

## Cultural Appropriation



Cultural appropriation refers to the inappropriate adoption of customs, practices, and ideas of one culture by members of another. It occurs when members of a dominant group adopt cultural elements of minority groups without any acknowledgement. Cultural appropriation perpetuates and reinforces negative racial stereotypes and contributes to oppression. Cultural appropriation is problematic because it is seen as a power trip with privilege, in which the privileged take from the oppressed because they feel they have the power to do so, with no credit nor respect for the original source. Cultural appropriation can also be considered racist and stereotypical because it is seen as a way of mocking the people and the culture if it is not represented correctly. Oftentimes, sacred aspects of a particular culture suddenly become trendy and popularized without reference; but when individuals don't take the time to learn and fully understand said cultural elements or traditions, it is disrespectful and diminishes its

representation. Some things that people often culturally appropriate include: art, literature, music, food, religion/spirituality, hair, fashion, minority languages, and body alterations. Further examples relevant in our society today include the fact that dreadlocks are often worn by white people to demonstrate non-conformity, creating a view that they are dirty. This was seen when Justin Bieber was praised for his dreadlocks, whilst Zendaya, a person of color, was told that she looks as though she 'smells of patchouli oil or weed'. Those in a position of privilege continue to profit from the labour of those who are oppressed, while the creators receive no credit. In worse cases, the originators are mocked for these traditions, as it can be seen with braids and cornrows often being considered as less professional compared to other hairstyles.

In today's time, cultural appropriation is prevalent in the fashion industry, specifically in the clothing and hair branches. Several designers, models, celebrities, and influencers profit from designs taken from minority cultures. This minimises the cultural significance that hair plays in the lives of people of other cultures. A notable example is Kim Kardashian wearing cornrows and Fulani braids and going as far as renaming them "Bo Derek braids" despite the hairstyles' West African origins. The photo above showing Kim Kardashian in braids caused an uproar from the black community as her "trendsetter" status allows her to be able to influence a large audience, which has never faced the same discrimination as African Americans for wearing the braids. This is an example of how those in a position of privilege are celebrated for their 'innovation' while the originators are actively discriminated against.

Many individuals fail to understand the weight and negative effects of cultural appropriation and instead equate it to cultural appreciation. In reality, while cultural appreciation is important for bringing about unity amongst cultures, appropriation breaks this unity by showing dismissal and disrespect to said cultures. Cultural appreciation is about learning more about and cherishing different cultures around the world. Those who truly appreciate cultures do so by enjoying the food and music, travelling or enhancing their knowledge on the customs and traditions, supporting businesses and people belonging to them, giving due credit for various art styles and inspiration, and also cherishing their differences instead of using or adopting these cultures. I believe that it is not difficult at all to avoid appropriating other cultures just like the image above, but rather, it simply takes a level of self-awareness to be able to reflect and analyze whether one's intentions are to genuinely show admiration for a culture or just use it for personal gain or aesthetic. One can also research and learn about the significance of particular elements, ideas and traditions they are considering to explore, and when possible, interacting with an individual belonging to that culture is a great way to gain some more insight.