

# gender & ethnic studies

# Versace's Native American

## A Colonized Body in the Name of Aesthetic and Dynastic Glory

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*The following is an excerpt from a longer piece. For full text, please visit [www.honorsjournal.com](http://www.honorsjournal.com).*

moment fashion designers have the means to collaborate with Native American fashion designers. However, there is still as owners of intellectual property. While some brands may initially start on the right track via collaboration with Native artists, it may not always end in success. Most recently, Versace has included Native American designs in a portion of the collection belongs to a tribute honoring Gianni Versace and his original print. I will be discussing the implications of men and women. In this essay, I will look at Versace's legacy and his original print; the new Native American Tribute Collection by Donatella Versace; and Donna Karan's collaboration with Pueblo artist, Virgil Ortiz. I argue that respectful recognition of Native North American property is thrown aside for aesthetic and dynastic glory, which in turn, allows non-Native designers to colonize the 'exotic' Native woman's body by denying Native North American men and women the opportunity to represent themselves to the global

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tural identity, vis-a-vis sovereignty, is put at stake when global European designers perceive North Native American identities as a resource to improve aesthetic and individualistic glory.

One exhibition, curated by Karen Kramer from the Peabody Essex Museum, to counter mainstream narratives imposed upon Native North American women is traveling exhibition

is argued by Kramer to be the scope of Native American fashion.

in contemporary society by active

sought to honor her brother’s artistic genius. Donatella Versace’s *Tribute* collection features Native American iconography that is directly based on the *Tribute* collection debuted on the runway, Donatella’s voiceover encouraged the audience to “imagine a world without [Versace’s] allegiance to women.” Versace’s *prostitute style*, that reveals as much as it covers, contradicts the voiceover. Women’s voices are claimed by Gianni Versace through swaddling fabrics that accentuate and fetishize women’s skin. Donatella’s voiceover entertains the thought in which Versace “helped women reclaim their own voice to be themselves.” I argue, however, that Gianni Versace robbed women of a voice, and created them as objects subjected to the male gaze despite his lifelong commitment to women’s “visual authority.”

Portraying Versace as historically accurate and culturally driven work in the mainstream American Imaginary. Two of seven items that are direct reproductions of Gianni Versace’s original print belonging to Donatella’s *Tribute* collection. In these designs there are several motifs that promote

“the world of the American West.” headdress-wearing rider ; Natives on horseback with young child and colt; man with long unbraided hair, feather atop his head, peace pipe, moccasins, plains hide clothing, and beaded accessories; and most notably, presented on the *can* imagines Native American identity as the United States of America’s intellectual property — free to use, sell, and appropriate. The inclusion of the United States of America as paternal, civilizing, and rightful owners of Native North American intellectual property.

The absence of women in this design silences those who are respected and integral members of their respective Native communities. That

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Wear Fashion Show.”

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*Craft of Gianni Versace*, ¶¶ ¶¶ ±\$ ¶¶±

to refer to Versace’s bodysuits.

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Where are the women?  
Where are the people? These designs  
Bill, ethnographic zooscapes , and  
an idealized past. There is no truth  
likeness. The only true image in this

and elegant. The dresses speak to all audiences, Native and non-Native, and are a testament to the Pueblo of Cochiti.

Dr. Jessica R. Metcalfe writes a compelling article, "Reclaiming the Body: Strategies of Resistance in Virgil Ortiz's Fashion Designs" where she argues the collaboration between Ortiz and Donna Karan was an act of reclamation for Native representation in fashion, and by doing so, she argues that Ortiz's work is a form of American art. Having continued a family tradition of *muños pot-ter*, Ortiz uses the same techniques to create social commentary regarding non-Native representation. For Ortiz, reclaiming the representation of Native peoples lies within decoration, both in the design and in the execution.

age that mediates the consumption of American society. Versace's *FW* dismisses women as absent, non-essential members of Native communities, whereas men are unworthy of descriptive information to distinctly identify an individual. Versace's *Tribute* collection is a result of the dominant social and economic formations within West-  
American artistic expression. Aspects of dominant American culture thrive American motifs as exotic and obtainable via clothing and accessories. Stereotypes created by the fashion industry transform and exoticize both Native men and women into non-existent peoples living in the periphery of American popular culture.

Virgil Ortiz is not the only artist who is using his commercial plat-  
are other designers such as Bethany Yellowtail. Jared Yazzie, Patricia Michaels, and Loren Aragon. Virgil Ortiz and Donna Karan set a hopeful precedent for other global designers to give back to the communities they work with. Rather than use Ortiz's designs for her own aesthetic glory, Donna Karan was mindful to refer to Virgil Ortiz as an artist, "whose work *directly* designs." In comparison, Versace, both Donatella and Gianni, appropriate Native American identity to build a legacy that silences Native women and restricts Native North Americans to the "world of the American west."

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Manipulating Representations  
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Exhibits to Fight Stereotypes in  
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skin as white as possible in order to  
be considered beautiful, and it seems  
that Photoshop has taken the place of

able gains on smaller scales within the beauty industry that have empowered women of color and provided them with avenues to resist racial oppression. Over the last few decades, small, independent beauty brands have emerged. Women of color founded brands such as Koyvoca, Cocotique, and Lipbar over the last few years, filling gaps left by mainstream brands. These brands focus on creating products for women of color, and have been met with gratitude by women of color seeking more makeup options. While these brands have the same amount of popularity as hallmark beauty brands, they model racial inclusivity that mainstream brands should adopt. In the last year, Rihanna has founded and launched her own beauty line, Fenty. Fenty's mission statement is to be inclusive of everyone while at the same time focusing on a wide range of hard-to-match skin tones, creating formulas that work for all skin types, and pinpointing universal

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# Hey Grandma

, I hold the world in my heart  
Through me, I bring together those who are apart. Look at me, I am brown, I  
am black  
Raise me, I carry my family on my back  
Hear me, I speak life into your world  
I am the world, I am the world, I am the world, I am the world

Hear me, for my rhythm moves your soul.  
I have so much soul, so much soul in my voice, in my heart, my music,  
and my shoe.

Remember me, because bringing warmth to your life is my role.

I am the world, I am the world, I am the world, I am the world  
I am the world, I am the world, I am the world, I am the world  
I am the world, I am the world, I am the world, I am the world

Remember how they called us wild, uncivilized? Dirty and violent,  
then why they have us clean their houses, why they have us raise  
their child?

You know we didn't have much money, boy that how it goes is

You like that Kanye, how that song go? "Cause with my family we  
the roses."  
I am the world, I am the world, I am the world, I am the world

He talked about roses, black roses, roses is so beautiful, because we is  
those. We is black. We is strong, you can't tell me where I can grow.

The petals, black petals, so soft and beautiful, but you know they  
sharp too. My nails are the thorns on the stem.

You know if they put their hands too low, they get cut, see what  
these thorns do to them. Tongue sharper than the knife, the knife, the  
knife they held at our throats when we said no.

Tell them to give me back my life, for it went to making theirs.

Look at me, for I hold the world in my heart.

You know, I am the world. They use me, they hurt me, they kill me,  
they don't love me.

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I'm trying to bring those together who are apart  
That truce between red and blue, what did it really do?  
Ice Cube and Eazy the only one the kids looked up to  
Raise me, for I carry our family on my back  
My back, strong, so strong, black strong. How that Chance song go?  
I sing in church, "you singing too but yo grandma ain't my  
grandma. Mine's is handmade," but we hear hand maid, he said his



example, the “past atrocities” Day refers to may be the annihilation of indigenous people in what is now the United States and the enslavement of Africans. However, comfort for those in power is not the only function of in power, overlooking history is a way to stay in power; to continually gain wealth from the labor of black Americans. The revival rhetoric validates and secures non-people of color’s “natural” ownership of potential capital of indigenous lands and col-

ly, the rhetoric surrounding the wa-

is the same rhetoric used around the colonization of the America’s. Mak-

people that live there and according-

colonialism.

In their book, *Black Geogra-*  
 Kath-  
 situate the disappearance of peoples due to colonialism as a continuing and violent marginalization and engulfment of people, land, and cul-  
 of central power in the United States recurrently incites this violence. The geographies of black and indige-  
 nous people in the U.S. are continually overlooked, unspoken about, or  
 Before non-people of color committed genocide and conquered what is now Detroit, hundreds of indige-  
 nous tribes lived in the Great Lakes area including, but not limited to: the Anishinaabe, Wyandot, Iroquois,  
 By naturalizing indigenous people’s enslavement and violent assimilation

sume the normality of the margin-  
 alization and enslavement of other  
 groups, such as black Americans  
 the tendency to deny the existence  
 of peoples, keep the conquered and  
 their spaces hidden from the con-  
 oppression...

The state and nation abandon-  
 ed many people and parts of  
 Detroit, those who survived this  
 anomaly are largely still hidden from  
 large scale movement of non-people  
 of color to the suburbs (and away  
 in unequal distribution of resources  
 and opportunity for low income peo-  
 ple and people of color. Although,  
 the abandonment rhetoric utilized by  
 mainstream media is problematic. It  
 this abandonment—those still living  
 in the city—to the status of empty  
 lots. In her book, Kimber-  
 lery Kinder contextualizes the way  
 the geography of poverty is made in-  
 visible to those with hegemonic iden-  
 tities. The racial divide in Detroit al-  
 lows for extreme income, health, and  
 housing disparities...Internal class  
 divisions further marginalize those  
 who are already racially ostracized.

...Housing discrimination  
 forces people into the margins of  
 society, disappearing them from na-  
 people themselves can be taken again  
 by non-people of color.

However, marginality does  
 not mean disappearance or extinc-  
 tion...The social and geographical  
 margins of Detroit are also spaces  
 the landscape of the city, to commu-  
 nity organizations, resistance is ev-



in Detroit is abandoned, there are more than two-thousand small farms throughout the city. Resistance is in entire abandoned blocks dedicated to displays of sculptures and art such as the Heidelberg Project depicted below.

[...]

Resistance is in the continued cent of the black population living under the poverty line. Resistance is in the rigging of houses by water hoses to provide clean water to entire communities. Resistance is the survival of entire groups of people living in a country where they are not meant to survive. Indeed, the marginal spaces in Detroit are the spaces of unheard stories and possibilities.

Blues Epistemology, according to Clyde Woods and Katherine resistance composing of geographical, socio-economic, and political critiques similar to those in blues music and hip hop. The blues tradition is the antithesis of the plantation tradition and all of its manifestations. If neoliberalism serves to divide, then blues tradition serves to connect. Paralleling the neoliberal creation of a neo-plantation society, the blues

tradition became a form of massive resistance...Blues epistemology also alized spacial impoverishment," recognizing "plantation and state models" extending beyond slavery in agriculture and sharecropping. The "roll back" policies of the eighties which Peck and Tickell explain as the "shift in the pattern of deregulation and dismantlement," can be seen as part of this institutionalized spacial impoverishment, or as a function of neo-slavery. According to blues epistemologies, the

derstood as a part of neoliberal policies and practices that historically disenfranchised the established black are in Detroit exemplar of Woods's understanding of a plantation society that extends far beyond agriculture.

In Detroit, the roll back policies in the height of implementing neoliberalist policies targeted the bodies of black women (Peck and



Despite the limitations of this work, this thesis makes a valuable contribution in understanding the interconnectedness of media and 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 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