

The Blueprint: Aaliyah

Jailine Collado

ARTH 1204

New York City College Of Technology

Aaliyah Haughton, known as Aaliyah, was an American singer and actress. She has been credited for helping redefine R&B, hip-hop, and pop. Aaliyah coined the title Princess of pop; she was nothing less than an icon. Aaliyah's style perfectly blended masculinity and femininity, undeniably impacting fashion. The 90s were pivotal to the evolution of streetwear by way of music and, in particular, hip-hop culture. With the emergence of female artists like Aaliyah, tomboy fashion assumed a more prominent role in hip-hop. Aaliyah frequently wore oversized shirts, baggy pants, and dark shades. Her style made her the perfect candidate to represent the Tommy Hilfiger brand. She was admired by many because of her individuality and fluidity (Vaughn, 2021). Aaliyah remains one of the prominent performers and trendsetters of the pre-social media age. There is no current streetwear trend that Aaliyah did not sport first (Okwodu, 2016). In the 1990s, Hilfiger opened a division called Tommy Jeans. This collection was more youthful, and it had more logos. Hilfiger wanted to market the label to young people, not just his typical consumer looking for the preppy look that he was previously known for. The pieces Aaliyah wore came from the men's line; she quickly inspired the women's collection. In this campaign, we see Aaliyah wear a bandeau top with the signature Tommy Hilfiger logo and the blue, red, and white color block print paired with baggy jeans again with the Tommy Hilfiger logo on either side of the jean legs with the blue, red, and white color block print and exposed boxer brief with once again the Tommy Hilfiger logo. The details were necessary for this campaign because, as stated before, Hilfiger wanted to cater to a more youthful audience, and logos was the way to do it (Salessy, 2020).

Tommy Hilfiger claims to be a brand that celebrates diversity and inclusion, and that was heightened in the 90s thanks to artists like Aaliyah. Hilfiger Being a white designer and taking

inspiration from a black artist might have raised concerns of cultural appropriation; Hilfiger has successfully navigated fashion and race. At the time, many European fashion designers knew the hip-hop community enjoyed their clothes but chose not to work with them. Once Hilfiger knew that the hip-hop community enjoyed his designs, he pursued the relationship. The link between hip hop and Tommy never felt exploitative because while Hilfiger was profiting off of black rappers, he also directly looped them into his world; it was a mutually beneficial relationship. Hilfiger sought out black talent and embraced them like Aaliyah. As an industry that thrives on exclusivity, championing diversity is not easy for fashion (Lieber, 2021). Seeing people of color wearing designer brands like Hilfiger, individuals inspired to look like artists like Aaliyah felt inclined to sport the brand.

Tommy Hilfiger has built one of the most successful clothing businesses by linking his name with Hip Hop and pop musicians. What is remarkable about Hilfiger is the range of artists who have embraced his fashion, from McJagger to Snoop Dog and Aaliyah. Hilfiger company has been generous with providing free clothing to black performers; with that being said, hip-hop socialites have shown their loyalty to the Hilfiger brand because of the relationship building. Hip-hop showed that you could develop a brand based entirely on artists. Although, at the time, many brands were signing models for their campaigns, Rather than following the norm for his fall advertising campaign, Hilfiger enlisted Aaliyah. The company has sold 2,400 red, white, and blue baggy jeans emblazoned with “Tommy Hilfiger” that Aaliyah wears in the advertisements. Aaliyah appeals to black teenagers and young women. It is significant to Hilfiger to have the music because it caters to a younger audience he wants to continue attracting (White, 1997). Aaliyah epitomized the eras street style in Tommy Hilfiger crop tops and low-slung baggy pants.

Aaliyahs was so influential that any girl wearing baggy pants and a little crop top still sexy is Aaliyah. She never wanted to look too far away from achievable for any girl on the street. This made Aaliyah incredibly appealing to her audience because they could see themselves in her. (Palumbo, 2021).

Tommy Hilfiger can pursue specific collaborations today because of his relationship with Aaliyah and her influence on his designs. Hilfiger later pursued a collection titled Tommy x Indya; the collection celebrated the diversity and uniqueness of the world while practicing the belief that great style knows no boundaries. This collaboration directly takes inspiration from the late Aaliyah. Indya's favorite artist was Aaliyah, and she knew her from the way she rocked Tommy. Aaliyah solidified what makes Tommy Hilfiger magnificent by how she wore Tommy and made other young black girls see themselves in the clothes. Aaliyah was one of the first women to pioneer wearing baggy oversized men's clothing. Aaliyah's Tommy logo bandeau top has been reimaged in Indya's collection, saying Indya in script, a similar style top we see Aaliyah wear in the original campaign. Indya's collection is non-gender-conforming and size-inclusive. Showcasing that there is something here for any style (Greenfield, 2021). Tommy also collaborated with music artist H.E.R and when asked what sort of memories H.E.R had of Tommy as a kid, she stated that she always thinks of Aaliyah and the influence she has on her style today; the way she feels the most herself in her tomboy style and oversized silhouettes[(Greenwood, 2022).

One of the many reasons Aaliyah had such great appeal was because she was able to cross boundaries and was one of the first examples of androgyny from the 90s. Singer-songwriter Dawn Richard said that Aaliyah's style still motivates pop culture. The way she fearlessly played

with her tomboy style and sexuality made her unique in every way. Artists like Aaliyah paved the way for black women like Dawn Richards herself to express their fashion and art into the world. Musician Suzi Analogue stated that her style was what she needed as a girl growing up with Aaliyah. Her style showcased the journey from girlhood to womanhood. The message her style evoked to young girls everywhere was that it was okay to be more than just picture-perfect (Hahn, 2018).

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