

my culture is not a trend.

A DIALOGUE ABOUT CULTURAL APPROPRIATION



On Reverse Cultural Appropriation

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I've removed myself from a lot of the cultural appropriation debates because as a person of colour, it is fucking exhausting trying to have your feelings and pain constantly invalidated by white folks.

However, I've been hearing way too much "well, Black people wear business suits. That's cultural appropriation." Or, "well, people of colour speak English." Or, "in India, they are trying to appropriate Western culture! They have a MacDonalds."

Seriously, you CANNOT make these comparisons and here's why:

I just wanted to say that things are not black and white, and things such as cultural appropriation cannot happen horizontally when power is not distributed horizontally. When we see, for example, "black people wearing business suits" vs let's say, hipsters wearing headresses, there is a different context and a different meaning that is being produced. We need to look back at history, to context, to culture, to ideology, and to power to really understand what these things are communicating.

Why, for example, are people of colour speaking English and wearing "western clothes?", you may ask. In many cases, COLONIZED countries were forced to adopt the culture of the colonizer while their own culture was violently removed. Residential schools, for example, forced indigenous children to speak English, adopt christianity, and were forced to wear European clothes and adopt a European culture. Therefore, it is important to understand the history of colonialism and to understand that what you see as a parallel act of "cultural appropriation," is really the product of colonialism. To equate those things is to deny the historical and continued violence produced by colonialism, and it is also a huge reflection of privilege.

About the author



Hi, I'm a Native American, and I'm fed up with the appropriation of my culture by those desperate to be trendy, hip, ironic etc.

Being a Native comes with a history of decidedly un-trendy events, such as the cultural genocide of an entire continent, residential schools, racism, stolen generations, and the eradication of entire tribes of people and their cultural traditions.

This blog is devoted to calling out those who might think that it is fun to dress like a native for a photo-shoot, or what have you. Just because it's popular, doesn't make it right, and to me, it is just as offensive as blackface.

Although we are a mostly invisible culture, that does not grant anyone the right to appropriate what little pieces of our past we have, robbing them of their dignity.

Part of being seen as "trendy"

Forced assimilation does not equal the appropriation and the commodification of another person's culture. Furthermore, forced assimilation does not have to be as black and white as putting people into residential schools, but it can also be an epistemic and ideologically forced assimilation such as "business suits* = a necessary uniform to gain access into the white collar workforce," therefore, in turn, what this also produces is the idea that the "native dress" of someone else's culture is devalued and "uncivilized." Therefore, in order for a person of colour to have a white collar job, they must then wear a business suit. We have the social and cultural understanding that "business suits = employment," but we never interrogate where that comes from and what that means.

Let me just say this,

White supremacy works so that white privilege goes unnoticed.

Hipsters wearing headresses is cultural appropriation because it is a commodification of indigenous culture. It takes something from someone else's culture without any context or respect and turns it into something marketable and profitable. It reiterates the very techniques of colonialism by objectifying someone else's culture and turning that culture into something available for consumption. It has the effect of making indigenous culture as something belonging to white people by turning indigenous-looking clothes into fashion accessories. It also helps to perpetuate essentializing stereotypes of what indigenous culture is by removing indigenous clothing from its historical specificity and context.

I think that people get so defensive about being called out on those things like this because it threatens their sense of entitlement. Colonialism is about feeling entitled to every space (regardless if it is yours). It works the same with culture.

It is important to think about how privileged it is to dress "Native" or "Asian" or "African" in order to look fashionable, when folks who are Indigenous, Asian, or African were murdered because they looked and dressed different, because they were "other" than white, and because their cultures were deemed as "uncivilized" (which, was often a claim used to legitimize their colonisation). You have the agency to "try on" those cultures, whereas other groups of people were forced to adopt another culture (while still being discriminated against because regardless of how they speak or what they wear, they still aren't the right skin colour). How is that equal? How is this the same?

So seriously, check your privilege before making stupid arguments such as "well, Indigenous people speak English..." It's not productive to feel guilty, but it's not productive to pretend that those power dynamics don't exist either.

*I'm just using this as an example because someone else made that comparison.

If I had a dime for how many times I've had "stop speaking English" dropped into my Ask box by an anon, I'd be a rich woman. This was spectacular. It

also makes an entire culture not only a commodity, but also something that people will (and can) tire of; therefore being disposable. And to me, that is unacceptable.

I can be contacted at flight.of.fancy@live.com, if you'd like to see something I've missed up on the site.

Want to contribute? Submit posts to www.mycultureisnotatrend.tumblr.com/su

Got questions? Submit them to www.mycultureisnotatrend.tumblr.com/ask

can never be said enough. Thanks to "Meow" for bringing this to my attention!


PS: A recent anon hatemail I received - apparently I'm a threat to "everyone who cherishes diversity" according to all of the people they know. If that's their definition of diversity, you better bet I'm a threat.

Stop speaking English! It's a European thing! Stop wearing jeans! It's another European thing! Stop listening to jazz or rock and roll! That belongs to the African Americans. Globalization has allowed all cultures to share their wealth. Although cultures can be belittled by the media, they can also be celebrated. You see someone wanting to buy a headdress as offensive to your culture, but could it be that they are proud to show that they support your culture? Next time you post something, declaring how racist all of the white people of the world are, consider what their true intentions are. If you ignore the value many place on diversity, you ignore everything toward which civil rights leaders have worked. You are not the only one whose culture is being used to sell commodities, so please don't act like it. The people with whom I have shared this and I agree that it is offensive to everyone who cherishes diversity, so please realize the value of your words.

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