JOURNAL OF CONTROVERSIAL IDEAS

Article

Reconciliation or Segregation? Race as Social Identity in the Cultural Appropriation Debate

Olga Thierbach-McLean *

* Corresponding author: olgatmclean@gmail.com

Submitted: 22 July 2024, accepted: 11 April 2025, published: 30 April 2025

Abstract: The critical concept of cultural appropriation has profoundly changed public discourses on cultural exchange. Drawing attention to the colonialist dynamics which sometimes inform even ostensibly benign forms of intercultural contact, it has challenged the idea of cross-cultural borrowing as an unqualified positive. By bringing to the fore concerns and challenges experienced by cultural minorities, it has provided impulses for a multilateral renegotiation of intercultural relationships in the postcolonial era. But by rigidly settling on race as an epistemic category, the cultural appropriation debate has reached a conceptual impasse. This article traces the critical movement's struggles to define cultural membership beyond biological ancestry, arguing that its inherently contradictory premises – the strategy of pursuing diversity through monocultural segmentation, racial equality through codifying of minority statuses, and political allyship through deprecation of outsiders' involvement – limit its efficacy as a systematic decolonizing method. Especially by implicitly reaffirming symbolic Whiteness as the standard against which other cultural expressions are set, it breathes new life into the very same discriminatory constructs it seeks to overcome.

Keywords: cultural appropriation; social construction of race; postcolonial reconciliation; decolonialization; culture and globalization; US political culture; progressive movements in the US; US popular culture

How to cite: Thierbach-McLean, O. Reconciliation or Segregation? Race as Social Identity in the Cultural Appropriation Debate. *Journal of Controversial Ideas* **2025**, *5*(1), 4; doi:10.63466/jci05010004.

Introduction: A Sea Change on the Left

In March 2016, an incident at San Francisco State University drew global media attention. Cellphone video posted online showed a White man being physically confronted by

a Black woman for wearing dreadlocks.[1] In a tense exchange, she accused him of trespassing on an element of her culture, even threatening to cut off his hair (CBS News, 2016). As the clip went viral, it became a lightning rod in the contentious national debate over cultural appropriation. While conservative commentators derided it as evidence of liberalism run amuck, many voices on the political left supported the fortification of cultural borders. In a remarkable inversion of ideological codes, the right thus positioned itself as the defender of free-flowing multiculturalism against leftist cultural policing.

For all the reasons to question the sincerity of this stance, the underlying criticism is not entirely unfounded. The forensic exactitude with which parts of the left have taken to dissecting cultural practices ranging from celebrities' clothing styles to ordinary people's home décor choices in search of foreign cultural DNA has struck many observers as doctrinaire and quixotic. As "one of the most misunderstood and abused phrases of our tortured age" (Mishan, 2022), the issue of cultural appropriation has thus been causing friction not only along liberal–conservative fault lines but particularly within the political left itself. In many ways, it marks a sharp departure from the spirit of past progressive movements. Contrary to other liberal reform discourses which have called for the breakdown of cultural and racial boundaries – the unification rhetoric of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" or the Obama-era avowals of a "post-racial America" come to mind –, the cultural appropriation paradigm is based on territorial demarcation along lines of race and ethnicity.

As longstanding symbols of cultural openness and interracial solidarity – be it dreadlocks, Native American jewelry, or Palestinian kaffiyehs – have come to be seen as tokens of bigotry when displayed on what are considered biologically mismatched bodies, a sense of disorientation has spread particularly in liberal cultural milieus. This is not least evidenced by the continuous stream of popular publications which, in a tone reminiscent of traditional advice columns, offer guidance on "The Dos and Don'ts of Cultural Appropriation" (Avins and Quartz, 2015) or tackle questions such as "What Does Cultural Appropriation Really Mean?" (Mishan, 2022). Despite such efforts to map out distinct cultural terrains, the results have been impressionistic at best. At worst, they have been patently incongruous. Most problematically, the cultural appropriation model has failed to yield a narrative that aligns with the core tenets of liberal society, especially the principles of equality and pluralist exchange. To give just one pop-cultural example, whereas actress Tilda Swinton, a White woman, faced severe criticism for playing a fictional Asian character in the 2016 Marvel film *Doctor Strange* (Healy, 2016), the casting of Black actress Jodie Turner-Smith as sixteenth-century Queen of England Anne Boleyn in the eponymous 2021 historic drama was widely lauded for abandoning racial criteria (Ibekwe, 2021). Also in the academic sphere, pleas for greater diversity in artistic fields such as improv comedy (Büch, 2022) incongruously coexist with laments over the waning monoracial profiles of creative genres such as hip-hop or K-pop (Kopano, 2014; Morrison and Jackson, 2014; Jackson, 2019; Kawamura and de Jong, 2022).

On the left, charges of "double standards" and "reverse racism" are typically countered with a version of the argument that "racism … against white people at large just doesn't exist. It can't exist, because that's not how collective power works"

[1] Against the background of the ongoing debate over the capitalization of adjectives referring to race and ethnicity, I opt for a uniform capitalization of both Black and White.

(Acho, 2020: 64). Granted, since the impact of exclusion mechanisms depends on the power of the group who wields them, racial ressentiments harbored by the dominated towards the dominant cannot be equated in their effects or causes to institutionalized racial discrimination. That, however, does not change the fact that value judgments based on race are ultimately racist in nature. In this context it is notable how many cultural appropriation texts forgo deeper engagement with the rich scholarship on social constructions of race, leaning instead towards biology-based arguments whose crudeness often remains unchallenged. This may have to do with the widespread sense – rarely overtly stated but ubiquitously enacted, especially in progressive academic environments – that different discursive etiquettes apply to individuals of different races and ethnicities, for example when it comes to using hostile language towards the racial other or declaring one's biological ancestry a source of personal pride. Ostensibly aimed at counterbalancing existing racial inequalities, such variable levels of acceptability reveal a strong undercurrent of paternalism which keeps imagining non-White people as the exception to the rule, the not-quite equal to be complaisantly indulged. Hence, the flipside of what is commonly referred to as "White guilt" is a patronizing, infantilizing mindset towards minorities which, regardless of its positive intentions, hampers sincere and mutually respectful discussions about race.

And so, in the critical cacophony that is the cultural appropriation debate, classic liberal aspirations to "color blindness" overlay and interfere with affirmations of race as a socially determining category. While it may be naïve and even offensive to declare the irrelevance of race in the face of the factual weight of racist legacies, the compacting of race and culture is equally misguided as it ultimately serves to perpetuate rather than abolish colonialized spaces.

Let me acknowledge at this point that my use of the term "segregation" in the title may invite misunderstandings and strike some readers as callous. I have considered using less loaded alternatives such as "separation," "isolation," or "fragmentation" to avoid the impression of heedlessly comparing acts of fashion shaming to the atrocities of institutionalized racism. Especially against the background of recent distortions of liberal language, such as former Attorney General William Barr's notorious comparison of pandemic stay-at-home mandates with slavery (Forgey and Gerstein, 2020), I am aware of the sensitive nature of my wording. However, despite other options coming with less historical baggage, they do not equally capture the routine of allocating distinct social spaces based on biological ancestry. For this is my main point: Although the cultural appropriation critique prescribes separated cultural territories in the name of minority empowerment, it effectively short-circuits progressive agendas by validating two staples of racist thought, namely that, firstly, there is such a thing as "tidily bounded quasi-genetic units called races" (Fields and Fields, 2012: 66) and that, secondly, these genetic units correspond to definable cultural ambits. That being said, it is sometimes impossible to escape this thought pattern even on a purely linguistic level, since discussing social identity vis-à-vis biological ancestry often means being stuck with imprecise and slippery vocabulary: talk of "races" conjures up the image of distinct entities rather than a continuum of human phenotypes, "minority" misleadingly compounds quantitative and qualitative meanings, and "ethnic" implies that ethnicity is something that applies exclusively to "people of color," another clumsy phrase. However, for lack of concise alternatives, I make recourse to these terms by way of shorthand even as I am alert to the fact that they carry stowaway presumptions that latently obstruct my argument.

My analysis focuses on the US, which has been the epicenter of the cultural appropriation debate and has provided the blueprint for cultural appropriation discourses in many other countries. I am particularly interested in the intersections between academic and pop-cultural discourses because this is where broader societal attitudes towards the relationship of race and culture have been prominently shaped. As I will go on to argue, the prevalence of US historical perspectives in the formulation of this global discussion has also resulted in a myopic preoccupation with race as the benchmark of cultural dominance, all but ignoring that other parameters such as class, gender, nationality, or political affiliation have also acted as important position controllers in the setting of cultural power relationships. Before examining the nexus of race and culture underlying the cultural appropriation critique, I will provide an outline of its general concepts and situate it in a broader historical context.

What Is Cultural Appropriation?

The Burlesque Handbook by Jo Weldon is an homage to a popular entertainment genre that thrives on provocativeness, satire, and travesty. "I love the desires many performers have to shatter boundaries of lookism, sexism, and elitism," Weldon writes (Weldon, 2010: 14). However, when it comes to the aspect of race, she retracts her call to creative transgression. "One area in which to be extremely cautious is the portrayal of ethnic costumes," she advises.

> This is often called cultural appropriation, and doing it opens you up to being criticized as racist. Portraying a geisha, Native American, or Frito bandito will offend some people …. I mention this … because it is such a surprise to new performers when they get a negative response for their beautifully choreographed and costumed numbers. (Ibid., 27)

This warning may illustrate how deeply the unease over cultural crossings has taken root even in creative spaces that would seem entirely uncongenial to it. Especially since the mid-2010s, the concept of cultural appropriation has come to dominate public debates on racial justice, Western hegemony, and postcolonial reconciliation. Broadly speaking, the term refers to processes "whereby members of relatively privileged groups 'raid' the culture of marginalized groups, abstracting cultural practices or artifacts from their historically specific context" (Dines and Humez, 2011: 623). This relates to a wide range of cultural domains including artistic expression, religion, sports, and the production of knowledge in scientific disciplines such as archeology, medicine, or genetic engineering. James O. Young, an eminent scholar in the field, has identified five types of appropriation that may occur across cultural boundaries: *object appropriation*, which involves taking possession of tangible items such as paintings or archeological finds; *content appropriation*, the reutilization of intangible creations such as melodies or storylines; *style appropriation*, the imitation of broader stylistic features; *motif appropriation*, the reproduction of artistic themes in a different style; and *subject appropriation*, also referred to as *voice appropriation*, which takes place when artists represent cultures other than their own (Young, 2008). Such forms of intercultural exchange have come under attack for causing harm or offense to minorities by destabilizing their cultural identities, thwarting their economic opportunities, trivializing and ridiculing foreign traditions, and perpetuating racial stereotypes (Ziff and Rao, 1997;

Tate, 2003; Young, 2008; Brown and Kopano, 2014; Kawamura and de Jong, 2022; Bucar, 2022).

The cultural appropriation critique is aimed at redressing such grievances by examining intercultural power relations and reconfiguring dynamics shaped by imbalanced resources between dominant and minority populations. For instance, it has drawn attention to the ways in which African-American cultural expressions have been absorbed by the US entertainment industry and showcased in the name of national prestige even as the originators have been systematically denied full membership in American society (Tate, 2003; Ratchford, 2014; Jackson, 2019). It has also highlighted the one-sided extraction of cultural capital from vulnerable populations in the field of knowledge production, such as the seizure of human remains for purposes of scientific study and exhibition. "In the days when it was not customary to consider the wishes and feelings of Indigenous peoples in North America, Africa, Australia, Polynesia and other colonial domains," notes moral philosopher Geoffrey Scarre, "anthropologists and archaeologists tended to look upon human physical remains from these regions as just another morally unproblematic category of fascinating data for research" (Scarre, 2009: 72–73). Hence bodies were routinely taken without the consent of the respective community and in utter disregard of its values, customs, and worldviews.

If such patterns of exploitative dissociation have come under broader scrutiny, it is in large part thanks to the cultural appropriation movement. In a global society that is decolonizing and growing together at the same time, it has provided a critical tool for challenging mental habits and institutional mechanisms that take advantage of cultural diversity without embracing the diversity of people. For those who have been marginalized for their difference, it can be confounding to see how the very same traits that mark them as undesirable outsiders – whether it be their dress, food, language, or spiritual practices – become codes for fashionable insider status when applied to White bodies. The concept of cultural appropriation has offered a public language for voicing such disparities and opened a space for multilateral negotiation of more equitable intercultural relations.

This has typically entailed defining cultural insiders in opposition to cultural outsiders and discouraging outsiders from engaging with foreign cultural elements – unless this is done in terms of respectful cultural adoption or appreciation. However, critics have proposed vastly differing and often rather vague criteria for what distinguishes such constructive modes from the transgressive quality of appropriation. Take, for example, the inquiry into the differences between ethical versus unethical kinds of cultural borrowing in Young's *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts*. While clearly sympathetic to the claims of minorities to control the use of their culture, Young also submits "that there can be no blanket condemnation of cultural appropriation … because cultural appropriation is important to the flourishing of the arts in the contemporary world" (Young, 2008: 28). Trying to avoid simplistic formulas, he lays out how even seemingly obvious cases of cultural looting, such as the shipping of the Parthenon Marbles from Greece to Britain in the early nineteenth century, may appear in a more ambiguous light when all surrounding factors, including the local population's agency, are taken into account (Ibid., 23).[2]

[2] Agency is a thorny issue in the context of colonial relationships since it is hard to determine what can count as a voluntary decision in an inherently discriminatory system. Even if on the face of it local populations offer artifacts to colonizers on their own accord, they may be under duress to do so for lack of other options

The general takeaway from his argument is that every instance of cultural exchange must be evaluated individually based on the respective set of circumstances. What is problematic, however, is that, in order to evade intellectually rigid prescriptions, Young repeatedly takes recourse to tenuous criteria such as aesthetic merit and "obligations to the rest of humanity" (Ibid., 65). Elsewhere, in *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation*, even the questionable concept of "culture-transcendent moral principles" (Young and Brunk, 2009: 6) is invoked as a marker of benign cultural transfer.[3] The striving for nuance thus culminates in generalisms which clash with the factual heterogeneity of values, worldviews, and tastes across cultures.

The tendency to evade sound theorization by making vague gestures towards allegedly self-evident truths is a common refrain in the cultural appropriation literature, with numerous critics affirming that, for all the elusiveness of cultural appropriation as a theoretical concept, in practice "you usually know it when you see it" (Galchen and Holmes, 2017). But that is evidently not the case given that even the most basic features of cultural appropriation remain contested, with some voices maintaining that appropriation can only take place when privileged groups borrow from marginalized ones (Ziff and Rao, 1997; Kawamura and de Jong, 2022), while others expand the term to include the absorption of dominant cultural features by minorities (Rogers, 2006; Walsh and Lopes, 2009), the intermingling of minority cultures (Diggs, 2003; Young, 2008), and even the "dilution" or "distortion" of traditions by cultural insiders (Bucar, 2022). Adding to the ambiguity, some critics propose that intercultural respect is shown by remaining faithful to the original while others conversely argue that engagement with foreign cultural elements is only warranted if it adds something genuinely new. Some call for a clear referencing of the original while others object to such referencing as parasitic harnessing of the original creator's clout.[4] And although there is broad agreement that cultural boundaries may be legitimately crossed after obtaining insiders' permission, in practice it is difficult to determine which individuals are qualified to act as arbiters of such approvals. Besides, objections have been raised to the effect that the willingness to admit outsiders to one's culture is per se a degenerative symptom, a mark of "self-colonization" (Endres, 2015: 649).

From Academic Theory to Pop-Cultural Phenomenon

These conceptual entanglements reflect the confusing complexity of a globalized world where social norms are in flux and cultural offerings overwhelmingly manifold. As the information age has dramatically scaled up cross-cultural contact and concomitantly threatened traditional cultural identities, it has created psychological incentives both for cosmopolitan immersion and protective seclusion. Neologisms such as "glocalization" capture these simultaneous trends of universalization and particularization, but contrary to

---

of sustenance. Nevertheless, race and ethnicity cannot be blanketly posited as the only category of power even in colonialist scenarios. In the concrete case of the Pantheon Marbles, which were removed from Ottoman Greece between 1801 and 1812 on the initiative of Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, there has been a lengthy controversy over the role of Ottoman officials in facilitating the transfer.

[3] As Young himself points out, such universalist arguments are precarious not least because they harken back to colonialist claims to cultural standard-setting and stewardship.

[4] Discordant positions on originality, artistic merit, and referencing are discussed in more detail in (Young, 2008) and (Young and Brunk, 2009).

what this portmanteau implies, they do not necessarily blend harmoniously, often stirring up fears of cultural displacement and dispossession. As Yuniya Kawamura has observed, "intense reactions against cultural appropriation and misappropriation are about guarding one's territory, a marginalized one in particular, in the globalized world where the territorial boundaries are becoming fuzzy" (Kawamura and de Jong, 2022: xii). Especially the advent of social media has mediated geographic distance and simultaneously blurred the line between private and public spaces, thus boosting intercultural mobility and concurrently exposing personal styles and consuming habits to an unprecedented level of collective scrutiny. Against this sociocultural backdrop, the claim to exclusive cultural property can be seen as a collective reflex to reinforce symbolic borders in a world where the significance of physical boundaries is fading.

In that sense, the cultural appropriation controversy is a product of the information age. Its antecedents, however, can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Already in 1848, abolitionist writer Frederick Douglass had condemned minstrel performers as "filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow-citizens" (qtd. in Kawamura and de Jong, 2022: 103). By the same token, in the 1920s, Harlem Renaissance intellectuals began raising concerns over the portrayal of African-American people and folklore by outsiders, such as in Joel Chandler Harris' popular book series *Uncle Remus*.[5] In 1935, the premiere of George Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess* incited criticism for promoting racial stereotypes, incidentally not only from African-American commentators. White composer Virgil Thomson, for instance, objected that "[f]olklore subjects recounted by an outsider are only valid as long as the folk in question is unable to speak for itself, which is certainly not true of the American Negro in 1935" (Thomson, 1935: 17). A wave of African-American protest also mobilized in response to the Lost Cause nostalgia of Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind* as well as its record-grossing film adaptation of 1939. In another memorable episode, actor Marlon Brando declined the 1973 Academy Award as Best Actor for his performance in *The Godfather* in a public stance against the negative representations of Native Americans in popular media.[6]

All these campaigns challenged mainstream narratives of race and culture, albeit not yet under the banner of cultural appropriation, a concept that until recently was largely confined to the academic realm. An early use can be found in the 1945 essay "A Sense of the Past" by US literary scholar Arthur E. Christy, where he outlines the history of cultural relations between European and Asian countries. Although Christy repeatedly speaks of "the Occidental debt to the Orient" (Christy, 1945: 1) and acknowledges Western economic exploitation, from a purely creative and intellectual perspective he describes the resulting intercultural contact as mutually beneficial. Only later would Western scholarship begin to associate cultural transfer with the disenfranchisement of subaltern peoples, as in

---

[5] The book series was published from 1881 to 1948 and adapted in 1946 by Disney into the musical drama *Song of the South,* which became equally controversial for its romanticization of Southern slavery.

[6] Brando, who did not attend the event personally, was represented by actor and Native American rights activist Sacheen Littlefeather. After her death in 2022, it was revealed that Littlefeather, who was born Maria Louise Cruz, had fabricated her Apache and Yaqui ancestry and was in fact of European and Mexican descent. She is now considered one of the most notorious "Pretendians," people who falsely claim to have Indigenous ancestries to garner media attention.

the 1976 essay "Some General Observations on the Problem of Cultural Colonialism" by British art critic Kenneth Coutts-Smith.[7] Criticizing "the Eurocentristic bias of our thinking on culture" (Coutts-Smith, 1991: 5), he voiced concerns over "cultural genocide through assimilation" (Ibid., 17) and loss of "cultural autonomy [to] more forceful neighbors" (Ibid.). Another notable forerunner to the contemporary discussion is the 1979 book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* by British media theorist Dick Hebdige who examined the absorption of subcultural expressive forms into mainstream culture with special attention to class and race (Hebdige, 1979). With the rise of postcolonial theory in the 1980s, the concept of cultural appropriation gained traction particularly in anglophone academia. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a burst of scholarly activity occurred around the issue, with studies on Native American and African-American culture being especially prominent.[8] During the 2010s, the debate mushroomed into a full-blown pop-cultural phenomenon in tandem with increasing digital convergence.

In addition to technocultural transformations, political developments contributed to the rise of the cultural appropriation discourse. As the racist backlash against the Obama presidency silenced the initial celebratory narrative of a "post-racial America," the liberal-progressive camp fell into an ideological crisis. With the mobilization of the alt-right following the 2008 presidential election, the mood on the political left shifted from reconciliation to resistance, making it increasingly receptive to a critical program that espoused the erection of cultural barricades. In other words, the appeal of cultural separation to contemporary leftist milieus can be read not only against the backdrop of technological changes in mass communication but also against the frustration of an epochal political hope. In an ideologically polarized social climate, where respectful sharing of public spaces may seem unfeasible, symbolic withdrawal into gated cultural communities becomes a plausible psychological response. The fact that the cultural appropriation approach easily attached to the world of entertainment further expediated its evolution from an object of academic study to a pop-cultural preoccupation. In fact, most people today encounter this issue not in the scholarly arena but rather as an outrage topic in the news.

Despite eliciting highly polarized responses, the effects of the cultural appropriation approach have been more ambiguous than either its avid advocates or harsh detractors allow. On the one hand, it has provided an intellectual framework for challenging entrenched structures of exploitation of marginalized and/or colonized peoples. But on the other, it has been standing in the way of rapprochement by subscribing to a segregationist logic deeply at odds not only with basic liberal values but also with the factual conditions of our globalized age. The main issue is that it has given rise to a leftist version of biological determinism.

---

[7] The essay was originally presented as a contribution to the Congress of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), held in Lisbon in 1976, and published in 1991 as part of the volume *The Myth of Primitivism*.

[8] Notable examples include (Ziff and Rao, 1997), (Huhndorf, 2001), (Tate, 2003), (Brown, 2004), (Coleman, 2005), and (Scafidi, 2005).

Culture as Race: An Unstable Connection

Culture is a notoriously fuzzy concept. It is, according to Raymond Williams' oft-quoted dictum, "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams, 1976: 76). As a multilayered symbolic territory, it may or may not overlap with political states, ethnicities, linguistic communities, economic classes, age groups, aesthetic sensibilities, and a wide range of other aspects. Despite its common usage in phrases such as "US culture," "Black culture," or "youth culture," scholars have struggled to pin down what exactly culture entails. A classic definition formulated in 1871 by English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor describes it as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1871: 1). Generations of scholars have since undertaken to refine the contours of the term. While it goes beyond the scope of this article to track the results in detail, in the present context it is sufficient to say that there has been general consensus that culture is not biologically inherited but socially acquired.

It is exactly this fundamental premise that is slipping away from present-day discussions of cultural identity. Consider, for instance, Kawamura's explication that culture "is not just about race and/or ethnicity, as many assume. Culture as a coherent racial or ethnic unity is too narrow a categorization … Culture also refers to values, beliefs, and traditions, which support a particular ideology and direct actions" (Kawamura and de Jong, 2022: 2). Not only is it telling that the author of a progressive academic text feels the need to spell out to her readership that social belonging is not determined by biology, but it is also revealing that she neglects to differentiate between race as genetic lineage and race as cultural construct. Her wording thus suggests that biological ancestry, while not the only relevant aspect, does indeed belong to a set of attributes that factor into cultural identity.[9] One could put this down to linguistic imprecision by assuming that what Kawamura means here is the impact which *collective interpretations of biological traits* have on social experience. But that would be to disregard that one-dimensional equations of culture with physicality have come to dominate the cultural appropriation discourse both in its popular and academic forms. As a matter of fact, it has recently been suggested to replace "cultural appropriation" with "racial plagiarism" as a more accurate term (Pham, 2017: 67).

On the other hand, there are critical voices who challenge this racial essentialism. Among them, E. Patrick Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness* (2003) stands out as one insightful analysis of the limits and potentials of cultural cross-identification. Contemplating the question of cultural ownership and authenticity from a performance studies perspective, Johnson, an African-American academic and musician, draws on his own field study of a White Australian gospel choir as well as on his experience as an educator to show that performance of the Other does not have to be "a static process but rather one of flux and flow – of *possibilities*" (Johnson, 2003: 218, emphasis in original). Instead of normatively staking out cultural monopolies, he is interested in the transformative dynamics of exchange. Even as he emphasizes that different cultural

[9] Kawamura addresses this point only at the very end of the book by recommending that "we need to go beyond culture as race and ethnicity … since appropriation occurs in other social categories and groupings" (Kawamura and de Jong, 2022: 182). This, however, is not the main angle from which the preceding analysis is conducted.

realities have factually developed around race, he rejects simplistic analogizations of race and culture, stating that

> blackness is often sutured to physical characteristics as opposed to sociocultural ones. As a primary signifier of race, skin color in particular functions to legitimate claims of black authenticity. This legitimizing works both ways: black folk strategically rely on their black skin when they become arbiters of "good" and "bad" black performances by nonblacks, and nonblacks either refrain from performing "black" art forms or equate black skin with artistic ability because they see skin color as endemic to artistic skill. Whatever the case, both stances are misguided attempts to essentialize blackness by ontologically linking the body with cultural performance. (Ibid., 191)

But it is precisely this essentialized view of the body as cultural performance that has become pervasive in contemporary discourses. The notion that eligibility to cultural assets hinges on biology provides the rationale for public demands to exclude all but Middle Eastern women from practicing belly dance (Jarrar, 2014), to disallow the practice of Asian medical knowledge by Western physicians (Lin, 2018), or to reclaim yoga exclusively for people of South Asian descent (DasGupta, 2014). It also informs the controversy over "culinary colonialism," which has been revolving around chefs' genetic ancestry rather than their experience in preparing certain "ethnic" foods (Carman, 2017; Jackson, 2019), with some voices even criticizing the mere consumption of dishes from other countries as an imperialistic act (Heldke, 2003; Kuo, 2015). This thinking goes beyond decolonializing and anti-racist agendas, expanding instead into a broadly conceived segregation project along any and all "color lines."

A headline-making example of this phenomenon is the public outcry that occurred in 2017 over NBA player Jeremy Lin's hairstyle. As an American of Taiwanese descent, he came under harsh criticism for wearing dreadlocks. "Do I need to remind this damn boy that his last name is Lin?," African-American basketball player Kenyon Martin weighed in on the debate via an Instagram video. "Come on man, somebody need to tell him, like: 'All right bro, we get it. You wanna be black.' … But the last name is Lin."[10] When Lin retorted that, by the same reasoning, Martin himself is overstepping cultural boundaries by sporting Chinese tattoos, many media voices took sides by pondering degrees of oppression. A *HuffPost* article, for instance, concluded that "both men were guilty of appropriating from each other's cultures" but that "one offense carries more weight than the other" (Prois and Workneh, 2017), without fundamentally questioning a logic by which two individuals born as US citizens imagine each other cultural strangers based purely on ancestry. Other instances include the controversy over superstar Beyoncé, an African-American, wearing an Indian sari in a 2015 music video (Bai, 2016), or the backlash against entertainer Cardi B, who has Afro-Latino roots, posing as a Hindu goddess for a 2020 sneaker ad (Flanagan, 2020). Such disputes are the fruits of an intellectual climate in which people are accustomed to thinking of culture as genetically transmitted birthright rather than acquired practice. So normalized has this outlook become that even the advertising

[10] The comment has since been deleted from Martin's Instagram but can still be seen on YouTube (Martin, 2017).

industry has embraced it, as in a memorable 2017 television commercial for genealogy company Ancestry.com,

> featuring a woman named Kim who … is thrilled to discover that she's 23-percent Native American. Now, she says, while standing in front of some culturally appropriate pottery, "I want to know more about my Native American heritage."… The point of Kim's surprise is that she has no Native American cultural connection whatsoever; the point of those pots is that they become culturally appropriate only when they're revealed to be genetically appropriate. (Michaels, 2017)

Such claims to cultural insider status based on nothing but vaguely conceived notions of "blood ties" evoke uncomfortable associations with racist blood-and-soil ideologies. Relatedly, the left has been cultivating its own brand of orientalism which, while ostensibly positively connoted, casts non-White people as the arcane Other. Even in scholarly texts on cultural appropriation, one will regularly come across nebulous esotericisms such as "embodied desi experience" (Bucar, 2022: 192) or "a wisdom of experience [people of color] embody" (Browning, 1992: 33) from which White people are allegedly excluded per insurmountable biological barriers.[11] To be clear, such attributes are not assigned in the sense of individual social imprinting but literally as biological dispositions. Ironically, this exotically fantasized non-Whiteness bears an uncanny resemblance to racist tropes of "the mystical Asian," "the noble savage," or "the magical negro." In an ideological horseshoe effect, the far left and the far right thus arrive at the same essentialist notion, namely that cultural identity is inseparably tied to biology.

The Incoherent Quest for Cultural Purity

Strangely enough, this essentialist turn comes at a moment when science is backing away from the notion of races as naturally distinct groups. Rather, race is understood as "a social construct or a social invention with political, economic, and historical context … that varies over time and from place to place." (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2023: 184). Besides, given the unprecedented mobility of people, products, and practices, categories of race and culture are becoming ever more elusive. As a matter of fact, one would be hard-pressed to find a text on cultural appropriation that does not contain some kind of disclaimer concerning the inevitability of cultural blending. What is striking, however, is the regularity with which such qualifications vanish from the actual argument. Lauren Michele Jackson's *White Negroes* is a typical example. In the introduction to the book, she writes that

> Appropriation is everywhere, and is also inevitable. So long as peoples interact with other peoples, by choice or by force, cultures will intersect and mingle and graft onto each other…. The idea that any artistic or cultural practice is closed off to outsiders

[11] Writer Janisse Browning, who has North American Indigenous and African ancestry, is quite forthright on this point. "We persons of color," she writes, "have hidden knowledge … that can't be accessed by white people because they have not been forced to continually combat white oppression like we have" (Browning, 1992: 33). One can only wonder why instances of historic oppression based on other attributes than skin color – the centuries-long persecution of Jews or the collective trauma of Stalinist terror come to mind – are discounted as similar sources of "hidden knowledge."

> at any point in time is ridiculous, especially in the age of the internet. (Jackson, 2019: 2–3)

Notwithstanding, what follows from here on out is a catalogue of condemnations of the "transfer of black aesthetics to white bodies and voices" (Ibid., 14), with Jackson stating that

> black music's present is regularly scraped and pasted onto white and nonblack figures who waddle their awkward forms back and forth across a worldwide stage. Sometimes the right person comes around with the right footing and a sweet voice to make something magical – Amy Winehouse, Lana Del Rey, and JC Chasez come to mind. (Ibid., 14)

This passage is noteworthy both for its derogatory wording and its random switch from race to aesthetic merit as the criterion setting legitimate cultural transfer apart from mere theft. Not only does Jackson declare non-Black people motorically challenged – which by association conjures up the racist stereotype of the "singing-dancing negro" –, but she also absolves putative thieves if they happen to capitalize on their loot in a way that meets her personal taste. Along the same lines, her statement that "[l]anguage doesn't conform to rules or boundaries or borders" (Ibid., 78) incongruously serves as a preface to criticizing as exploitative the wide use of coinages such as "BDE" (for big dick energy) or "on fleek" on social media based on the fact that the respective wordsmiths were Black and did not receive any remuneration for "[giving] the world a word" (Ibid., 97). Even the old familiar expiry of pop-cultural buzzwords is interpreted within a framework of racial oppression. Quoting writer Kashana Cauley, Jackson observes that the term "woke" "lost its vigor after just a few years of interracial visibility" (Ibid., 72). If her goal is to expose the discriminatory mechanisms of the capitalist marketplace, her argument falls short because it builds on an imaginary scenario where cultural expressions emerge within crisp racial boundaries and White people, and only White people, are financially compensated for creating neologisms. Instead of challenging the logic of relentless commodification which tends to hit racialized communities the hardest, Jackson entrenches herself in a strictly transactional worldview by putting an owner's tag even on the most mundane forms of interpersonal communication. In a time when the color of one's skin still impacts one's ability to vote, find good employment, receive adequate health care, education, housing, or, for that matter, survive encounters with law enforcement, such preoccupations with trivialities, especially when based on contrived premises, have the effect of minimizing rather than highlighting the dehumanizing effects of racism-cum-capitalism.

A similar disconnect characterizes Emmanuel Acho's bestselling book *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*. Addressing himself mainly to a White readership, Acho's stated goal is to promote an open interracial dialogue about sensitive subjects. In a chapter dedicated specifically to cultural appropriation, he makes a point of stressing that "[t]he exchange of ideas, styles, and traditions is one of the tenets of a modern multicultural society. It's a part of how we grow, learn, advance" (Acho, 2020: 36). On that note, he allows that "[b]orrowing influences from black culture is not an issue in and of itself. The problem becomes when you borrow from a culture without citing the sources and/or knowing the history" (Ibid., 35). With that, Acho joins the chorus of critical voices maintaining that cross-cultural forays are unobjectionable given proper intent and adequate referencing. Yet it remains unclear how this formula, which is both woolly in

its unquantifiable subjectivity and clinical in its aspiration to academic precision, could be coherently applied to the messiness of today's cultural eclecticism. Already from a purely pragmatic standpoint, it is hard to imagine how anyone living in the kaleidoscopic multifariousness of our globalized world could possibly be thoroughly informed *and* expressively appreciative about every foreign-conceived object and practice in their life.

Besides, the emphasis on knowledgeability as a prerequisite for legitimate cultural engagement negates the fact that getting to know and value a foreign culture is a hands-on process. Banning outsiders by default from engaging with foreignness as ignorant novices means denying them the opportunity to ever become appreciative connoisseurs. More to the point, if we genuinely accepted the premise that cultural borrowing is justified by abstract, unverifiable attributes such as knowledgeability and respect, the aspect of race would be moot from the outset. In actuality, however, the main preoccupation of the cultural appropriation movement has not been with exploring cultural difference for the sake of promoting intercultural familiarity but, on the contrary, with demarcating cultural no-go zones based on little more than racial phenotyping. More often than not, the pursuit of inclusion and empowerment has been understood in terms of claiming the power to exclude. To quote Jackson on this point, the question "'How do you be respectful?' … in truth has no answer that would allow [White people to make use of foreign cultural elements] with a clear conscience" (Jackson, 2019: 123).[12] Put another way, no amount of knowledge, respectfulness, or skill is sufficient to grant a person access to another cultural sphere if their skin is not of the right color. Against this background, parallel attempts to square the proprietary view of culture with cultural liberalism look much like intellectual fig leaves failing to cover the fact that the cultural appropriation movement is struggling to define cultural connection beyond biology.[13]

Cultural Segregation as Empowerment: A Precarious Premise

This racialized perspective does not only block out empirical actualities but also constructs narratives that ultimately undermine the interests of minority populations. Young, for instance, has shown based on real-life disputes how the retrospective quest for cultural origins is as likely to refute as to strengthen claims to exclusive cultural authorship. The following account is worth quoting in its entirety by way of illustration:

> In 1950, Pete Seeger and The Weavers recorded "Goodnight, Irene," an adaptation of "Irene" by Leadbelly. This appropriation from an African-American singer by members of mainstream American culture proved controversial at the time. Musicological research revealed, however, that Leadbelly's copyrighted composition was not as original as it at first seemed. It was based on a Southern folksong that

[12] Jackson makes this statement in the specific context of restauranting, declaring it categorically off-limits for White chefs to offer foreign dishes. However, the underlying logic applies analogously to other processes of cultural borrowing.

[13] This is also evidenced by the fact that people of the "right" skin color are conspicuously exempt from "citing the sources and/or knowing the history," once more revealing the underlying assumption that cultural identity is passed on via our genes. Acho himself critically reflects on the fact that, as a first-generation American of Nigerian descent, his appearance allows him to use signifiers of African-American culture without exterior scrutiny, even though he has no personal connection to African-American cultural heritage.

> Leadbelly had learned from his uncle, Terrance Ledbetter. This song was, in turn, an arrangement of a waltz by the African-American composer Gussie Lord Davis in the 1880s. Davis wrote for a largely white audience and the folksong Leadbelly learned from his uncle had been, in all probability, transmitted via non-members of African-American culture. Of course, Davis had appropriated the waltz form from Viennese musicians. (Young, 2008: 29)

Evidently, cultural crossflows resist easy mappings of culture onto race, particularly under the conditions of postmodernity, globalization, and mass digital communication. Considering the multidimensional nature of cultural interconnections, Richard Rogers has queried whether an analytical approach based on a dominant–subordinate binary is expedient in the first place. As he points out, "the identification of symmetrical or asymmetrical power relations between two or more cultures is complicated by the varying forms power can take, from economic capital to military might to cultural capital, and the complex intersections between them" (Rogers, 2006: 479). I would go even further by arguing that, at least in the context of the cultural appropriation discourse, scholarly ambitions to hierarchize cultural power relationships are entirely superfluous since "cultural power" stands as a mere verbal placeholder for "race." This is why we are seeing sustained controversies over the appropriation and commercialization of traditional Chinese medicine and Indian garments but not, say, of Finnish sauna traditions and Scottish tartans, even though by comparison Finland and Scotland have considerably less clout economically, politically, militarily, and culturally, while also being formerly colonized nations. This is not to downplay the historical connection between racism and colonialism but rather to point out that, when we are talking about culture, we are really talking about race.[14]

This "color-coded" mode of thinking about cultural identity is not only limited and selective in its scope, but also creates a conceptual boomerang effect by reversely raising the question of minorities' entitlement to dominant cultural practices. Even if we posit, as many critics do, that cultural adaptions by subaltern populations do not fall under culpable appropriation even if for no other reason than that they tend to occur by necessity rather than by choice, the question of identity remains. Rogers has observed on that score that the conception of cultural vitality in terms of authenticity and clear boundedness

> implies, especially via the trope of ''degradation,'' that sovereignty involves a right to remain pure, uninfluenced by others, and that the purity of subordinated/colonized cultures is maintained by being static, not dynamic—the former associated with primitive peoples and the latter with the ''developed'' world…. The underlying logic is that essence and agency are mutually exclusive, at least for ''other'' cultures. (Ibid., 489)

Incidentally, this is the very notion that keeps being leveled against Indigenous Americans who develop commercial real estate like shopping malls, hotels, or casinos on their

[14] In this context, Fields and Fields have proposed that, based on historical evidence, racism should be seen as a product of oppression rather than the other way around: "A commonplace that few stop to examine holds that people are more readily oppressed when they are already perceived as inferior by nature. The reverse is more to the point. People are more readily perceived as inferior by nature when they are already seen as oppressed." (Fields and Fields, 2012: 128).

reservations, the implicit or explicit assumption being that, by participating in the capitalist marketplace, they cease to be "real Indians" (Ibid., 485). It is indeed striking how often endorsements of traditional identities, both by insiders and sympathetic outsiders, are drawing upon the very same precepts of cultural ossification and designated "natural environments" that are criticized for stereotyping racialized communities and insinuating their inferiority.[15] In this way, the tenet of closed cultural perimeters becomes complicit in racist subordination. Particularly insidious when shape-shifting into self-affirmation, it may "materialize in inner-city schools whenever children learn to mock the use of Standard English as 'trying to be white,'" or fuel "the campaign-era mocking of Candidate Obama's taste for arugula, the elegant tailoring of his suits, and, especially, his habit of speaking in complete, grammatically correct English sentences" (Fields and Fields, 2012: 38).[16] As long as the enfranchisement of minorities is argued in terms of establishing their distinctiveness from symbolic Whiteness, Whiteness is implicitly confirmed as the standard, which in turn reinforces the center-periphery dichotomy in our thinking about shared cultural spaces.

Even amidst a culturally heterogenous reality, such caste mentality encourages people to imagine themselves confined to monocultural compartments, so that the very idea of artistic inspiration and cross-fertilization becomes morally suspect. And the more human selfhood is reduced to racial identity, the more the biological body appears to be the only source of creative meaning. So it happens that public indignation over racially offensive images promptly switches to acclaim based solely on the creator's skin color, as was the case when social media watchdogs condemned fashion designer Patrick Kelly's penchant for blackface and banana-skirt-clad Black women as crudely racist but veered to praising it as liberal avant-gardism as soon as it became known that he was African-American. More than just a clash between the empiricist theory of art, according to which only the immediately perceivable properties of creative works are relevant to their aesthetic merit, and the opposing view that an artifact cannot be properly appreciated without extrinsic information about the cultural milieu in which it was produced, the tunnel vision on race eclipses other ways of reading. For it rules out that an artist's work could be intimately understood by a person of another race.

As a case in point, the initial choice to have a White translator render Black US poet Amanda Gorman's acclaimed poem "The Hill We Climb" into Dutch has been publicly called "incomprehensible" (Holligan, 2021). Although Gorman had personally approved renowned Dutch writer Marieke Lucas Rijneveld for the task, incensed critics saw a faux pas in the contrast of skin tones, with racial profiling masquerading as artistic subtlety: Only people who are versed in slam poetry and have experienced oppression (both

---

[15] On the political left, the habit of celebrating the return to traditional and national identities in people of color but reproaching it as reactionary in people of European descent has the unwelcome side-effect of deemphasizing that Western societies too have a pre-scientific past. In this way, the dichotomy of modernity versus tradition, scientific knowledge versus superstition keeps being reaffirmed as an innate characteristic of Western versus non-Western societies and peoples.

[16] This problem is the central theme of the comedy-drama *American Fiction* (2023), which is based on the novel *Erasure* (Everett, 2001). It revolves around an African-American writer and literature professor who does "not believe in race" and resents being urged to be more 'Black' by the academic and publishing establishment. Ironically, he only finds literary success when he decides to write a comically stereotypical 'Black' novel. What he meant as a joke to expose the absurdity of race-focused US cultural discourses ironically becomes acclaimed by liberal America as a genuinely African-American voice.

sweepingly coded as Black) could capture the form and content of the poem, was a common argument. Bowing to public pressure, the project was ultimately reassigned to a candidate deemed racially compatible.[17] Even assuming that shared experience is necessary to adequately convey a literary text – a dubious premise according to which a book like for example *The Gulag Archipelago* by Russian Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn could only have been successfully translated by prisoners of Soviet labor camps –, not all shared experience boils down to race. In the concrete case of Gorman and Rijneveld, both are young writers who have come to fame early and are outspoken on matters of diversity and minority rights. But such commonalities do not carry any weight within an episteme which lays down race as the sole foundation for artistic, and indeed human, kinship.

With race thus towering as the master category of social belonging, other avenues of solidarity along axes of political orientation, class, and gender fade from the mental map. In effect, some of the most severe clashes over cultural appropriation have occurred over White support for anti-racist causes, such as the 2017 exhibition of Dana Schutz's painting *Open Casket*, an abstract depiction of the mutilated body of Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African-American boy who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955, or the 2019 hijab solidarity campaign, in which non-Muslim women wore a headscarf as a symbol of tolerance and inclusion. Both were sharply criticized as instances of voice appropriation, insensitive posturing by people with a 'white savior complex' (Jackson, 2019; Bucar, 2022). While there are clearly discussions to be had about interracial dynamics in the formulation of social justice discourses – including matters of tact and taste –, the cynicism stoked by the divisive logic of the culture-as-race paradigm forecloses such important conversations. By blanketly censuring anti-racist activism by White individuals either as vain self-display or financially motivated opportunism, it out of hand dismisses the possibility that they could have genuine interest in promoting a racially just society and discourages them from taking up advocacy for minorities. Here, the common slogan "not your story" all too easily translates into "not your problem," resulting in the corrosion of liberal alliances.

Conclusion

The connection between biological descent and cultural identity is flexible and contingent on specific circumstance. Yet the contemporary discourse on cultural appropriation has been dominated by the reification of culture as body. By collapsing culture onto race, it has created a progressive mirror-image of the political right's pursuit of an imaginary past of cultural purity understood in terms of racial boundedness – a retrogressive reflex that can be made sense of against the background of collective anxieties over globalization processes, the disenchantment with post-race narratives, and the rise of social media with its unprecedented volume of transcultural information flows.

Although this critical movement must be credited with amplifying the voices of minorities and opening a space for articulations of racial pain and guilt, especially as they have emerged in the US historical context, it ultimately fails to propose a coherent path towards racial equality and reconciliation. In highlighting the impact of racist mentalities on

[17] Eventually, the Dutch version of the poem was produced by Zaïre Krieger, a Dutch-born spoken-word artist who has African ancestry.

cultural interaction, it has lapsed into casting the suspicion of racism on cultural transfer per se – and prescribing separateness as the cure. Given the cultural bricolage that is everyday modern life, this formula is both theoretically inconsistent and practically unfeasible.

Since the critical model's analytical template is based on essentialist difference and the dichotomy of weak versus strong cultures, it has been predisposed to reiterate rather than reimagine the status quo, only further entrenching the idea of marginalization as an immutable attribute of non-Whiteness. Its equalization of racial difference with cultural separateness suggests that the latter is dictated by unalterable natural laws instead of historically grown social practices, giving it the nimbus of inevitability. This ultimately dovetails with the racist claim that, no matter how long people live together in the same society, they will always be separated by genetic ancestry.

Such ideas deemphasize, if not completely block out, shared interests rooted in class, gender, political orientation, and other common ground. The reduction of the complexities of living in a pluralist society under the forces of global capitalism to the single dimension of racial oppression distracts from the larger picture of an international capitalist system that can no longer be understood in the simplified terms of purely Western dominance. And to the extent that the struggle for political, economic, and legal equality is cast as a problem of personal style and consumer behavior, the public discussion on how to address colonial legacies is deflected from governments and corporations to the face-to-face level of private individuals. The result is a depoliticizing effect that drains activist energies away from the concerted pursuit of structural change into small-scale skirmishes over abstract cultural turf.

Even when we look at cases that are cited as flagship examples of the movement's positive impact, they arguably owe more to other critical frameworks, such as anti-capitalist demands for economic fairness (the financially lucrative partnership of the outerwear company Canada Goose with Inuit seamstresses), the assertion of intellectual copyrights (the settlement reached by Walt Disney Corporation with the descendants of Solomon Linda, the Black South-African musician who composed the signature melody of the global megahit "The Lion Sleeps Tonight"), or simply common notions of piety (the return of stolen human remains to Indigenous communities). While all these cases illustrate how racial discrimination acts as a ubiquitous driver of social inequality, they also suggest that the most effective way to combat it is by invoking broader models of equity as opposed to splitting off into cultural quarantine.

On the whole, the notion of culpable "racial plagiarism" seems to have been more divisive than conciliative in its effects, and nowhere more so than within the liberal left. In view of all the drawbacks and deadlocks this theoretical approach has entailed, one cannot help but wonder whether its stated aspiration to racial reconciliation is sincere. Instead, it appears to promote a collective Sisyphean ritual where the dominant group is urged to keep trying yet can never hope to attain exculpation. This impression tallies with the retributive undertones and, in some cases, explicit rejections of racial rapprochement. From a psychological perspective, there is an argument to be made that such figurative retribution may have positive cathartic effects – a way of clearing the collective air, so to speak, in preparation for a more reconciliatory social atmosphere. But that would also require the intellectual honesty to admit that the public discourse over cultural appropriation has been less about reconciliation than about chastisement of Whiteness. Considering the long history of racial oppression, such a desire for symbolic score-setting

is understandable. However, in a time when core liberal values and institutions are under direct assault, disagreements over race-based access to cultural tokens have come to seem painfully trivial. Liberals simply can no longer afford to impose a segregationist logic on their political imagination.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

Acho, Emmanuel. 2020. *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man* (New York: Flatiron Books, 2020).
Avins, Jenni and Quartz, "The Dos and Don'ts of Cultural Appropriation," *Atlantic*, 20 Oct. 2015, link to the article.
Bai, Stephany, "Appreciation or Appropriation? Coldplay, Beyonce Release New Music Video," *NBC News*, 29 Jan. 2016, link to the article.
Brown, Michael F., *Who Owns Native Culture?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
Brown, Tamara Lizette and Baruti N. Kopano, eds., *Soul Thieves: The Appropriation and Misrepresentation of African American Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
Browning, Janisse, "Self-Determination and Cultural Appropriation," *Fuse Magazine,* Vol. 15, No. 4 (1992), 31-5.
Bucar, Liz, *Stealing My Religion: Not Just Any Cultural Appropriation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022).
Büch, Michel, *Whiteface: Improv Comedy and Anti-Blackness* (Berlin: de Guyter, 2022).
Carman, Tim, "Should White Chefs Sell Burritos? A Portland Food Cart's Revealing Controversy," *Washington Post*, 26 May 2017, link to the article.
CBS News, "SFSU Investigating Video of Black Woman Confronting White Man for Wearing Dreads," 29 Mar. 2016, link to the article.
Christy, Arthur E., "A Sense of the Past," in Arthur E. Christy, ed., *The Asian Legacy and American Life* (New York: John Day, 1945), 1–55.
Coleman, Elizabeth Burns, *Aboriginal Art, Identity and Appropriation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).
Coutts-Smith, Kenneth, "Some General Observations on the Problem of Cultural Colonialism," in Susan Hiller, ed., *The Myth of Primitivism* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 5–18.
DasGupta, Sayantani, "Dear Racist Yogini: It's South Asia Calling and We Want Our Yoga Back," *AdiosBarbie*, 31 Jan. 2014, link to the article.
Diggs, Latasha Natasha, "The Black Asianphile," in Greg Tate, ed., *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 191–202.
Dines, Gail and Jean M. Humez, eds., *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Critical Reader* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2011).
Endres, Danielle, "American Indian Permission for Mascots: Resistance or Complicity within Rhetorical Colonialism?" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2015), 649–90.
Everett, Percival, *Erasure* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2001).
Fields, Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso, 2012).
Flanagan, Hanna, "Cardi B Apologizes after Being Accused of Appropriating Hindu Culture on Footwear News Cover," *People*, 11 Nov. 2020, link to the article.
Forgey, Quint and Josh Gerstein, "Barr Creates Firestorm with Comments that Appear to Boost Trump's Reelection Campaign," *Politico*, 17 Sep. 2020, link to the article.
Galchen, Rivka and Anna Holmes, "What Distinguishes Cultural Exchange from Cultural Appropriation?" *New York Times*, 8 Jun. 2017, link to the article.
Healy, Patrick, "Race, Hollywood and 'Doctor Strange': Margaret Cho and Tilda Swinton, Annotated," *New York Times*, 20 Dec. 2016, link to the article.
Hebdige, Dick, *Subculture: The Meaning of* Style (London: Methuen, 1979).
Heldke, Lisa, *Exotic Appetites: Ruminations of a Food Adventurer* (London: Routledge: 2003).
Holligan, Anna, "Why a White Poet Did Not Translate Amanda Gorman," *BBC News*, 10 Mar. 2021, link to the article.
Huhndorf, Shari M., *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).
Ibekwe, Desiree, "How One Actress Is Reshaping the Story of Anne Boleyn," *New York Times*, 10 Jun. 2021, link to the article.
Jackson, Lauren Michele, *White Negroes: When Cornrows were in Vougue … and Other Thoughts on Cultural Appropriation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2019).

Jarrar, Randa, “Why I Can’t Stand White Belly Dancers: Whether They Know It or Not, White Women Who Practice Belly Dance Are Engaging in Appropriation,” *Salon*, 5 Mar. 2014, link to the article.
Johnson, E. Patrick, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
Kawamura, Yuniya and Jung-Whan Marc de Jong, *Cultural Appropriation in Fashion and Entertainment* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).
Kopano, Baruti N., “Soul Thieves: White America and the Appropriation of Hip Hop and Black Culture,” in Tamara Lizette Brown and Baruti N. Kopano, eds., *Soul Thieves: The Appropriation and Misrepresentation of African American Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1–14.
Kuo, Rachel, “The Feminist Guide to Being a Foodie without Being Culturally Appropriative,” *Everyday Feminism*, 18 Nov. 2015, link to the article.
Lin, Sally Sue, “White People are Commodifying Chinese Medicine Just Like They Did with Yoga,” *Wear Your Voice*, 14 Mar. 2018, link to the article.
Martin, Kenyon, “Kenyon Martin Takes Issue with Jeremy Lin’s Dreaded Hairstyle,” *YouTube*, uploaded by *NBA Highlights* on 6 Oct. 2017, link to the article.
Michaels, Walter Benn, “The Myth of ‘Cultural Appropriation’,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2 Jul. 2017, link to the article.
Mishan, Ligaya, “What Does Cultural Appropriation Really Mean?” *New York Times*, 30 Sep. 2022, link to the article.
Morrison, Carlos D. and Ronald L. Jackson, II, “The Appropriation of Blackness in *Ego Trip’s The (White) Rapper Show,”* in Tamara Lizette Brown and Baruti N. Kopano, eds., *Soul Thieves: The Appropriation and Misrepresentation of African American Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 15–30.
National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Using Population Descriptors in Genetics and Genomics Research: A New Framework for an Evolving Field.* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2023).
Pham, Minh-Ha T, “Racial Plagiarism and Fashion,” *QED: A Journal in the GLBTQ Worldmaking* . 4, No. 3 (2017), 67–80. [CrossRef]
rois, Jessica and Lilly Workneh, “Jeremy Lin’s Dreads aAnd Kenyon Martin’s Chinese Tattoo Are a False Equivalency,” *HuffPost*, 11 Oct. 2017, link to the article.
Ratchford, Jamal. “A Silent Protest: The 1968 Olympiad and the Appropriation of Black Athleric Power,” in Tamara Lizette Brown and Baruti N. Kopano, eds., *Soul Thieves: The Appropriation and Misrepresentation of African American Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 109–49.
Rogers, Richard A., “From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation,” *Communication Theory*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2006), 474–503.
Scafidi, Susan, *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).
Scarre, Geoffrey, “The Repatriation of Human Remains,” in James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk, eds., *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 72–92.
Tate, Greg, ed., *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003).
Thomson, Virgil, “George Gershwin,” *Modern Music*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (November–December 1935), 13–19.
Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom, Vol.1* (London: John Murray, 1871).
Walsh, Andrea N. and Dominic McIver Lopes, “Objects of Appropriation,” in James O. Young and Conrad G. Brunk, eds., *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 211–34.
Weldon, Jo, *The Burlesque Handbook* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).
Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1976).
Young, James O., *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008)
Young, James O. and Conrad G. Brunk, eds., *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009).
Ziff, Bruce H. and Pratima V. Rao, eds., *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).