André Leon Talley dead at 73

By Godfrey Deeny - 19 January 2022

André Leon Talley, the path-breaking American fashion editor has died at 73. His death was confirmed by TAA PR, the public relations agency. The cause of his death has still not been confirmed.

In a four-decade career, Talley won senior positions at major fashion titles, and became a leader in diversity, long before that term became common.

After working for Andy Warhol’s Interview – and partying in Studio 54 – Talley broke into fashion journalism at industry bible WWD. Going on to become its Paris Bureau Chief, a pivotal role in fashion as the senior reporter in the world’s most important fashion capital.

Subsequently, he held senior positions at Vanity Fair, House & Garden and above all Vogue, where he served as a contributing editor until 2013. While at Vogue he did everything from interviewing Rihanna on the Met Gala red carpet, and Michelle Obama in the magazine’s pages.
Instantly recognizable for his booming voice, giant caftans and physical presence, Talley had a reputation for speaking his mind in a business, where critical opinion is often deliberately muted.

He was also the author of multiple books, most famously his *The Chiffon Trenches*, which was published in 2020, and was seen to have skewered his long time boss Anna Wintour.

Born on October 16, 1948, Talley was blessed with a dry wit, and an inexhaustible supply of designer tales and stories.

His many roles in fashion also included stints supporting the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute; advising Gianni Versace on staging his epic shows; and perhaps most importantly, championing black models, editors and designers.

Last year he was informed that he would be the recipient of the de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, one of France’s highest honors. Reacting to the news, Talley told his alma mater WWD: “Of all the education and experiences that I have had in this world, I think this represents a great deal to my race and my people. I hope that it will make people, who look like me, really proud. I am very proud to be an African American man, who grew up in the Jim Crow South to receive this prestigious honor from the Republic of France.”

Three decades ago, Talley was often the only person of color in front-rows in major shows in London, Milan, New York and Paris. If that is no longer the case today, much of the change was thanks to Talley’s often heroic career.

We will not see his like again.

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