and support that they needed through their rough path. This illustrates a present day disputation featuring the controversial national football league player Colin Kaepernick. Countless celebrities of minority descent this year, like Rihanna, and popular female rapper Cardi B rejected the idea of performing at the fifty third Super Bowl halftime show of 2019 because Kaepernick kneeled during the singing of the national anthem and was then kicked off the San Francisco 49ers when the season ended. He did this to silently protest the treatment of minorities in the united states. But it wasn't so silent after many teams started to kneel during the national anthem which sparked a social media outrage. The brand Nike then released a ad campaign featuring the quarterback and many more athletic activists such as Serena Williams and Lebron James. Nike stocks then skyrocketed after it was released. Similar to when Versace featured many persona no grata figures in his campaigns. Gianni also made a pathway for people of the LGBTQ community, Being a member of that society and cared and acknowledged many for their ethnic background and culture by expressing sexuality and culture in many of his pieces; Versace had socially and fashionably made a statement which was influential to many at the time.

“I'm a little like marco polo, going around and mixing cultures.” Gianni once said. Which he did, furthermore shaping the new generation of fashion culture. After most of his ads and collections were released to the public, Gianni was making appearances on talk shows, news networks, radio broadcasts and late night telllevision. His designs started a movement full of athletic, LGBT and Civil rights activists that would spark future generations to stand up for what is right.

During the mid 1990’s, the Versace house was flourishing with success, with over 800 million dollars in sales and 130 stores globally, with the iconic medusa logo on all products. The Medusa symbol comes from Versace’s greek/roman background growing up in Italy. Many stars would be seen wearing the tight fitting, bright colors and patterns with the signature Versace emblem. Dressing stars from Elton John to Tupac and surviving a rare ear cancer in 1993. No one would have thought the events of July fifteenth 1997 would have taken effect. Tragedy struck just moments after Versace was returning from a small café nearby his Miami beach

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mansion. Gianni was assassinated taking two open range shots to the back of the head by the on-the-run serial killer Andrew Cunanan (See appendix C), a homosexual prostitute seeking life of luxury and leisure. He was wanted in several other states and hid out in Miami before killing Versace. Much media attention came to this murder, yet this was not Cunanan’s first kill. His first casualty was former military officer Jerry Trail, he was brutally beaten to death with a hammer. After killing Trail, Andrew Cunanan went to kill his former beau, David Madson because of he allegedly gave him HIV. Andrew then went to Illinois killing Lee Milligan only to steal his truck, then he went to New jersey to kill William Reese. Though his motives were unknown, most suspected it was because he reportedly was trying to murder the man who gave him HIV. Andrew was on the top 10 most wanted fugitives in the united states. Thankfully the manhunt came to an end days after he killed Versace, when Andrew took his own life, by using the same gun he used to kill Gianni on a houseboat just off the coast of Miami.\(^{10}\) When the public was informed about his death it seemed as if the fashion world had came to an immediate halt. His death made headlines in newspapers, on tellavision and countless fashion magazines across the globe. His life will be remembered by good friends such as Elton John, Princess Diana (see appendix D ) But most importantly his family, remembering his life along with keeping the business up and running. His designs and impact he made on that generation of fashion that will forever remembered and influence future generations.

After it’s founder’s death, the company was in falling apart in the early two thousands, although the business was still primarily family based. Santos Versace was debating on selling the company. While Santos was trying running the company as president and Donatella as the creative director. Donatella, was so attached to her brother that after his death she turned to cocaine to deal with her sorrow. She started making inconsistent and flashy choices for the company. By doing so the fashion house fell due to industry changes and without Gianni the company did not evolve into the megabrand that it was set out to be. Donatella was falling apart and in 2005 the family along with dear friend Sir.Elton John staged a arbitration and sent her to a rehabilitation center in Arizona. As Donatella reached sobriety in two thousand seven, Versace started to grab ahold of the reins by hiring a new chief executive officer, Gian Giacomo Ferraris. As well as hiring Bian & Co consultants to get back on track in the next 3 years. Which the company did after letting go three hundred fifty of its staff members\(^{11}\) to make the brand more high end and valuable. The company’s decision ended with much anticipated success as the Versace has slowly but surely made its way back to the top.


Twelve years later, after the Versace business went through many difficult patches; The company was able to come back triumphically into the fashion world. In two thousand seventeen Donatella created a collection honoring her deceased brother twenty years after his death. (see appendix E ). A year later Donatella was one of the co-chairs at the Met Gala, a highly famous fundraising event that has gained much attention in the media in recent years. That raises money for the costume and art institute in the Big Apple. In addition to that the Versace company was sponsoring the event. And many celebrities such as Chadwick Boseman, Kim Kardashian and Gigi Hadid (See Appendix F) wore Versace that evening. Many of the roman catholic inspired designs were featured in the Met Gala museum that night. Although Versace isn’t as big as megabrands like Calvin Klein and Gucci. It still has a social impact on many to this day. Without Gianni fashion culture would not be what it is today and many jobs and opportunities for people seeking work in the fashion community would not exist today. He has truly left a print on this world and will forever be remembered as the designer who influenced fashion with pop culture.
(Appendix A)

(Appendix B)

Appendix C
Appendix D

Appendix E
(Appendix F)

Works Cited
1955- A portrait of Gianni Versace at the age of nine. This photo was taken when Gianni Versace was nine years old in his hometown. This will be used to visualise Gianni's life before fame and glory.


This will be used to show what the serial killer looked like in his early years.

Belafonte, Gina, and Jordan Belafonte. "La Dolce Vita" ["The Sweet Life"]. Time, vol. 150, no. 4 Accessed 28 July 1997. Article: La Dolce Vita, The Sweet Life. This is a secondary source about the life of Gianni Versace written about a week or two after his tragic murder. This will be used to go further into his life of luxury and fame.

Chan, Melissa. "The Real Story Behind The Assassination of Gianni Versace and Serial Killer Andrew Cunanan." Time, 6 Jan. 2018, p. 1. In this Time magazine article written by Melissa Chan. Chan goes deeper in the story of the tragic murder of the well-known designer Gianni Versace and into the mind of the Killer Andrew Cunanan. The reason is unknown of why he killed Versace. But some say that he was driven by one of his ex lovers who gave him HIV. This source will be used to talk about the tragedy in my essay as well as touch on the topic of Andrew Cunanan.

Charlie Rose. Performance by Gianni Versace, PBS, 1994. In this PBS Charlie Rose interview with Gianni Versace. Versace is asked a lot about his clothing and how his ideas and styles come to him. This will be used to go deeper into the triumph of my essay and how he became the world known fashion designer.

Diana, Princess of Wales at his memorial service in Milan. 22 July 1997. Gianni Versace- Life in Pictures, Vogue. This photo was taken when Dianna was exiting the funeral. This day
will be forever remembered by Versace's family and loved ones. It will be used to show how public and tragic that this event was.

*Fashion File with Tim Blanks.* Narrated by Tim Blanks, 1991. This episode of Fashion File filmed in 1991 goes to one of Versace's runway shows and gives us a deep dive into Versace's style of clothing back then. Along with a short interview with Gianni Versace.


Gigi Hadid wearing a Versace Gown to the 2018 met gala. 7 May 2018.

*Whatgoesaroundcomesaroundnyc.com,* May 2018. Accessed 7 Jan. 2019. This will be used to show one of the many Versace designs of 2018, worn by Bella Hadid. The style of Versace has really changed over the years. And yet most suits and accessories are easily recognized as Versace, the designers of the house played around and tried something new, meeting the criteria of the met gala theme.

"Master of Beauty: Gianni Versace." *NBC,* performance by Gianni Versace and Donatella Versace, NBC. In this interview, hosted by Charlie Ross Versace talks about his designs and his clothing and many other things that made him who he was.

1991 - *On the catwalk following a Versace show in LA.* 1991. Gianni Versace- Life in Pictures, *Vogue.* This photo was taken at one of versace's fashion shows in LA. In this photo many models surround the famed designer.

*A portrait of Gianni Versace inside his Miami Home.* August 1996.
Spindler, Amy M. "Gianni Versace, 50, the Designer Who Infused Fashion With Life and Art." New York Times, 6 July 1997. This article explains the impact Versace Had on the fashion world. He really made an impact that influenced many designers later.

Thomas, Dana. "Fashion Disaster." Fashion Disaster, 2009, pp. 52-56 154 vols. Originally published in Newsweek, 16 Nov. 2009. In this Newsweek article about the famed designer and his sister goes through the aftermath of his death and how the versace house struggled after he died.

"Tour of the Versace Mansion." Hosted by Shelley Acoca. Videofashion, Videofashion, 29 Sept. 2011. This video gives a tour of the Versace mansion as well as some inside details of the home and names some stars that have stayed there in the past.

Vlamos, Yannis. In this tribute collection to Gianni Versace we see that models walk in a group rather than alone. 22 Sept. 2017. Vogue.com. Accessed 7 Jan. 2019. This will be used to show what the Tribute collection at the 2017 fashion show looked like.

Wyche, Steve. Colin Kaepernick Explains why he sat during the national anthem. 27 Aug. 2016. Nfl.com. Accessed 10 Jan. 2019. This Source will be used to connect What Versace did during his lifetime to the clothing brand, Nike. Versace took a controversial figure at the time and cared for them. Nike did the same thing as well.