

## Stussy's Story

In the year 1982, the now recognizable Stussy handwriting had originally been thrown onto surfboards and printed on t-shirts in the little beach town of Huntington Beach, California, sparking the journey of Stussy clothing and its eventual impacts on streetwear and fashion as a whole. With such authentic beginnings, the clothing brand ironically created a worldwide impact on streetwear – a relaxed and contemporary style of fashion deeply influenced by pop culture. Stussy's growth and progression in the fashion world stems from their accurate references to the trends that came before it, culminating in the current cultural aspects of surf, skate, and certain music genres such as hip-hop and reggae, and straying away from the high end designer looks of the time such as Gucci, Versace, and Tommy Hilfiger. You can not begin to discuss the topic of streetwear and its evolution without mentioning Stussy's impact, for it to be recognized as the epitome of streetwear, "effortless attitude, spot-on cultural references, dope threads and the spawning of an independent global movement". Stussy embodies these values with their organic growth and beginnings, timeless authenticity in their pieces and in creating a worldwide culmination of like-minded DJs, club kids and sharp dressers, unknowingly creating a brand that would bestow a revolutionary impact on streetwear, to a level of influence in which no other clothing brand has been able to capture.

What began as a simple form of income for a California surfer to fund his true desire of shaping surfboards, screen printing his iconic font onto clothing pieces soon became his true focus. Shawn Stussy grew up surfing and board shaping in Huntington Beach, but because Shawn never intended on making clothes, but rather shaping boards, it gave the brand its true authenticity that so many start-up brands are unable to attain; Shawn used the

word ‘poser’ in an interview to describe the previously existing surf companies. Screen printing his ‘Stussy’ name in his infamous font was originally only to supplement an income for his board shaping, “designing and selling clothing is almost entirely accidental. It all starts with his love for surfing.” (Abdihakim). And Shawn incorporated his lifestyle, love for surfing, and attention to detail into his clothes, as he did with his boards. Shawn integrated many aspects of the things that he loved, while creating something that nobody else was doing. The clothes he was making were not limited to surf or skate culture either. In taking references from a multitude of influences in fashion and combining that with creative clothing items like painter pants, he constructed something the growing streetwear world was unknowingly awaiting. Shawn tried to apply his naturally unique perspective and simplistic designs into these innovative clothes, though what he lacked was funding. Co-founding the brand was Shawn’s partner, Frank Sinatra Jr. (with no relation to the singer), who provided Shawn with financial support in the beginning, but more importantly encouraged him to apply all of his talent and focus towards his clothes. Sinatra saw Stussy for its true values of “authenticity, talent, and a truly unique character” (Adz), recognizing the brand’s potential before Shawn did. Its organic start built these core values that the brand follows to this day. As the company grew, it stayed loyal to its direction, ignoring the pulls of fashion trends, giving its customers a perceived feeling of exclusivity when wearing their pieces while maintaining their typical ‘streetwear’ brand accessibility.

Stussy maintained its relevance not by conforming to the forever changing trends that weave their way in and out of popularity, but instead by sticking to the brands original authenticity and conserving the brands initial customers attention. Stussy has been able to connect to the youth and their intended demographic in a seemingly effortless attempt to maintain their relevance in the fashion world. They balance themselves amongst the current

day trends and popular brands of the time, while respecting the brand's heritage and its values. Looking back, it is easy to recognize Stussy's consistency in the company's structure and products, but it was not always like that. When Shawn stepped away in 1996, selling his stock to Sinatra, the brand lost its cache and many of its customers' attention. The fashion period of the early 2000s harshly countered Stussy's early resurgence without its founder, "thrift-shop crap, plaid, punk, grunge" (Adz). Sinatra and the interim designers for Shawn massively countered the fashion trends of this period, setting themselves out of place, into inevitable isolation as a brand. Sinatra worked to reconnect the company's products with its niche audience, while staying true to the brand's values. Stussy's priorities were redirected into quality products, reestablishing their longevity by selling in stores like Dover Street Market, and redesigning Stussy stores all over the world to generate a new look for the brand. Stussy's global brand director, Fraser Avey, demonstrates Stussy's priorities "There isn't this ambition to grow. The ambition is to be good." (Tashjian). Stussy is a company that derives from authenticity, for Sinatra and Avey to value quality over generating revenue demonstrates the brand's focus. From the early 2000's, it was a long period of finding the right balance of what the brand was and what consumers and trends want you to be, though Stussy exemplifies a brand that does not change who they are to appeal to the masses of periodic fashion trends.

The International Stussy Tribe and the community Shawn and Sinatra built around Stussy in the early years evolved from a small inner circle group of friends who shared similar perspectives of fashion, music and street-culture. It was an effective way to expand the brand's outlook, engage with new customers, and be represented by well-dressed individuals. In creating an inspiring culture around the brand, Stussy's worldwide presence came as a result of the Tribe and its impact. Stussy Tribe members included: DJ's from New York,

streetwear kingpins from Tokyo, and hairdressers from London, to encapsulate the notion of Stussy's worldwide influence on the world of streetwear. Among these members were eventual icons in their own respective ways. James Jebbia, a former store manager of Stussy, would go on to found Supreme, probably the most well known streetwear brand with expensive pieces balancing their brand between both luxury and streetwear labels. One of Stussy's potentially most influential members was Tremaine Emory (Tashjian), seemingly behind every relevant brand today like Marc Jacobs and Levi's, he is now creative director at Supreme. While today the internet has diluted the need for a Stussy Tribe that wears and represents the brand with a Stussy varsity jacket, Stussy continues to be a driving force "in contemporary culture and fashion" (Bobowicz), equipped with a strong community loyal to wearing the brand's products. Even without many of the original members of the International Stussy Tribe offering much influence on the brand today, it is important to recognize the company's heritage, along with the energy the original contributors have built around the brand that can be carried into the future.

Stussy defines all that streetwear tries to be, and it ironically came into popularity at a time when a large portion of the fashion world had nowhere to turn but to streetwear, which is why it is largely considered that Stussy is responsible for streetwear and its evolution. In combining originality, cultural references, and quality, along with a simplistic and memorable name, Stussy was an obvious candidate to become one of the most influential brands in streetwear. What remains is not only the brand's longevity simply as a brand, but its impacts on other companies and designers, accounting for "a whole sub-genre of fashion design, seeping into the work of everyone from Raf Simons to Neek Lurk of cult internet brand Anti Social Social Club" (AnotherMan). Two vastly different apparel brands, Raf Simons and Anti Social Social Club, draw inspiration from Stussy. Raf Simons from Stussy's simplistic high end

designs, and Anti Social Social Club for their streetwear identity and branding, taking shockingly similar prints of Stussy and applying them to their apparel. This demonstrates Stussy's continually influential abilities as they continue to push out timeless products. Despite coming dangerously close to downfall and disaster in the early 2000's, Stussy had been able to maintain its exclusivity with their desirable pieces, almost unidentifiable if the clothing item was from the 80's or present day. In the AnotherMan article, Stussy is praised for their ability to still lure the attention of so many kids "nearly four decades after it first printed its logo onto a blank t-shirt" (AnotherMan). This demonstrates Stussy's ability to maintain their in street-culture, still producing their own products, while still having a lasting impression on the direction of streetwear.

What began with a surf company screen printing tees, Stussy maintained their authentic values, bringing together a bona fide group of people with similar interests and shared ideas, to create a brand that has catered to the worlds of hip-hop, punk, surf and skate, arguably creating the first true "streetwear" brand. In doing so, Stussy is still respected, tees are still glorified, and companies still draw inspiration from their laidback and simplistic branding and designs. Stussy's ability to embrace such numerous subcultures gave the company the edge in fashion, capable of associating with such a variety of genres in the fashion world. Today, Stussy's heritage is remembered and embraced, and as they continue to make products with the same qualities of craftsmanship and creativity, their presence and impact will continue to be noticeable in the streetwear scene.

#### Works Cited

Abdihakim, Mohamed. "All You Need to Know about Stussy History." *Cult Edge*, 23 May 2019, <https://cultedge.com/stussy-history/>.

Adz, King, and Wilma Stone. *This Is Not Fashion: Streetwear: Past, Present and Future*. Thames & Hudson, 2018.

AnotherMan. "How Stüssy Foresaw the Future of Fashion." *AnotherMan*, 24 Aug. 2017, <https://www.anothermanmag.com/style-grooming/9984/how-stussy-foresaw-the-future-of-fashion>.

Bobowicz, Joe. "How Stüssy Influenced Generations of Streetwear Culture." *I*, 20 Dec. 2019, [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/9395m5/history-stussy-streetwear-culture](https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/9395m5/history-stussy-streetwear-culture).

DeLeon, Jian. "The Oral History of Stüssy: Part 1." *Complex*, Complex, 20 Apr. 2020, <https://www.complex.com/style/2012/12/the-oral-history-of-stussy-part-1>.

Tashjian, Rachel. "How Stüssy Became the Chanel of Streetwear." *GQ*, 10 May 2021, <https://www.gq.com/story/stussy-revival-2021>.