

The misuse and nonconsequential abuse of cultural appropriation

[Business](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder; accordingly, culture appropriation is in the eye of the perceiver. Some eyes perceive the adoption of icons, rituals, and behavior from various cultures as a way of complimenting their roots. Still, others perceive the superficial underpinnings as even deeper implications of offensive culture appropriation. The history of culture appropriation starts with dominant cultures “ borrowing” aspects from subordinate cultures such as style, appeals, and mannerisms. The subordinate cultures feel as though their culture’s uniqueness diminishes when used out of the original context.

One question exemplifies the stem of the issue: “ What is considered ‘ out of the original context’?” Could this phrase represent the demeaning presentation of cultures in today’s sport teams’ mascots, music idols, fashion statements, and comedic appeals? Could this phrase also represent the minimizing of sacred symbolism reaped by the sacrifices and struggles of different cultural ancestors? Because of the predominant misuse of treasured customs from subordinate cultures and lack of consequences for such misuse, cultural appropriation undermines the authenticity and identification of the past from which people develop. The misuse of standards, icons, rituals or behavior from subordinate cultures by dominant cultures subverts the authentic history and lineages of the targeted subordinate cultures. Through cultural appropriation, dominant cultures reap benefits from the degradation of the minority cultures. One of the most attacked groups of people that are consequently oppressed by cultural appropriation is the Native Americans. Native American culture experts Angela Riley and Kristen Carpenter reveal the mainstream examples in American society that are

often overlooked and explain the excuse behind Indian cultural appropriation, “ For centuries, non-Indians have appropriated Indian cultures for their own purposes, largely concerned with identity formation” (Riley and Carpenter 862). Examples of Indian cultural appropriation include Victoria Secret models’ usage of Indian headdresses, sports teams with Indian mascots, and celebrities’ usage of Indian feathers in photo shoots.

As many dominant cultures use these aspects of Indian culture to embellish their own identities, the same non-Indian cultures continue to diminish the authentic history including tragedies behind such actions. While Indian women undergo tragic experiences such as domestic violence and sexual assault, celebrities seductively depict the charming Indian maiden in music videos and concerts excluding the reality and suffering behind the Indian women portrayed. According to Native Americans, cultural appropriation entitles more than just the usage of lands, sacred objects, or identities, rather Indian appropriation strikes at the heart of Native American culture with lasting effects of humiliation and discrimination. The inadequacy of practical consequences for cultural appropriation normalizes the tendency to execute disrespectful actions toward subordinate cultures. In today’s society, people look up to those most recognized in the media and tend to accommodate to new styles and ways of many celebrities.

Celebrities in the spotlight bring about the normalization of cultural appropriation through the media stars’ adoptions of traditional elements from subordinate cultures such as hairstyles, music, clothes, and art. Cultural appropriation shines on the public platform of the dominant American culture

while stripping the subordinate cultures of the respect that such sacred customs deserve: “ One negative result of this (cultural appropriation) can be that elements of an appropriated culture are distorted... when normally they would be treated with some respect or reverence” (Cho 59). Elements prevalent in the media that diminish the authenticity of cultural values lack practical consequences that could assist the issue in more than one way. From a legal standpoint, American law becomes typically restricted around the broad issue of cultural appropriation, “ For indigenous people, then, there is little protection against the appropriation of intangible cultural ‘ goods,’ even if the appropriation is experienced by tribes as distortion, theft, offense, or misrepresentation...” (Riley and Carpenter 866). The law blurs the line between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation by allowing certain degrading actions to be permissible toward subordinate cultures. As cultural appropriation becomes normalized, subordinated cultures must continue to tolerate the disrespect and irreverence from dominant cultures without the aid of practical consequences.

While members who have benefitted from cultural or racial power may feel that subordinate cultures are being “ too sensitive,” dominant culture members fail to realize the great depth of importance between the different power dynamics among cultures. Many people choose to turn away from the reality that comes in having better privileges than others; however, others feel victimized when accused of cultural appropriation because of “ a legacy of advantage over which they have no control” (Cho 60). No matter what the excuse behind an inappropriate action towards a subordinate culture may be, there must be a realization of the more severe damage done to the

<https://assignbuster.com/the-misuse-and-nonconsequential-abuse-of-cultural-appropriation/>

appropriated culture. Many subordinate cultures feel degraded because people do not know the history and context of the culture's elements that are being tampered with. Cultures should not be used as gimmicks for others; moreover, there should be a desire to recognize and acknowledge the deeper meaning that ties to the culture's identity.

On the surface, culture appropriation seems as though the effects rarely affect anyone, but with further investigation, the revelation of the true damage comes through the acts of degradation towards subordinate cultures. The authenticity of the history and reality of subordinate cultures diminishes as dominant cultures act inappropriately towards the subordinate cultures without acknowledging the significance of such actions. The usage of cultural appropriation continues to grow as practical consequences lessen and people choose to ignore the result of their disrespectful and irreverent actions. As some choose to completely ignore the issue as a whole, subordinate cultures continue to live on with the lasting and impacting effects of cultural appropriation. These cultural communities deserve the respect and reverence that many have failed to give to them.