

# Appropriation Resource Sheet

*Excerpted and edited from:*

<https://drakebearstephen.wordpress.com/2017/01/17/cultural-appropriation-when-is-it-appropriate/>

**Cultural appropriation** is when the dominant culture borrows, uses, or takes the characteristics of or intellectual property of a minority culture for its own use (often for economic benefit) without giving credit to the culture of origin and without reciprocity or permission.

The dominant culture is almost always Western (mostly white) and the minority cultures that are most commonly appropriated from are African, Black/African-American, Asian, Native American and First Nations, as well as other indigenous tribes and people of color worldwide.

## The negative and unethical aspects of cultural appropriation are:

- It strips the object or custom of its meaning, significance, or sacredness.
- It disrespects the members of the originating culture.
- It robs minority groups of the credit they deserve.
- It reinforces stereotypes of minority groups.
- The appropriated objects or customs are taken without permission.
- Profits from the appropriated object or fashion is redirected from the minority group to the dominant group.
- It trivializes violent historical oppression.
- It lets people show love for the culture, but remain prejudiced against its people.
- It makes things cool for white people – but too ethnic for people of color.
- It lets privileged people profit from oppressed people's labor.
- It lets some people get rewarded for things the creators never got credit for.
- It spreads mass lies about marginalized cultures.
- It perpetuates racist stereotypes.
- White people can freely do what people of color were actively punished for doing.
- It prioritizes the feelings of privileged people over justice for marginalized people.

Read Maisha Z. Johnson's full article here: <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/whats-wrong-with-cultural-appropriation-these-9-answers-reveal-its-harm-hesaid/>

## Examples of how cultures are appropriated:

- **Art & Archaeological Artifacts** *Example:* Hiram Bingham illegally exporting to Yale University enumerable items from Machu Picchu.
- **Commercial Capitalism** *Example:* Jeep *Cherokee*, *Winnebago* Campers, Urban Outfitters *Aztec* designs on clothing. *Winnebago* campers trademarked the word "Winnebago". The *Winnebago* tribe is prevented from using their own name to market anything.
- **Dress and Decoration** *Example:* White people wearing dread locks, corn rows, "gang" fashions, feathered headdresses, saris, bindi dots, turquoise squash blossom necklaces, quill earrings, or henna tattoos. Decorating with dreamcatchers or in the "Oriental" style.
- **Food** *Example:* Taking ethnic food such as Thai, sushi, burritos, and modifying it and then profiting from the new version.

- **Holidays** *Example:* Wearing Halloween costumes that portray minority cultures such as Indians or witches. US citizens celebrating the Mexican Day of the Dead with costumes and skull painting but stripping away the intent, which is to honor dead ancestors.
- **Media** *Example:* Disney movies romanticizing figures of other cultures, i.e. *Pocahontas*. Disney even tried to trademark the Day of the Dead until protests led them to withdraw the proposal.
- **Music** *Example:* Rap or Hip Hop music performed by white artists, white rock n' roll, jazz, and swing artists taking musical style from black musicians without giving credit to the origins.
- **Performing Arts** *Example:* White people belly dancing or twerking. White minstrels painting their faces black for entertainment purposes.
- **Plants** *Example:* Corporations that take plant medicine from indigenous wisdom to sell for profit without sharing revenue with the indigenous people.
- **Speech** *Example:* Adopting slang or accents of non-white minority groups as a way to avoid one's own racial identification.
- **Spiritual Beliefs and Systems** *Example:* The term "shaman" was appropriated by anthropologists from Siberian cultures and has become a mainstream term defining a specific type of healer/mystic/medicine person in non-Siberian cultures.
- **Spiritual Ceremony** *Example:* White non-Native people running sweat lodges or the Boy Scouts doing Native American dancing.
- **Sports Mascots** *Example:* Cleveland *Indians*, Washington *Redskins*, and Florida State *Seminoles*.
- **Tattoos** *Example:* White people getting tattoos of Celtic, Aztec, or Maori designs or Chinese characters.
- **Other** *Example:* Doing yoga, meditating, or taking martial arts.

***Why isn't it okay to share across cultures?*** *It is okay to share across cultures when the exchange is reciprocal and mutually beneficial. With appropriation, it is typically one-sided and not a true exchange.*

**Culture-sharing** is the sharing, interaction, and intermingling between cultures. It is a shared activity and is inevitable in our non-homogenous world. If culture-sharing occurs in a way that is mutually beneficial to each group, positive aspects include:

- It fosters cross-cultural understanding.
- It promotes mutual admiration of others' cultural perspectives.
- It is a mutual, reciprocal exchange that occurs willingly by participants in right relationship.
- It promotes empathy, education, and respect for diversity, free speech, and free exchange of ideas.

### ***What about people of color and appropriation?***

1. When people of color adopt patterns of the dominant, white culture this is often not considered appropriation. This may be assimilation. This is often done in order to survive and may be forced upon the minority culture by the dominant culture.
2. Whether some people of color should be critiqued for taking on styles or traditions of other people of color is best left to people of color to negotiate amongst themselves. White people, as the dominant group in the U.S., can stay in right relationship to these issues by focusing on our own actions, instead of monitoring the actions of people of color.