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A CONVERSATION ABOUT CULTURAL APPROPRIATION AS EXPLORED BY  
AN EMERGING MEDIA PROFESSIONAL

By Shikha Shrestha

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, Mississippi

May 2019

Approved by

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Advisor: Professor Mark Dolan

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Reader: Professor Cynthia Joyce

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Reader: Professor Evangeline W. Ivy

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## **DEDICATION**

This is for you and me to learn together, and for our future selves in hopes of preventing arguments, but preserving the tradition of unconventional conversations discussed at the dinner table.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, reader for taking the time to read this. I hope this provides some answers, but also that it helps you stay curious.

I express my sincere gratitude to my readers Professor Cynthia Joyce and Professor Evangeline Ivy for taking the time to read and challenge my perspective on the media, while also providing me their own professional and personal insights.

I want to thank as well as admire students who are members of organizations that promote the enrichment of diversity and inclusion on this campus, without which I would have never thought about this concept.

Thank you Mamu, Papa, and Mumu Didi for the unconditional love and support during such a part of my college career, thank you for being my strength throughout this writing process.

Lastly, and certainly not least, words truly cannot begin to describe how grateful I am to have met Dr. Mark Dolan. Under your guidance and mentorship not only during this writing process but throughout my time here at Ole Miss, I have grown. You shined a light on my potential as a writer. You taught me how to be courageous, ambitious, and adventurous in communications as an IMC student, and as an emerging media practitioner. Thank you for your patience, persistence, and commitment to making this a piece that we are both proud to not only own but discuss. Thank you.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **A Conversation About Cultural Appropriation As Explored By An Emerging Media Professional**

This thesis investigates cultural appropriation for the benefit of emerging media professionals. I use a personal encounter with cultural misappropriation as a starting point for the study. To further my exploration, I call upon the theory of symbolic interactionism and scholarship in sociology, anthropology, and art criticism to better understand the concept. Then I interviewed many students and faculty members in the university community and they provided both insight and personal reflections on the concept, especially the media's role in how they view cultural appropriation. Finally, I provide case studies, choosing three areas where cultural misappropriation has occurred, and suggest dialogue to enhance understanding and make recommendations for practice.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION..... P. 1**

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW.....P.13**

**CHAPTER THREE: CAMPUS CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CULTURAL  
APPROPRIATION AND MEDIA.....P.23**

**CHAPTER FOUR: CASES AND CONSIDERATIONS.....P.41**

**CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....P.58**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.....P.67**

**APPENDIX.....P.76**

**IRB Application.....P.76**

**IRB Approval E-mail.....P.83**

**Personal One-on-One Interview Question Script.....P.84**

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

We see cultural appropriation, “when someone adopts something from a culture that is not his or her own— a hairstyle, a piece of clothing, a manner of speaking,” everywhere, or we often perceive we do. It occurs every day— in many cases, unintentionally—whether online, through the media and national news, or in offline instances on college campuses, such as the University of Mississippi (Rao and Ziff). Cultural appropriation poses difficult questions about the overlap and power dynamics of race, politics, society and individuality, elements of which dissolve into a grey area that can leave emerging media practitioners guessing as to what is the right or wrong approach to content creation, what is sensitive or insensitive, as we engage audiences.

Conceptually, and as cultural offense, where did cultural appropriation originate? Cultural appropriation in America seems to have emerged in the 1980s as part of a discussion around colonialism and expansionism, “directed at literal cultural theft—the pilfering of art and artifacts by colonial powers” (Young). Why did it take so long for the term to permeate pop culture?

Have there been a series of watershed moments, heightened by the advance of digitization? Cultural appropriation has entered the mainstream. Has its presence coalesced around political correctness? Or perhaps globalization has paradoxically made for a more culturally delineated landscape, where to dabble in the styles, songs and speech patterns of another’s ethnicity carries with it censure and taboo?

Elusive as these answers may be—and thus making impossible any definitive grasp of cultural appropriation—the concept is rooted in sociology, anthropology, media studies and literary criticism. Weighing the words *cultural* and *appropriation* separately



provides some help. Broadly defined, culture is a way of life, and it reflects the customs, traditions, basic values, religion, and activities shared among a common group or society (Brown and Baruti). With similar breadth, appropriation is taking something for one's personal use without receiving permission from the owner, denoting an unfair or unauthorized taking (Rogers 475).

The words together, cultural appropriation, trigger often negative associations of historical media stereotyping; for example, a mediated version of blackness by taking the popular ideation of blackness in order to sell pancake flour. In other instances, cultural appropriation is the absconding of non-racist African American media presence: white office workers doing the Harlem Shake,<sup>1</sup> a street dance which evolved in a black enclave and was an expressive black experience.

There are several definitions of cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation “signifies not only the taking up of something and making it one's own but also the ability to do so,” and people misinterpret the distinction between shared ideas and borrowing from one another, “but appropriation is entirely different from borrowing or sharing because it involves the taking up and commodification of aesthetic, cultural and, more recently, spiritual forms of a society” (Root). Another way to understand cultural appropriation is how materials of culture are broken up. “ ‘Appropriation’ in this sense is beyond the legalistic understanding locating it in the vicinity of plagiarism. In this other

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning as a techno song produced by Baauer in 2012, the song an eccentric dance has become an internet meme spreading globally as crowds recreate their own ‘Harlem Shake’ for online distribution on social networking sites. Recreations of the dance are in no way linked to the actually ‘Harlem Shake’, a dance originating in Harlem in 1981 that has been popular among African American since the 1990s and early 2000s (Steele).

aspect of appropriation rests the metabolic quality of adaptation as a creative and metamorphic process: material is broken up to become part of a new living organism”

(Nicklas and Lindner 13). Cultural appropriation can also be defined as,

It is not simply an opportunity to widen the visitor experience from personal to communal interactions; it is an unstable, fluid shift in our understanding of what is at the core of heritage experience (Giaccardi).

In sociology, anthropology and artistic criticism, cultural appropriation is thought of by some scholars as an act of illegitimate taking, acquisition and transformation by members of the mainstream society of ideas, images and art styles originated by indigenous peoples and other minority groups (Heyd 37-38). In popular culture, specifically the entertainment industry, cultural appropriation highlights the historical power imbalance between those who once held the social power—dominant culture—and those who've been marginalized by societal standards—minority culture. Additionally, cultural appropriation can be viewed as the misuse of culture with the intention of seeking creative inspiration, especially when a member of a dominant group can assume the traditional dress of a minority group for a costume party or a musical performance (Mallia 172). In artistic works, who decides when it is homage versus misuse? Or collage versus “taking without permission”?

In his article “Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture,” Douglas Kellner writes, “Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture” (Kellner 7). Kellner says the media is an omniscient entity that not only influences but also controls the way we think, behave, act and react, “teaches us how to conform to the dominant system of norms, values practices, and

institutions” (7). Media literacy is thus a skill crucial for individuals struggling “to cope with a seductive cultural environment” (Kellner, 7). Media culture determines what is popular or unpopular.

Kellner provides a new perspective for the purpose of my study on how individuals use media, and the kind of control media practitioners have. Recently, American singer-songwriter Beyoncé Knowles Carter was called out for her acts of cultural appropriation when she travelled to India to perform at an Indian wedding, but what’s strange about this instance is that many South Asian communities, specifically Indians, supported Beyoncé and dismissed charges of cultural appropriation leveled by Americans. The appropriated community—South Asians in this case—do not condone appropriation, but rather, they saw what Beyoncé did as appreciation, and spreading awareness of their culture. Accusations of cultural appropriation are a bummer. Based on personal experience, such accusations are synonymous with being “not woke,” (Sanders) or being culturally blind, or even being a racist. In 2018, social media creates an ongoing text of many conversations around cultural appropriation and social movements, in general, spotlighting discussions once taboo, and now replicated as popular hashtags such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, or placing a hashtag # in front of a social transgression that is relevant to the post. The internet allows us to witness cultural appropriation and the discourse around it in real time.

Symbolic interaction, for example, is a theoretical perspective allowing us to consider how we come to understand ourselves through what others, including the media, show and tell us about ourselves. If we look back even further, people have been talking about social interactions symbolically for a long time. From the Chicago School of

Sociology, George Herbert Mead defined symbolic interactionism as that which “addresses the manner in which society is created and maintained through face-to-face, repeated, meaningful interactions among individuals.”

Marketing and media professionals play a major role in building these symbols and helping us attach certain meanings. For instance, when some of us hear the term Budweiser, we immediately imagine Clydesdales or golden lab puppies in reaction to years of TV commercials aired during the Super Bowl since the 1980s. The repetition of the commercials, their messages and images, become ingrained in our psyche where we give meaning to an object, inanimate or not. Like race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, class and age, among a host of other human qualities, some inherent and others acquired or accrued, the mere mention of cultural appropriation triggers political reactions in popular discourse, in part, because of its contested terrain. Cultural appropriation’s rulebook is in many instances revealed only at the moment of transgression, with a lexicon both ambiguous and expansive, thus deepening the shadowy terrain between appropriation and appreciation.

Perhaps because we come to believe culture is a set of personalized statements—the rough parallel of a song playlist, which blinds and leaves us with lack of understanding—we possess a limited, flawed, or otherwise skewed awareness of cultures assumed not to be our own. Put another way, we are discouraged by offended groups when we try to engage in discussions with others from cultural backgrounds unlike us. My thesis seeks to have a different conversation about cultural appropriation, and to be the enabler of future discourse, so as to help emerging media practitioners, myself included, better navigate an often contested and always complicated cultural landscape.

This is a difficult conversation, in part because the term cultural appropriation connotes something automatically negative in popular culture. Art historian Thomas Heyd argues that cultural appropriation can be a necessary element in cultural creation:

Where some see cultural appropriation as leading to inauthenticity, others see valuable cultural development, Where some see threats to the identity of indigenous and minority groups in such appropriations, others see cultural appropriations as ways in which hybrid cultures come about, which themselves may become re-appropriated by the original groups as leavening for their own cultural renaissances. In general, where some see harms to indigenous, minority, and even mainstream cultures, others see overall benefits, which, on consequentialist grounds, supposedly justify cultural appropriation (Heyd 38).

We often confound appropriation with misrepresentation. “Appropriation denotes taking possession of something that one has no right to, and misrepresentation refers to the deliberate, typically negative, depiction of a false ideal” (Brown and Kopano) Cultural appropriation is thus a two-edged sword, considered to be both inevitable and harmful. The study of cultural appropriation can become our passport to explore, psychologically as well as in real time, different cultures, almost as a type of costuming, behind which lies our sometimes conflicted, culturally curious DNA.

My generation navigates a landscape littered with stereotypes of the past, especially in Mississippi. Slogans like “Make America Great Again” have a chilling effect on campuses, discouraging students from engaging or even beginning these important conversations, sentencing us to regional bubbles. Some of the most creative artists in the country come from Mississippi, while the nation awaits the state’s next cultural faux pas. How can we overcome this? Through conversation, I say. Using personal interviews and case studies derived from media, I hope to initiate a healing,

illuminative dialogue about how in a country where racial tension exists, marketing directors and teams of similar professionals all over the country, in their desire to embrace something new, veer into dangerous waters fraught with potent cultural symbols, which they then appropriate, without always knowing the cultural risk.

## **My Story**

Crossing the line is often done unwittingly, something I have experienced personally, as an event in 2018 made cultural appropriation a central consideration in my decisions around content creation as an IMC student. Each spring at the University of Mississippi, student political signs stretch across Business Row as elections draw near. The student body goes into a political frenzy as candidates seek supporters, leaving no student passing by without a sticker on Business Row. Such is the climate around the Associated Student Body (ASB) election season. The spring of 2018 was no different from any other political season. The typical adrenaline of candidates' speeches clouded the campus as Election Day drew near. The position for ASB Secretary had remained vacant, creating an opportunity for write-in candidates. After much encouragement from myself and others, my friend Reagan Moody, a junior at the time, decided to seek office. We wanted to spread the word fast, in case others had the same idea— and someone did. With news of a competitor, a once cramped shoebox of a sorority bedroom quickly became campaign headquarters for Reagan.

The pressure was on, and given a tight deadline and being recruited on Reagan's campaign team as the marketing manager, I felt it. We needed to post something that would be relatable to all students *and* embrace Reagan's personality outside of the

politics—fun, personable. Our campaign team agreed that option was the best of our ideas to recreate a personal rendition of the popular and latest Hollywood hit song “Finesse” by pop artists Bruno Mars and Cardi B. After two long days of careful strategizing, organizing video props, and editing hours of raw footage, the music video went live on social media.

Ten minutes later, Reagan took the video down. *Why?* Within minutes after the video posted, our campaign team met in our headquarters, which had started to feel like a small bedroom again. The same night we released the video, Reagan received a phone call and a few texts from members of the Black Student Union and from our sorority’s chair of campaigns. They accused the video of cultural appropriation, devaluing the original intentions of Bruno Mars and Cardi B. The pop artists dedicated their music video to the 1990’s television series *In Living Color*. It was an American sitcom inspired by NBC’s promotion of broadcasting television in color, but the playful title attributes the series’ cast of individuals of color, unlike its competitor *Saturday Night Live* (Kennedy). Reagan, who is white, impersonated rapper Cardi B, who is both Dominican and Trinidadian, geographically close, though culturally distinct. As Reagan focused on constructing her apology messages to the BSU and anyone else possibly offended by our video, I thought more about cultural appropriation— and the more I thought, the more questions I had. Was Reagan’s whiteness the problem? Should I have turned the camera around to promote diversity because of my skin color or maybe placed the other two individuals of color closer to the front of the camera? Who is or is not allowed to appreciate the message and the culture celebrated in the show *In Living Color*?

“Our idea came from a good place,” said Moody after a month long election season ended. “Our intentions were not to offend. I really try to make an effort to understand people, their life, their struggles.” Then Moody paused, her eyebrows tightened in discontent as she recollected the election season. “I can never get it,” she said, “but I would never want to act like I do. This moment broke my heart.”

While it broke Reagan’s heart, it made me mad, because no matter how many times or ways I asked about cultural appropriation, I did not find a clear answer. And so I set out, showing our video to professors, friends, family, and other students of various backgrounds, specifically black students, but most importantly individuals most offended by the video. I was in a search of both an understanding, but also an affirmation that I was not completely alone in thinking that our video was not offensive or otherwise problematic. One of my professors, Jennifer Sadler, who is bi-racial, watched the video. Initially, she smiled. Then seconds later in the video, Reagan started lip singing Cardi B’s part, and Sadler’s smile wilted, and her eyebrows slowly raised. She then said, “Honestly, I don’t have a problem with this, but I can see a small number of people who would.” Since the campaign, similar situations have surfaced on campus and in the media, and now I detect cultural appropriation frequently in mediated spaces.

To me and my team members, it felt as though the accusation carried a new, subliminal language unrecognizable by any of us on the team— and the effect was to inhibit inclusion and possibly underscore exclusion. No one wanted to feel or think that way. We live in a political climate where political correctness is encouraged. Politics becomes a factor in characterizing cultural appropriation and its defining boundaries. Politics participates heavily on the discussion of cultural appropriation, where brands and



companies address the controversies our country faces and, in an attempt to retaliate against these issues or show the political agenda of the brand, they communicate messages with themes of unity, diversity, or inclusion. Sometimes though, they receive the opposite reaction and negative attention. I see and hear it on national television, where companies such as Pepsi Co. and H&M have recently been accused of both cultural appropriation and misrepresenting a cause. The pattern exists whereby the intended message can easily be overshadowed by the perception of cultural appropriation.

Talking about each other's cultures is difficult and usually involves hesitation for fear of offending, not out of arrogance, but ignorance. That hesitation turns into silence, fear of unspoken conversations, and so nobody talks about the areas in which cultural appropriation is assumed to occur. But the problem is not just local. As an integrated marketing communications student, I wonder if even on a professional level, public relations teams all over the country face the problem of distinguishing between appropriation and appreciation. Which makes me again wonder, what are the guidelines for media practitioners, for students, and overall, for the general populace that explicitly defines cultural appropriative acts? We usually do not set out to hurt each other. Yet cultural appropriation does hurt. We do not even realize a line has been crossed (Young 140).

“How do you judge how wrong something is?” asked Margaret Hay, a junior at the time and also a manager for Reagan’s campaign, “Is it just wrong if one person speaks on behalf of a whole community?” The contested terrain around black and white America is a persistent focus in the media. However, while the fight around many controversial issues, from police brutality to social colloquialisms, appears to be a black-

versus-white or a white-versus-black narrative, with symbolic actors echoing historic racialized coverage, there exists an unspoken tenet: some are not allowed to empathize with the problems, struggles, or history of other communities of different cultures because as outsiders, they would never understand.

How do media practitioners avoid cultural appropriation, if charges of appropriation seem inevitable no matter the choice of medium or communication channel, but more so how does it impact them, how do they approach culture appropriation, and are they still doing it in the wrong way? Again, what is the right way?

One way of viewing cultural appropriation is the historic privilege self-conscious of an individual—the appropriator. This is seen on campus and seen in the country as a whole. The action of taking tangible or intangible items of historically underprivileged groups hits the core when real cultural appropriation occurs. Cultural appropriation is then seen in a negative light, and deviates far from appreciation. The context, the use, and the time spent within a culture matter for one to not only be properly informed, but also to remain aware of others and the impact when one overlooks the historical struggles of underprivileged groups of our society.

In the chapters that follow, I plan to discuss my findings of the interpretations of cultural appropriation by scholars in subject areas such as sociology, anthropology, and communication studies to see how their definitions contribute to the conversation of the relation between the practices of the media professions and cultural appropriation. Then from scholarly literature, I take the conversation to faculty who provide insight through their expertise as well as personal experience of cultural appropriation, and include students who describe why our generation has shaken the new atmosphere of political

correctness and why subjects like cultural appropriation becomes problematic. Next, I discuss several case studies. Because cultural appropriation touches every aspect of life, from sports to food to music, I focus on industries most problematic for media practitioners when discussing cultural appropriation—fashion, music, and social movements. How fashion creates individuals as walking forms of appropriation, or hearing the appropriation in song lyrics, as well as the misrepresentation of social movements by appropriating their goals— these are relevant areas for case study. Finally, I conclude with my own meditations, a year after Reagan’s campaign.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Analysis of the Concept**

Two major discussions of cultural appropriation are addressed in this chapter: cultural appropriation explored through scholarship and cultural appropriation conveyed through mainstream media. The scholarship section touches again upon symbolic interactionism related to cultural appropriation, as well as relevant sources in sociology and anthropology. Mainstream media is relevant, showing us where and in what tones the conversations occur around cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation as a concern of public relations practitioners, a subset of media professionals, is important because these must work to heal wounds and bridge gaps between the appropriated and the appropriator.

As it relates to relevant scholarship, cultural appropriation may be thought of as not simply transmitted communication, from a sender to a receiver, but rather something shared, with recognizable symbols, which accrue meaning over time and through earlier communications. “In the past, the medium of communication has been conceptualized as a simple pipeline, a carrier of messages ... it is also possible that the medium of communication may be selected for symbolic meaning that transcends the explicit message” (Trevino et al.). Communication theories are relevant to an exploration of cultural appropriation, because these theories apply perspectives such as symbolic interaction in the media, in an effort to understand how media creates a provisional reality for people. Symbolic interactionism is, in part, cultivating a symbolic meaning around an item itself rather than waiting to see what causes the consumer to carry out the purchase. Symbols attain meaning through ritual usage. Consumer behavior relies on symbolic sharing. When individuals purchase an item, a symbolic significance is attached

to that purchase because “individuals are assumed to relate to objects or events based on their symbolic meaning given by society” (Leigh and Gabel 28).

As “arbitrary representations of the unseen phenomena,” symbols possess a powerful role of controlling and formulating identity (Baran and Davis) Symbolic interactionism in media mirrors society. Because individuals use language and significant symbols to communicate with others, social theorists such as Blumer and Mead are interested in how individuals make sense of their worlds. Blumer wrote that society itself is a continuing process where “the action consists of the multitudinous activities that the individuals perform in their life as they encounter one another and as they deal with the succession of situations confronting them” (Blumer 10).

Symbolic interactionism determines what meanings are transferred to what object, and what meanings define the consumers’ beliefs. However, with the vast symbolic interpretations and attachments, media professionals muddle in a grey area between cultural appropriation and appreciation. Political scientist John Meisel designed a diagram that examines the cyclical mindset and psyche of human interpretation of culture and individual cultural values in four senses: anthropological, aesthetic, political, and leisure. He expressed how cultural and political symbols interact with one another creating the kind of culture in which individuals place themselves in.

For the purpose of this study, studying these forms can explain particular cultural nuances, how the individuals process symbols, affecting the perception of other cultures and whether the internalized symbols shape personal politics and our political climate, articulating how politics affects cultural appropriation. Leisure culture stresses creativity to the mind, and any form of creativity to that. Meisel stated, “Leisure culture enables

them in some active way to satisfy those needs for self-esteem and self-actualization of which Maslow speaks and which becomes important once basic physical needs are met” (Meisel). Personal and cultural politics convey the power relations among “mutually understood symbols”—constantly altering what action judges to be appropriate or appreciative of one’s culture.

In the twenty-first century, racially charged phrases and symbols truly remain as some of the most emotionally charged meanings in the human language and has shaped human interaction across civilization on how we view race, and so, how we view each other (Reid-Merritt). Skin color or facial features did not relate to race or identify with its meaning until centuries later. Like cultural appropriation, race has been argued to be a social construct (Onwachi-Willig). The “indication of the power, and invasiveness, of the ideology of ‘race’ that each and every one of us has ‘learned’ to regard these forms of observed difference as significant” is what determines who is placed into which groups, as well as “distinct biological types” (Ratcliffe). In a contemporary sense regarding how we view race today, we subconsciously push the desire to compartmentalize everything around us to distinguish *us* and from *them* or *others*—our culture and their culture.

“‘Race’ acquired a paradigmatic status through a long history of slavery, colonialism and imperialism, and is constantly reified in contemporary discourse” (Ratcliffe).

Both the physical and emotional characteristics of religion embolden consumer reaction, and so the symbols are taken advantage of as a marketing tactic rather than a genuine one. The use of religious symbolism coincides with another concurrent trend on the rise: the decreasing emphasis on words and increased reliance on nonverbal communication in advertising for “symbols telegraph meaning” (Mallia 175).

Professor of Communications Richard A. Rogers from Northern Arizona University categorizes cultural appropriation in four ways: exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation (Rogers). The following conditioned each category are how Rogers and other scholars translate the scope of the appropriative act: the degree of voluntariness (as an individual or community), the symmetry or balance of relative power, the strength of either domination or resistance, and finally, the nature of the cultural boundaries involved. He also deemed that acts of cultural appropriation and their implications are not determined by the intent or the degree of awareness and knowledge of those engaged in such acts, but also how such acts are shaped by, and in turn shape, the social, economic, and political contexts in which they occur.

Rogers illustrated each category in detail, but first posited a brief definition for each:

1. Cultural exchange: the reciprocal exchange of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies between cultures with roughly equal levels of power.
2. Cultural dominance: the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in a context, including appropriations that enact resistance.
3. Cultural exploitation: the appropriation of elements of a subordinated culture by a dominant culture without substantive reciprocity, permission, and/or compensation.
4. Transculturation: cultural elements created from and/or by multiple cultures, such that identification of a single originating culture is problematic, for example, multiple cultural appropriations structured in the dynamics of globalization and transnational capitalism creating hybrid forms (Rogers).

While he argues that transculturation carries the most weight of the four categories in understanding acts of appropriation, Rogers claimed that each play a significant role in

his spectrum of cultural appropriation. The spectrum involves this triggering crisis where an imbalance occurs between cultural unequals (Ashley and Plesch 1-15).

As the beginning bookend, cultural exchange is the “implied baseline for clarifying inequalities involved in the other conditions of appropriation” acting as an ideal where this type of appropriation posits a reciprocal flow and generally voluntary with “choices” involved. On the other end of the spectrum, cultural domination, highlights the “asymmetries under which acts of appropriation occur. Cultural dominance heavily implies a lack of choice. In between, there is exploitation and transculturation. Cultural exploitation characterizes the commodification, materialization, and incorporation of elements of subordinated cultures, especially the attachment of race, some may even define this as “racial capitalism” (Gersma). Rogers argued that transculturation questions the hybridity of appropriation and culture, how “the view of culture embedded in transculturation focuses on processes and relationships; culture ‘is never fixed, never fully seen in its totality, and always changing’ because it is a network of relations, not an entity” (Rogers). However, other scholars argue that the idea of “culture is as indeterminate as any found within social science... it cannot... be relied upon to set clear limits as to where the concept of cultural appropriation begins and ends” (Rao and Ziff).

In the context of cultural appropriation, the association of power, especially power imbalance between minority and majority, casts *appropriation* in a negative light. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* deals with cultural appropriation, the misrepresentation of “the Orient” to satisfy the “desires and consolidate [the West’s] own power” (Ashley and Plesch, 3). Said wrote, “Men have always divided the world up into regions having either real or imagined distinction from each other” (Said 39). Through Said’s text, there is this



binary model instilled within appropriation, a relationship between cultural un-equals—a dominant culture that appropriates and a weaker culture. When viewing the relationship between the East and West, Said described that there was a growing systematic knowledge, “knowledge reinforced by the colonial encounter as well as by the widespread interest in the alien and unusual, Europe was always in a position of strength” (Said 39-40). Similarly, today, scholars believe that popular culture as well as how individuals express themselves, normalized cultural products, creating recycled or re-formed objects (Ashley and Plesch).

Young proposes three types of appropriation in the realm of the arts, which can also apply to media: subject appropriation, content appropriation, and object appropriation. Subject appropriation occurs when an “outsider represents members or aspects of another culture,” and a recurring instance of this kind of appropriation exists in the fashion industry, models who are cultural outsiders because of what they are wearing. Another instance is in the film industry. Directors portray a storyline based on a culture not their own. Content appropriation occurs when outsiders use the cultural products of another culture in creating something new. For instance, “musicians who perform the songs of a culture that is not their own have engaged in content appropriation” (Young 136). The content is not restricted to a whole product, but can be a style or motif. Object appropriation occurs when the possession of a tangible object is transferred from members of culture that produced it to the possession of outsiders, like the transfer of art from its original places to museums.

In the book *Who Owns Culture?* Susan Scafidi writes about cultural appropriation in relation to ownership and authorship of cultural products. “Consumers respond to

cultural products in the marketplace and elsewhere much the way that decorator crabs  
father seaweed and adorn their shells,” writes Scafidi. Culture transforms into product,  
which is used in the service entered into “a marketplace or otherwise become accessible  
to outsiders” where outsiders sample these cultural products as a way of building self-  
expression and self-identity through these defining cultural characteristics, and becomes  
“a starting point for recognition of the source community as well as a means of allowing  
outsiders a degree of participation in and appreciation of that community” (Scafidi). In  
terms of appropriation, Scafidi questions the movement, the domino effect of  
interactions, of cultural products that provokes conflict between insiders and outsiders,  
minority cultures and majority cultures, especially. Cultural appropriation appears  
problematic in the displacement of cultural products, or more so the misrepresentation,  
especially when an outsider popularizes the product for financial gain, commodifying the  
culture. “Even when voluntary, contributions to popular culture are subject to gross  
distortion: can Mexican national cuisine be faithfully represented by Taco Bell?”  
(Scafidi).

Do media professionals combat this daily fight against their morals or do they  
truly not know? Acts of cultural appropriation have been regulated by both American  
culture and individual thought of that culture (Rao and Ziff). These patterns of  
appropriation both consumers and producers of the media become a part of their daily  
lives. “The existence of shared cultures and histories suggests that sometimes these  
entitlements might also be shared or sharable” (Rao and Ziff).

As the construction of civilization continues, “lives, situations, even societies are  
always and everywhere evolving, adjusting, becoming (Plummer). The U.S. is a multi-

cultural complex, full of cultures, communities, individuals. Ideas that were once unorthodox such as same sex or even interracial marriages contribute to the evolution of symbols, changing how we interact with one another, and how much we think to do so.

### **Cultural Appropriation's Battlefield**

Encountering new faces and perspectives enlightens an individual, and creates a sense of an emboldened, new self. However, the emotional risk involved in appropriation can produce uneasiness in a person, and that causes that person to regress back to his or her cultural standard (Carter and Fuller 944). For this reason, acts of cultural appropriation are perhaps seen as ephemeral. "We have to stop guarding cultures and subcultures in efforts to preserve them," stated columnist and digital media writer Jenni Avins (Avins). Avins demonstrated in her post "The Do's and Don't's of Cultural Appropriation" how the debate of cultural appropriation affects her daily routine. She expressed that with the fluidity of culture, the exchange of ideas, styles, and traditions is one of the joys of a modern, multicultural society. Avins examined her daily routine as multiple series of cultural appropriation acts such as pouring Italian coffee and dressing in French clothing. Though fair to question, smaller, daily uses of cultural products such as coffee adds to the grey area between appropriation and appreciation, I consider these activities as influences rather than appropriation, far from exploitative as Rogers defines (Rogers).

Rather than creating a discussion, the Internet tends to become a battlefield. With a community of "self-appointed guardians of culture," the Internet disengages people to join the conversation of how to appreciate cultures outside of their own (Avins). Genuine interest shifts to turning the table and accusing others of 'playing the race card,'

weakening conversation. Cultural appropriation becomes a rhetorical weapon in the hands of individuals claiming to speak for minority rights. “Even the most modest education in cultural history teaches us that art of all kinds has depended on the mixing of cultures” (Ziff and Rao). How can identity or other forms of self-expression be policed? “People are not just getting mad over song or dress. It becomes manifest in these outrageous incidents that dominate the news.” As more incidents occur, the conversation of cultural appropriation intensifies on the news.

Many known faces of popular culture are blazoned across online and offline news mediums, causing PR turbulence fumed by cultural appropriation accusations.

Jamie Oliver’s punchy jerk rice recipe was criticized for appropriation of Jamaican cuisine. Khloe Kardashian’s tribute to Diana Ross went awry immediately as she posted images of herself wearing a slinky gold dress and blonde afro; “the ‘disco fever aesthetic soon led fans to accuse [Khloe] of cultural appropriation” (Fowler). In South Dakota, a school was called out for their cultural insensitivity when organizing a day called “Hawaiian Day,” where the school intended to celebrate “the Aloha State,” but students complained about “the use of indigenous cultural symbols” (“Hawaii Day at a Mainland”). In February of 2019, 11 days into Black History Month, singer Katy Perry wore loafer-style shoes in a design that was apparent to the public as blackface, but not so apparent to her. In March of 2019, the annual holiday celebration of St. Patrick’s Day incited a new debate of the appropriation of Irish culture, and now, the festive green holiday is categorized along with Cinco de Mayo, Flag Day, and other holidays not celebrated by their respective cultures, but rendered into American popular—costumed—culture.

Public relations professionals face a challenge to find the source of communicating, *amplifying* a message that carries weight in both intent and impact, especially when balancing a mutual relationship between the organization and the public, where the rules of PR evolve as the world continues to do so. “It is easy to see why a marketing campaign would be tempted by the currency and news value of a hot-button social or cultural issue, but it can be a perilous move” (Etchison).

As scholars culminate cultural appropriation as a product of social construction, no one has yet created a handbook or their own guidelines as to what dictates the boundaries of the concept in media. Outside of anthropology and sociology, studying cultural appropriation as an emerging media practitioner also deals with ethical behavior. Rather than an area or industry to study, the media is a new power, where scholars and all of us alike continue to question the dynamics of a cultural landscape. With urgency and immediacy of media content, it is the influence or manipulation by the media that thickens the line between insult and praise, stereotyping and embracing, appropriation and appreciation.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **Campus Conversations about Cultural Appropriation and Media**

Envision a dinner table where conversations once considered distasteful are now as ordinary as bread and butter. Seated at this metaphorical table are professors from various fields, including African American studies, political science, education, gender studies, as well as Ole Miss students with various majors. This is a conversation about cultural appropriation, some possible reasons for its rise, and the personal experiences of some in the campus community for whom cultural appropriation is a reality. Though a series of one-on-one interviews, I hear each person speaking and responding, reacting to one another.

Dr. Marvin King, professor of African American Studies and Political Science, recalled hearing about political correctness before he ever heard discussions about cultural appropriation— an inclination or instinct towards political correctness, as people entered into an era, the 1990s, of confronting each other, taking a chance and gaining the confidence to tell someone that something did not feel right.

“When I grew up, I was the same generation as the people who are on the news due to their political incorrectness—Governor Ralph Northam from Virginia, and Justice Brett Kavanaugh. Political correctness did not become a thing until the early ‘90s,” King said. “Minorities have had to put up with a lot of things, you kind of had to *deal* with the skin difference comments and that’s just how it was.” Having to *deal* with the way American culture was then does not mean cultural appropriation did not occur, however. Some today take refuge in an American culture rooted in the backward glance, as if to ask, if it was okay then, why is not it now?

Just because certain cultural views were acceptable at one time, does not mean they are okay now, or really ever were. “At some point in the early ‘90s, someone finally said, ‘Hey, that’s rude,’” said King. Before the ‘90s, cultural appropriation, or for that matter, racialized expressions, did not incur as much instant condemnation as now. “Cultural appropriation was all around us as kids, but we did not think about it,” said King. “I was not brought up to think you could challenge these things, you can speak up for yourself. I grew up in a generation where you can have rights.”

### **What Does Cultural Appropriation in Media Mean?**

Our conversation now turns to Dr. Phyllis George, University of Mississippi Professor of Education, about the role in symbolism in understanding what cultural appropriation can mean individually to people. “Symbolism in America is a very powerful thing,” said Dr. George. “We are influenced by symbols, latch onto those symbols that become an entrenched part of our society, how we act, how we socialize ourselves.”

George described cultural appropriation as a part of socializing, and said that the visual symbols create implicit racial and cultural inappropriate slurs. For example, George said that children become a product of their experience with media, especially watching television where darker skin colors in cartoons historically denoted evil, a villainous sounding musical score, or as George puts it, “*dun, dun, dun!*” Symbols are everywhere and shape how we view life, and the repetition of symbols deepens and reinforces their meaning. Colors, for instance, convey symbolic meaning.

Television tells children that white means good and that black means bad, she explained.

The misperception of symbols can lead to cultural appropriation, to the misperception and misapplication of symbols. These days, when one is accused of cultural appropriation, one feels attacked; rather than discussing, people become defensive, thinking an appropriator is equal to a racist. George said a racist and a cultural appropriator are not the same. “Cultural appropriation deals with custom and practice, but the melanin in my skin is not a custom or practice, it is a biological trait.” George described racism as an egregious ideation that causes irreparable harm, but similarly, so does cultural appropriation. “Racists are not apologetic,” said George, “But there is hope for an appropriator.”

Every interviewee defined cultural appropriation based on their own interactions, but they agreed that the concept, specifically the term appropriation, creates negative sentiment. University of Mississippi Associate Professor of Higher Education George McClellan said that cultural appropriation is an act of power and assumed proprietorship, and so the line between appropriation and appreciation is very obvious and straight to him. McClellan said:

If it doesn't belong to you, you're stealing it—in my head it is a pretty clear line. If you were really serious about showing respect or something, why would you go buy faux-Native, and not make any effort [to understand] the real thing? When you are not doing anything to change your own ignorance, you are crossing a line.

McClellan views cultural appropriation as a competitive ambition against the power imbalance between majority and minority cultures. He said that majority populations find the strength of minorities threatening and so they sanitize this threat through appropriation in an effort to steal back power. McClellan illustrated this



sanitization as a “whitewashed” version of black culture, as for example, an appropriator’s way of thinking he or she is properly appreciating music or fashion, when in reality, what passes as appreciation is adulteration of the original cultural statement. In instances like Mexican restaurants on Cinco de Mayo, he addressed, “There lies this romanticized notion on how cool something is, but do you know what it is like to be in that person’s shoes?”

On the other hand, Marvin King thinks differently. “Does this include trying different foods? Because, I like Mexican food, and so, I, personally, don’t count that. I want to learn from the culture, use it, share what I’ve learned,” said King. The *use* of cultural products is significant when considering the difference between appropriation and appreciation, he said. “When it is used to stereotype and mimic, like blackface, it’s a problem,” said King. He considers cultural appropriation synonymous to the misuse of culture or an ethnic group. Though cultural appropriation is not excusable, there can be instances of misinterpretation, such as in educational or flattering sense, whether it is in a museum, school, presenting symbols from marginalized or minority groups. Cultural appropriation becomes a problem when it is not done in an educational or flattering sense, or to draw on or worsen stereotypes, demeaning, or diminishing a cultural minority.

George breaks down cultural appropriation by first defining culture, revealing how appropriative acts of cultures deconstruct the depth of that culture:

We all contribute to the furtherance of culture, how culture evolves. And so, if one has not been a part of the stewardship of the culture, and they all of a sudden show up, take on or mimic something whether it is malicious or non-malicious, knowingly or unknowingly, they take on all

that has shaped and defined that culture without understanding the history behind it.

History discusses through deeper conversations not only cultural appropriation but also its role broadly in understanding race, gender, politics, and other social matters. We ponder back and forth between the brevity and depth of the role historical symbols play when considering these matters to understand the degree of sensitivity when approaching certain cultural elements. As George adjusted the hat she is wearing, she explained, “What hats you wear, if that’s not your gift, if that’s not your hat, then don’t try to force it.” McClellan explained the spectrum of cultural appropriation and how close many of the instances we hear in the media hit almost too close to the center of a culture. “If I appropriate someone’s language or dress,” said McClellan, “it may not hit personally, versus taking something religious. There is stuff that is at the margins of culture, then the stuff at the core.”

### **Cultural Appropriation at Ole Miss**

Individuals redefine themselves every day, desiring to try on different cultural hats, thinking of appreciation as self-expression. “Self-expression is important but very much a matter of opinion than a single right or wrong answer,” said Laura Taylor, senior student at the University of Mississippi. Confrontation is difficult for some, especially when expressing what one can or cannot be or do; however, she said, this is what perpetuates stereotypes, stigmas, and appropriative acts. Taylor said:

The fine line between both [cultural appropriation and appreciation], something can be perceived as appreciation for one person can be appropriation for another. You think you’re doing the right thing, showing gratitude for another culture, or some sense of appreciation, but you also don’t get to be the person who determines how what you do makes someone else feel.

Taylor described the mindfulness and intentionality behind people's actions. Taylor sighed as she recounted the cultural appropriation on campuses every weekend across the nation, but especially here at Ole Miss. She believes it is simple to learn and ask questions about possible cultural transgressions, but at the same time sympathizes with her peers, because they may not always know when they are possibly at fault.

She and I are part of an often-criticized Greek system—critiqued as being oblivious to non-white cultures - that makes us walking targets for the next cultural appropriative act. Regardless of Greek affiliation, students encounter other cultures, increasingly so in Oxford – Latino, African American, as well as a growing Asian community. This new landscape repositions symbols, at times causing confusion which stems from a lack of knowledge about this emerging cultural landscape from a historically white paradigm. “A lot of Mississippi is uneducated on these areas, and it is not that they're not interested, they just lack these resources, nothing to learn from, and normalize diversity in their culture,” Taylor said.

Many students here at Ole Miss participate only in their own hemisphere of likeminded, similar-looking, students, or more so, *choose* to stay in this bubble of familiar culture. Some of these students have not traveled out of the country, out of the state—the greatest travel for some is within the state, or maybe even their commute to campus. This lack of traveling out of known territory both literally and metaphorically may reflect how much one grasps the depth of social concepts. Rather than seeing them as provincial, we should choose empathy, urged Taylor.

Now an assistant professor at Columbia College in Chicago, Jennifer Sadler noted that in a situation of cultural appropriation, it takes one side to acknowledge and

recognize mistakes but takes the other side to allow patience for the individual who appropriated - allow time to keep making efforts and to not do repeat the mistake, and especially, allow *space* for people to grow. Sadler said, “There is this weight of burden that people of color hold, but also people not of color also carry a burden of guilt. I think we’ll all benefit more by giving that patience.”

A senior at the University of Mississippi, Jaz Brizack also sees members of the student body in acts of cultural appropriation. Brizack said, “I think cultural appropriation means people who are privileged in society take something from people who are not privileged, but, in fact, discriminated often for having that.”

Though the two concepts seem similar, a selfishness is attached to appropriation, explained Brizack, such as the white appropriation of African American culture, especially hairstyles such as dreadlocks or cornrows.

“People’s lifestyles are not for fun,” said Leah Davis, junior undergraduate student at Ole Miss. A year ago, Davis was one of the few members of BSU who reached out to me and to Reagan’s campaign team, calling us out for cultural appropriation. Davis noted that appreciation is viewing culture in a positive light, unlike appropriation. Appropriation for Davis holds a very negative, degrading attachment, and costuming someone of a different culture than yours for a moment caricaturizes not only them, but the culture they come from, no matter the intent of the outsider. “Appropriation is when you don’t realize the brevity, the weight of what you’re wearing,” said Davis. “It is when you don’t necessarily realize what you’re wearing. When you take on those symbols, you’re taking on the gravity of it.”

## **Is Media Appropriating Cultural Appropriation?**

Usually, cultural appropriation begins with an *intent* not necessarily malicious, but rather uninformed. “Intention does not trump impact,” said Dr. Brian Foster. An assistant professor in the Sociology Department at the University of Mississippi, Foster sees cultural appropriation through the lens of race and racial inequality, a marker of broader patterns that causes systemic inequality and racial inequality to subsist. Foster urged that intention really does not matter. He continued,

Point one about cultural appropriation is when a group, especially a group who is historically disadvantaged in American society, if they say that this gesture or this thing stepped on their thought, that is the authority.

Empathy helps us avoid cultural appropriation, being in the shoes of the “other” and every single receiver of a message. When members of a historically marginalized community had once lacked opportunities to express their identities, individualities, in comparison to the nonmembers, cultural appropriation becomes an injustice, a reinforcement of marginalization.

Appropriation can occur through the reinterpretation of original meaning behind a cultural element—a problem many media professionals face. “Unity does not mean taking something that is not yours,” said Davis. “Unity means being vocal about something that is affecting me and realizing that, even if it is not affecting you.” And on college campuses nationwide, especially here at the University of Mississippi, students learn but sometimes retrogress into appropriative actions, much like the media.

The campus culture at Ole Miss has an underlying social pressure to impress, to be noticed, and to stand out in the crowd, which leads to not only cultural appropriation

but at times blatant racism, through racial slurs like saying the “N-word” or fashioning cultural appropriation through the actual materials of cultures they are not part of. Rather than discussing, students begin questioning “*Why can’t I*” or “*If they can, why can’t I?*”

Media has the ultimate power in the maintaining of racially charged or racially symbolic statements, she said, especially for our generation and those that follow, and a power so strong that it can reinforce or detach symbols no matter the initial experience or meaning. “How they underscore stereotypes and perpetuating racism,” Brizack said, “this leads to the disrespect of cultures, marginalized people, which can lead to or contribute to cultural appropriation.”

King said that media followers become these “armchair analysts” who, along with the media, possess a different kind of power and authority to dictate what is right or wrong. “The newly exposed [individuals] don’t know how to react. We tend to express our fears rather than commonalities,” he said.

“I don’t know why some versions of appropriation get called out but others don’t,” said King. “What is appropriation and what is honoring, how *in* [the cultures] can tourists and visitors get?” How “*in*” is another topic of controversy when studying cultural appropriation because as McClellan and King mentioned, restaurants of ethnic cuisines expose outsiders of that culture to their cuisine in a manner that invites them to take a taste of their culture; in other instances, restaurants such as Mexican or Chinese capitalize on holidays like Cinco de Mayo or Chinese New Year, respectfully, by advertising “holiday specials” that draw in consumers. When the insiders appropriate their own culture, this questions who truly is at fault for prolonging the consequences, such as cultural stereotypes that follow appropriation.

Jarvis Benson, senior at Ole Miss, pointed to the conversations around immigration we have now in our society, conversations which resonated with me personally. It is intriguing in a nation where we find reasons to celebrate and taste cuisines from all over the world at local cultural microcosms—Little Italy, Chinatown, and other culturally concentrated regions of cities— but then when immigrants are fighting for rights and representation, attempting to assimilate into American society, many in the same nation see the label immigrant, and look away, forgetting the rich culture they bring that we so desire.

Media can be an enabling virus that promotes interaction with flawed conceptions of another culture, and such flawed conceptions that were there in the first place as a result of the media.

### **Media as the Facilitator of Cultural Appropriation**

When I first began to study integrated marketing communications, I heard the mantra that the only constant in life is change, so as media practitioners, we possess a role to be adaptive and versatile in a constantly evolving technological and social environment. The culture is constantly evolving and media must react to cultural change.

King said:

The media is a big umbrella. In some ways it is helpful, brings attention to these things, but then unwittingly enables it, search for advertising dollars,” said King. “The media is like all Americans, pros and cons, there’s good and there’s bad, media generally argues ‘we give Americans what they want’.

He referenced a 2017 Pepsi commercial that shows how companies tend to appropriate beyond tangible items of culture, to a cultural message itself, a social

movement even. “[Pepsi] tried selling sodas off of Black Lives Matter,” said King. “Translated, Pepsi tried to profit sodas off the memory of these people.”

Based on her observations of the way particular messages are communicated in the media, Phyllis George believes media practitioners seek a symbolic attachment that is not only meaningful, but popular in society, defining popular as the latest, newest majority trend. The elements of cultures that contrast the cultural norm—predominantly white elements— in America appeals to outsiders. She said, “The problem is answering what’s going to make money, but the question media professionals should address is one macro question: What is my ethical responsibility here?”

Media practitioners must ask as well as answer this macro question. The ethical responsibility is to ask not only themselves, but also others so that they do not mistake appreciation for appropriation. “That is the extra burden,” said George. “This should become the cusp of your moral and professional philosophies as a media professional, same with education.”

It makes me wonder where the line is between one’s personal ethics and one’s career responsibility, especially for media practitioners, and what kind of role diversity plays in media organizations. “Google never gets accused of cultural appropriation, but think about their Google Doodles,” said King. Roughly half of Google’s hires are liberal arts students, and students with this degree are hired along with their insights about what determines consumer behavior and trends. The other half are computer programmers who will fix and code the algorithmic designs and content the liberal art students think up. He considered that between the two, these liberal arts hires are possibly more worldly and



bring more diversity, as well as bias. Journalists especially must work to correct misconceptions, in large measure, by seeking greater diversity in newsrooms. Sadler said,

Journalists put faces of people of color on primarily negative news. We have to think about how much weight we are actually giving, how much these decisions impact pretty much anybody. For example, when Donald Trump called Senator Warren ‘Pocahontas,’ rather than asking, ‘what are we going to do about this?’ the media keeps repeating this ongoing headline over and over again.

Sadler explained how the media and its lack of diversity impacts not only the organization but the messages communicated on behalf of the organization. Sadler said,

Lacking diversity definitely does not help. In order for a lot of people of color to go into professions, they have to network just like everyone else, but it is difficult when they can’t find someone similar to them in the workplace. Anyone white, they see themselves in every type of job and have no problem finding their place. Additionally, We’re not talking about diversity and inclusion in our marketing materials be it in the classroom or workplace. It is a huge caveat. Why are white professors timid to share anything related to race in the classroom?

The media must respond to not only the consumer but the climate of national and international contingencies. Professor of Journalism and Founder of the Magazine of Innovation at the university, Dr. Samir Husni, a.k.a Mr. Magazine, posited how the media’s reaction is pivotal to the public’s perception of any social, political, cultural problem the country faces. Husni explained, “When MLK was assassinated, then Robert Kennedy was killed, *ESQUIRE* led a big campaign to ban gun advertising, issuing the debate of guns, and the second amendment and this was in the 60s... Media plays a big role in normalizing or going after some of the taboos that used to exist in our culture.”

Magazines print popular culture, which creates a textbook that portrays the evolution of pop culture overtime. Husni explained how *Playboy* changed the perception

of nudity in magazines. Before 1953, nudity was more an art form like in Europe. “*Playboy* took that nudity and made it more erotica,” said Husni, “Media, through the two aspects of reflection and initiating, help change the culture or ‘pepper’ the culture with some seasoning to make things a little bit different.”

“Cable television did not help enhance our cultural experience,” said Husni, “I am a firm believer the rise of cable television in 1978 was the biggest factor in the fragmentation in American society.” Husni faulted television for putting “wider blinders” for viewers to become narrow-minded and only know what TV was showing and giving you. He expressed how multicultural the U.S. as immigrants expose Americans to their cultures, and as a result, they have helped deepen the definition of American. However, he also pointed out that some perceive this change in American culture as a struggle to assimilate and so they isolate themselves, and steer away from bolder cultural statements. Husni said,

The beauty of what was happening in the 20s, 30s, was the integration of cultures, a stew rather a cafeteria offering. Rather than helping that cultural diversification that was taking place, we just now have the opposite. People are more culturally isolated, everything is provided in this cocoon.

King also believes that television is a major problem in the reinforcement of stigmas in cultures. He said, “People are not use to being around each other, how they act and behave, they only know about it through stereotypes on TV.” As Husni mentioned, most people aren’t good with crossing over, and so they stay within their cocoon, or social hemisphere they identify with, and avoid interacting with people not like them.

As long as we live separate lives, silent, or rather, avoided interactions can cause cultural appropriation. Sadler said,

Marketing strategy is all about answering who your target audience is and what most relates to them. We know that a lot of cultural pieces are all really trendy and people want to *put on* elements of culture but not *take on* that culture.

Sadler distinguished *put on* as appropriation and *take on* as appreciation. She said that a lot of individuals do not understand the weight that is attached with cultural elements or products, and the media prolongs this idea that culture is “up for grabs” as the next hashtag or campaign theme.

### **Social Media as a Carrier of Cultural Appropriation**

McClellan introduced the idea of simulacra to our conversation. He defined simulacra as the following: that since humans have come accept in the age of the Internet, humans have also accepted that what is fake is real. Benson explained the role of social media and how it has shifted his generation’s motives for attention, especially for students who go abroad or mission, faith-based trips. Social media creates and perpetuates stereotypes around the countries young people visit. Thus, the representation these individuals carry with them when they travel back home and share their stories of the culture can be flawed. And these flawed perceptions get repeated across social media and absorbed into media consciousness as a whole, and shared symbolically through mediated interaction. Truth becomes derailed by social media pressures and group think.

Benson said:

You’re presenting a culture to your circle, a lot of times when people focus on the surface, ‘I probably got likes or shares,’ by painting this image of these “poor” things, or caption ‘I would take you from this place, adopt you’.

Instead of preserving depth and cultural respect, social media users have a different agenda when traveling, and illustrate a story on their personal media, an often false story that continues to be told about a given culture. Benson said, “[Individuals post about] these countries needing our help, when in reality we’re just wrapping our culture in this neat little bubble.”

Laura Taylor described social media in a similar light, further explaining the difference between post itself and post creator. She said, “Media shows what people are saying to a larger platform, anyone can twist that one message and really throw that down.” Taylor expressed that social media, or its users are automatically given the power to quickly change the line from appreciation to appropriation, and how it takes one person to say that this is not okay. She continued, “Someone goes on Twitter, retweets and then suddenly there’s a movement against this action.” Along with Taylor, the discussion of social agendas and fighting a fight over a matter that is so miniscule in comparison to other deeper, core-striking controversies, is problematic in our generation. Individuals in my generation have the power via social media to catalyze the way we view our world.

### **Where Do We, the Media, Go from Here?**

The path forward is difficult. Brizack explained the difficulty for members of dominant groups, or groups in power, to not appropriate. “I think appropriation of many cultures, what now the American culture is sort of a product of, is so common place, people don’t even recognize it.” Yet cultural appropriation is essentially a violent act, she explained. “I get it, it is a natural response,” continued Brizack, “but people will have to

eventually realize they're at fault, they're not being attacked, and their act of appropriation is essentially an act of violence and being called out on it.”

Brizack said privilege, specifically white privilege, is something that many may or may not realize they possess, and thus proliferates acts of appropriation because with that privilege comes a sense that one is greater than others. To remove yourself from that privilege may be a hard pattern to break for some, but limits self-actualization. For instance, surrounding yourself with media outlets that only resonate to your identity, culture, or community is ultimately self-destroying, soul killing.

“I like exposing people to information. Now, whether they receive it or not, that's not my problem,” said Davis. “After you have been informed, and you continue to appropriate, then yeah, that speaks a lot about your moral compass. Sometimes it is hard to separate the act from the person.” Davis advises her peers to stay hungry for knowledge. What irks Davis is when members affiliated with the Greek community—progressive whites, for example—shy away from confronting their friends or their quote-unquote sisterhood or brotherhood, fellow students, or co-workers.

“You are very aware, love to be inclusive, but you never call out. To me, that is a lot more hurtful than you doing the act; you're prolonging the problem,” said Davis.

In the U.S., we are constantly culture shifting as we step into different parts of the country, and among the states, there are different perceptions of other states. After graduation, Taylor will be moving to Washington, D.C, teaching in inner-city schools as part of her graduate program, and more significantly, she will be teaching in schools that are 99 percent black. “So how do I show through my curriculum that I have an

appreciation,” said Taylor, “I want to help my students better understand their own culture without appropriating it as a white female.”

Navigating these waters will be difficult initially, but education helps her avoid cultural appropriation. As a future educator, Taylor sees herself as a student for life, always curious about things, but especially about black culture. Taylor said,

As someone in an interracial relationship, I want to know what these racial implications are for me and him, to our families, the society we live in, as well what that means in Mississippi, but also in the lens when I go teach in intercity schools next year.

Many argue that the mix up between appropriation and appreciation is inevitable, and everywhere we go, everything we do involves some form of cultural appropriation. Jaz Brizack said, “Inevitability of cultural appropriation, sure, but it is not an excuse.” The discrepancy ensues when some suggest appropriation is a negative way of saying appreciation, meaning the two terms are interchangeable. McClellan said,

Make a commitment through this act [of appreciating culture and its cultural products]. You’re going to provide the context, and as a company do something that genuinely educates and not just exploits, though I think it is possible [to still appropriate] in some elements of culture again, especially if you hit another culture’s core.

George is hopeful, seeing the potential in people, in media practitioners, and future generations, because people can try to stay informed. “Own it,” George said. She believes they are capable of taking corrective steps and measures to not only accept something wrong, but also spread awareness, being comfortable and confident enough to speak up, strengthening a new era of deeper and perhaps less brittle political correctness.

“Acknowledging this culture, highlighting it, and questioning, why do I value it,”  
said George, “there’s that dialogue, and make sure you don’t overlook that opportunity.”

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Cases and Considerations**

#### **Fashion Statements Misread**

One's race, gender, and sexual orientation can become less certain, one's biology less certain, within a media gaze. The degree to which one's identity is a co-creation of media and biology results in complex forms of branded self-expression. Cultural products become items found on the clothing rack, be they cosmetics or clothing labels. People change their personal style every day. This experience can be transformative for an individual, but can be misconstrued by others. Media audiences, social media or mainstream, can quickly question the clothes one has chosen, citing stylistic appropriation. Fashion experimentation is not always flattering, to the wearer or the audience. Culturally, people tend to "try on different hats," but as Dr. Phyllis George emphasized, why force something that doesn't fit? On the other hand, the clothes we wear add to our identity, so is there room for an appreciation of culture when trying on different hats, or hairstyles? Bindis? Native American headdresses? Sometimes fashioning a "look" turns into cultural appropriation or appreciation.

The media has an even greater role in repeating fashion statements that may or may not be cultural appropriation. Social media, especially, makes its users faceless critics, meaning individuals possess more confidence in stating their opinions publicly while remaining a safe distance in cyberspace. Rather than self-expression or appreciation of style, clothing can be a kind of collateral damage within cultural appropriation. Two important perspectives emerge in the conversation of cultural appropriation in the fashion industry. First, an individual may intend to appreciate as well as adopt cultural elements into one's individuality and style; some may even view fashion



as an art form, celebrating heritage in a respectful, considerable manner. On the other hand, and as a second consideration, clothing choices can exploit and costume a “look” for the weekend, or for financial or personal gain— a kind of cultural appropriation *faux pas*, if you will.

Cultural appropriation surfaces when cultural elements become the center of popular appeal, something on display. When thinking about cultural appropriation through fashion, the Kardashian family comes to mind. This is a family full of celebrity and television personalities who dress in various styles that attract an audience of followers from all over the world, and as a result, has made the Kardashians media influencers. What they do the audience follows— including what they wear. The Kardashians, as well as many other celebrities, specifically models, who are not African American or black, like Gigi Hadid, notably stand out, but not for the best reasons. Models have been scrutinized for many years dressing in hairstyles that appropriate African American culture, including cornrows, Afros, and dreadlocks (Young). It questions how much time and effort do celebrities and designers consider before appropriating, but also begs the question if they intentionally appropriate for media attention. In this sense, does the media challenge fashion’s ethical responsibility?

“They’d rather use a celebrity that they know will get lots of people interested in it, rather than the original source of the idea,” explained designer Jane Kellock regarding the fashion industry’s cultural appropriation problem (Soh). Kellock expressed a sense of hope that designers are not intentionally stealing or appropriating, or going after another culture to just copy it. However, the intentional choice of models for fashion campaigns “aren’t considered properly” and deprive the cultural product of its authenticity (Soh).

For example, a designer might immediately select Kendall Jenner to model a Native American headdress before a model who is of Native American descent.

On the runway, we see appropriation of Native American and other indigenous cultural products, headdresses, jewelry; Westernized manifestations of Asian dress and embellishments, including the *bindi* or kimonos; especially in America, African American and black fashion and hairstyles. However, appropriation seems inevitable because design, style, and culture are interwoven, resulting in a trend of sorts. “The creativity of the African American community did not hinge on whether it would be accepted by white society because African American style was completely marginalized” (Lewis-Mhoon). Celebrities and designers use media to establish their brands, but also, utilize the various media platforms to display the laws of beauty; but sometimes, those laws are neglectful of what values as beauty now, minorities were once, or still are, criticized. Appropriation can be avoided, though. If designers and models thought about the historical meaning before dressing up, they would be prepared to not only acknowledge the cultural and historical significance, but also explain why their clothes are appropriate in the context they are wearing them.

The 2018 Met Gala<sup>2</sup> is a significant case to study on the craftsmanship of not only the clothes, but the theme for one of fashion’s largest events of the year. That year, the Met Gala caused shock and frustration for many critics, specifically conservative Catholics for the gala’s theme.

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<sup>2</sup> An annual fundraising event in the New York City Metropolitan Museum that invites all of Hollywood’s A-List celebrities and fashion icons of the world, benefitting the MET’s Costume Institute as well as the opening of the establishment of the institute’s annual fashion exhibit

The 2018 Met Gala theme was officially titled “heavenly bodies.” With the intent of elevating beauty through religion, the impact of the Met Gala 2018 was another debate about cultural appropriation. What caused the uproar of accusations were the sexualized and materialized recreations of Catholicism; many celebrities dressed in papal-like or saint-like garb (Griffin). “If this was another religion everyone would be up in arms,” tweeted out one person. The rampage in social media included comments such as “my religion is not your costume” (Griffin). Celebrities reputations were at stake, so what happened? What did the Institute do?

In actuality, it was what the *critics* failed to notice. The Met Gala responded by providing their plans before choosing the theme. Their plans included not only approval by the Vatican for the theme, but also, the Vatican provided clothing and other accessories to be worn at the exhibit. “The Met Gala and the Vatican have been working together for more than a year to procure more than 40 items for the event, and curator Andrew Bolton was given access to the hidden chambers where nuns look after the pope’s clothes” (Griffin). Depending on who you asked, the 2018 Met Gala showcased either cultural appropriation or cultural appreciation. Although one of the largest events of the fashion industry, an industry renowned for capitalizing on *intentional* cultural appropriation, this was the first time the Met Gala had been called out on the basis of cultural appropriation (Griffin). Yet, some are still arguing against the Institute for what happened. The media backlash suggests a pattern of people setting out to find problems.

When discussing cultural appropriation in fashion today, many people simply avoid the conversation, or dismiss particular actions as minor perceptions of cultural appropriation. With accusations overlaid like a broken record, people begin to roll

their eyes, choose to not react, especially when the most miniscule actions are called out. To reiterate, why do some matters get called out and some do not? For instance, after the media turbulence from the Met Gala, many critics redirected the conversation, comparing the event to an earlier “cultural appropriation incident” that occurred in 2017, an incident to which many relate.

A case in point. Keziah Daum, at the time a 17-year old high school student, posted on her personal Twitter account multiple photos of her friends and herself at their high school prom. While she thought she shared a memorable high school event, her photos provoked a cultural appropriation debate across not only the U.S., but also, the world. The photos showed Daum dressed in a traditional Chinese dress called a *qipao*, which she found in a local vintage store. “My culture is not your prom dress,” posted an angry Twitter user. Many critics of Daum suggested she appropriated Chinese culture, which is commonly subjected to American consumerism. The Twitter user argued these appropriative acts are based on colonial ideology against marginalized, minority-cultures. However, Daum received a lot of support from many Asians from both within the U.S. and on the Asian continent, specifically, China. Chinese followers of the debate praised the teenager for celebrating and appreciating their culture.

Since then, Daum had posted a follow-up tweet, apologizing to those who were offended and explaining her intentions which did not intend to offend. “My intention was never to be racist, provocative or (to show) cultural appropriation. I was in fact showing my appreciation for the culture” (Murray).

Like Daum, many students from campuses all over the country face cultural appropriation whether they intend to or not because of what they wear. Events include

formals, parties, swaps, mixers; Halloween especially invites students to be something they are not. An individual's creativity can lead to cultural appropriation, however unwittingly. Many costumes or choices of dress stem from cultural shock value, a desire to diverge from accepted norms.

For instance, the Hindu ornament *bindi* can be overlooked and seen as an essential part of costumes or music festival attire. The *bindi* is an ornamental dot traditionally worn by Hindu women in the middle of the forehead. This dot identifies as religious and spiritual connotations within the Indian cultural context, but has been materialized as an accessory in the fashion industry. "The humble *bindi* has been thrust into the international spotlight, attracting the attention of global fashion commentators, Hindu religious factions and critical scholars alike" (Antony).

The *bindi* holds meanings in both areas of spirituality and individuality for Indian women, and how those contexts have been dissolved. In many debates regarding fashion and incorporating Eastern cultural as a style, the controversy is whether the intent was based on the hybridity of what consumers seek, or the diversity of the meaning of the *bindi* in both a religious and spiritual sense to South Asians, specifically Hindus. Indians and non-Indians "utilize the *bindi* to express conformity toward traditional Hindu spirituality and customs. The *bindi* is primarily used by Indians to express religious devotion and adherence to tradition." Antony continued,

As commodified Indian fashion and accessories continue to impact global fashion trends through the mechanics of cultural appropriation, it is crucial to interrogate the politics of representation underlying the displacement and replacement of the Indian woman's body in Western media texts.

Each generation redefines fashion and the symbols attached to the term. Some view fashion as a form of art, some believe it as representations of themselves, and some see it is simply clothes. In their journal article “Speaking of Fashion: Consumers’ Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings,” Craig J. Thompson and Diana L. Haytko write,

The concrete issues of dress, clothing, tastes, and public appearances have been encoded in a panoply of folk theories concerning topics such as the morality of consumption; conditions of self-worth; the pursuit of individuality; the relation of appearance to deeper character traits; the dynamics of social relationships, gender roles, sexuality, standards of taste, economic equality, and social class standing; and the societal effects of capitalism and mass media.... Consumers use these countervailing meanings of fashion discourse to address a series of tensions and paradoxes existing between their sense of individual agency (autonomy issues) and their sensitivity to sources of social prescription in their everyday lives (conformity issues)

The choice of apparel is a reflection of symbols produced from experience—symbolic interactionism — and symbols carrying meanings that are possibly transformative and existential for an individual’s identity. The media can set anyone up to face a global audience with diverse backgrounds and opinions, where a stranger to you is given a platform to be one’s greatest critic.

### **Musical Miscues**

Music surrounds us, from the beat of our walk to the melody of our dialogues. Music encodes symbolic meaning and relates to different cultures; sometimes, when we

listen to a particular sound, a feeling rises. Music conveys a message that touches all senses and can influence the symphony behind one's life.

Musicians, popular artists, listeners, too, all adopt elements of songs, but music, as a medium, deviates into cultural appropriation through the borrowing of culture to gain popularity. Not only do we hear it in the music, but we see it in live performances or in music videos. We hear and see cultural appropriation commercial advertisement for music. The invisible rulebook of cultural appropriation for music dictates who can listen to what, or more so who *is allowed to* be listening, singing, performing particular genres, clashing with the ethical responsibility of a media professional. A song is a variable that can shift thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors of individuals, an influence which media professionals value for their communication efforts. Yet, this can create the opposite effect, devaluing the intended message of the original artist and his or her community — their culture.

To understand cultural appropriation in music, one must understand the difference between theft and influence, or taking and making (Richards). Popular musicians see their appropriative acts as synonymous to “genre-blending.” Blending of musical genres and styles has been around since the birth of music. Recently, pop artist Ariana Grande's newest single “7 Rings” has been called out for cultural appropriation. Musicians and cultural critics alike accused Grande of stealing parts of black artists songs, “specifically miming hip-hop and black culture” (Lockett).

In response to accusations, Grande's co-writer Tayla Parx claimed: “I highly doubt those artists [accusing Grande of appropriation] would want me to go through their catalogue and go through all of the songs that they've written or they were inspired by.”

Parx expressed that this blend of inspiration, culture and genres is good for the diversity of the music industry. However, appropriating African American music remains a common industry problem. Most modern music consists of some R&B or hip-hop cadence, and many artists consider this a part of their actual artistic identity.

“Hip hop is now the most popular genre and BE (black vernacular English) is being used by lucrative brands and companies” (Mwansa). Writer for the *Independent*, Natasha Mwansa headlined her article that posits a very popular question, “Now that black culture is so mainstream, can we really accuse people of appropriation?” Hip-hop and other African American original genres have been fused into the overarching American musical genre, which blurs the line that is crossed more. Last year when Ariana Grande accepted the Billboard Woman of the Year Award, presenter Patti Labelle referred to Grande as “that little white black girl” (Mwansa). With more white rappers than ever, who can or cannot sing, perform, or reference other cultures outside of their own is less clear.

Grande has also been called out for appropriating the LGBTQ+ culture, definitively “queer baiting,” where the pop artist placed a gay relationship in her music video of her song “Break Up with Your Girlfriend, I’m Bored.” The couple in the relationship is played by two straight women. “LGBTQ+ representation in media is necessary for cultural diversity,” writes Patricia Whyte in her article regarding the pop artist. “However, posing two straight women as queer purely for shock value is wrong and, frankly, tacky. ... Posing as another identity for the sake of a twist or views should be viewed in the same way.” (Whyte).



While many musicians individually face problems of cultural appropriation, music videos and performances receive similar condemnation, because of the deliberative decisions in the production and distribution of content. In 2017, the band Coldplay featuring Beyoncé Knowles Carter produced the single “Hymn for the Weekend,” a song about an angelic presence, or encountering someone who is extraordinary. Coldplay wished to illustrate that feeling in their music video, and they chose to film in Mumbai, India. The video includes Indian actors, Indian art, and Indian dance. As someone coming from South Asian culture, I personally viewed the music video as a homage to the beauty of the Eastern world that not many look for when they travel to those parts of the world. However, not everyone agrees with my initial take. Many argue that “Coldplay’s myopic construction of India has been part of western representation since the colonial era, but in the past few years, the music industry has embraced it to make their videos more interesting” (Kumar).

I almost had my opinion assuaged though Said and other critics of Westernized perceptions of the Eastern part of the world, who argue that such exotic views in which non-western cultures are visible, prolong the stereotype, or fantasy of South Asia. It all had to do with the imagery Coldplay and Beyoncé attached. “These music videos are perpetuating hackneyed fantasies of India as an exotic playground for rich white people to explore and exploit for cultural capital and economic gain ...Coldplay’s video romanticizes Hinduism to further *exoticize* India as a Westerner’s paradise unsullied by harsh realities” (Kumar). Could Ariana Grande, Coldplay, Beyoncé and others avoid cultural appropriation and not be condemned to appropriation accusations?

I think it is more about the fact that this is what pop culture does. Hip-hop went from being a very New York-local

genre of music to being a multimillion dollar industry that profited a lot of people beyond just the artisan producer involved in the creation of music, right? That's sort of the M.O. of pop music. That's the M.O. of record labels. That's the M.O. of artists once they engage with pop culture on a certain level, is to find ways to commodify imagery that's interesting to people, even if that imagery is interesting to consumers at a great distance (Martin)

### **Social Movements Marching Backwards**

The civil rights era, Black Lives Matter, gender equality, feminism, and many more movements have molded our American society, curated the cultural norms, and enabled at times hackneyed discussion of political correctness. They are the marches and the stories that lie within our history books, and persist today— on the streets and in the media. Despite progress, an underlying atmosphere of division prevails in our nation. These social movements carry some of the most thought-provoking messages that touch the public's mindset. They impact personal and individual political agendas and social ideations in various ways, which is the kind of shock value that transmits more than a message but a social responsibility with which media professionals desire to attach their organizations. However, a line is crossed when a company's advocacy for a movement can be viewed as appropriation, using a social movement's mission or sentiment to support an organization or a public figure.

When studying brands, organizations have been pushed further to develop not only a style, design, or label, but now, there is a focus on cultivating company culture that its consumers can relate to. The media plays a role in shaping that culture, expressing an organization's belief system that will characterize the voice the organization wishes to promote, as well as the type of consumers it seeks to gain. As companies adopt

ideologies, and take stances on particular controversies, with the intentions of becoming a fellow advocate for a movement, their message gets lost in translation.

In 2017, Pepsi released an advertisement with the intention of promoting the synonymous relationship between their products and a community that promotes unity; however, the company received a negative reaction. Pepsi messed up. The commercial includes scenes of young individuals joining together in a march, holding signs, similar to recent Black Lives Matter protests, but rather than a protest, the advertisement portrayed it as a celebratory march of individuals drinking Pepsi, laughing and dancing. The commercial included visual imagery resembling Black Lives Matter protests, but in a more fantastical way—nothing like what actually happens in these protests. If anything, it resembled high school pep rallies or spirit night.

The central scene that marked the advertisement as “tone-deaf” occurred when celebrity model and personality Kendall Jenner leads this protest, and steps up to a police officer. Jenner offered the officer a Pepsi drink, and when the officer accepts the drink, the protestors cheer and celebrate (Victor). “Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding. Clearly, we missed the mark and apologize,” the soda company said in a statement (Victor).

Many interpreted the symbolism of the commercial as the exact opposite of unity, peace, or understanding by posting their reactions on social media on how shockingly distasteful the ad was. What it translated was the resolution to all the real marches and protests of not only Black Lives Matter, but any civil rights movement was by giving an officer a Pepsi. They trivialized the weight of the historical burden attached to the mission of the Black Lives Matter movement. This ignorance and negligence also led the

discussion as to how Pepsi's PR missed the mark on this. One individual posted, "Brands need to hire more POC [people of color] in PR. Prime example: Pepsi commercial" (Victor). Another tweeted an image of Martin Luther King Jr. being restrained by police officers during one of his protests, with the caption, referring to the civil rights activist as "Daddy," symbolizing the father figure of the movement, "If only Daddy would have known the power of #Pepsi" (Victor).

Immediately in response to this backlash, Pepsi took down the commercial and published a public apology stating their intentions and their remorse for the impact and controversy the advertisement caused.

Especially after the Pepsi ad, many online analysts or business experts urge companies to avoid mixing politics with their brands. "Articles about the Pepsi debacle advises brands to stay out of politics and focus instead on cultural trends" (Dudharejia). However, Nike took a risk. Last year in 2018, after former quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers Colin Kaepernick began his symbolic protest of kneeling down during football games when the national anthem played, instead of disengaging from the former NFL player, Nike featured Kaepernick as the face of their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary campaign. Kaepernick's decision to kneel down before every game was his choice to use his public platform to make a bold statement against racial injustice and police brutality in the U.S. Nike took a chance by supporting Kaepernick by creating commercials, and public advertisements on billboards across the country with the football player's face, and the words "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything. Just do it" (Nike). Similar to Pepsi, Nike took the symbolic meaning behind Kaepernick and many individuals of the Black Lives Matter movement, and used it for their gain in hopes of

reaching an audience that would relate to their values and action of taking a stance on such a controversial issue. However, unlike Pepsi, Nike received positive reactions. Many business experts and media practitioners discussed why Nike's ad was not seen as "tone-deaf" as Pepsi, but instead, Nike did everything right when blending social movement missions with company culture. In his article in Entrepreneur's online media platform, Manish Dudharejia explained that media practitioners and businesspeople alike can learn 4 branding lessons from Nike's ad. He said,

The crucial difference between [Pepsi and Nike ads]? Relatability and alignment. Popular figures or influencers must have a real connection to the issue at hand. Pepsi chose pop-culture figure Jenner, a white woman born into family wealth and celebrity. ... Kaepernick, on the other hand, is biracial. ... As a person of color with a foot in both worlds, he has a believable personal investment in the causes the two ads championed. Kaepernick narrates the commercial, literally giving him a voice amplified by Nike's massive marketing reach (Dudharejia).

Similar to Dudharejia, in another article regarding the Pepsi ad, writer George Chilton expressed how companies must protect what their brand advocates or not only, but also to not play with fire when it comes to finding that significant movement that is transformative for consumers. "It strikes me as strange that Pepsi's ad got as far as it did. It ran a gauntlet of approvals upon approvals," Chilton said. "Perhaps the aim really was to create some heat" (Chilton). Along with current and future media professionals, Pepsi has learned from its mistake. They expressed their intentions, which were not deliberately out of harm, and acknowledged the problem by acting on it. They are a prime example of appreciation turned to appropriation.

Brands and self-image correlate from a large scale like corporations such as Pepsi and Nike, to smaller individual scales like in the case of Rachel Dolezal.

Rachel Dolezal is an activist for African-American issues who served as president of the local N.A.A.C.P in Spoke, Washington. Until 2015, Dolezal, who changed her name to Nkechi Amare Diallo, identified as a black woman. That year her parents outed Dolezal as a white woman “who had carried on a giant ruse, exposing her in what quickly morphed from a local story into an international sensation” (Haag). Dolezal has been scrutinized for extending her white privilege to claim that she is black. When one attempts to “pass” or “is inspired” to be something that they are not, these actions relate to the negative cusp of cultural appropriation. In an interview, Ijeoma Oluo spoke with Dolezal on her self-expression of racial identity. In response to Dolezal’s outing of being a white woman, Oluo said,

And with that, the anger that I had toward her began to melt away. Dolezal is simply a white woman who cannot help but center herself in all that she does—including her fight for racial justice. And if racial justice doesn’t center her, she will redefine race itself in order to make that happen. It is a bit extreme, but it is in no way new for white people to take what they want from other cultures in the name of love and respect, while distorting or discarding the remainder of that culture for their comfort (Hopper).

It may not have been wrong for Dolezal to be an advocate for the N.A.A.C.P and for which it stands for; however, she is condemned for not only identifying as a black woman but also taking advantage of the benefits of being another race while not experiencing or ever having experienced what a black woman has.

But then again, do individuals appropriate intentionally for their own personal gain and media attention? “Nike’s brand was front and center through it all as revenue soared” and this was the case for Pepsi because of the buzz generated in response to their ad (Dudharejia) . So is there a strategy behind appropriation?

On the Sunday prior to the Martin Luther King Jr. national holiday this year, Vice President Mike Pence quoted King's *I Have a Dream* speech during a discussion regarding the future of the government shutdown on CBS's Margaret Brennan's show *Face the Nation*. Pence said, "One of my favorite quotes from Dr. King was 'now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.' You think of how he changed America ... That's exactly what President Trump is calling on the Congress to do ... We'll secure our border, we'll reopen our government" (Cole). Pence used the Civil Rights Movement to underpin Trump's actions to build a wall as part of his immigration policy. Pence took advantage of a national holiday, thinking the context would appeal to the African American community. Pence equated King to Donald Trump.

In response to Pence's comment, King's son criticized the vice president "for citing the slain civil rights leader to make the case for a wall along the US-Mexico border" (Cole). "Now, Martin Luther King Jr. was a bridge builder, not a wall builder," said Martin Luther King III, "Martin Luther King Jr. would say love not hate would make America great" (Cole).

In the article "What Exploiting a Whitewashed MLK Says About You," writer Sincere Kirabo writes, "In truth, Dr. King was assassinated twice: first literally, then symbolically. Those who perpetuate rhetoric that misappropriates the legacy of Dr. King Jr. are not only wrong, they also take part in this symbolic assassination and sully what he stood for" (Kirabo).

"Many who quote him now would have hated him then," commented Bernice King, Dr. King's youngest child ("Mixed Messages"). She pointed out that along with this misuse and misappropriation of words that happens every year around her father's

holiday, especially during black history month, people continue to redefine messages, and the media provides a platform for that misappropriation and prolongs mixed interpretations of the message's original meaning. For years, many have appropriated Dr. King and other Civil Rights activists, as well as many leaders of other social movements quotes. Whether intentional or not, when quoting someone of King's stature, both research and a complete understanding of what the person is saying is necessary. The problem occurs when people separate the icon from the message, adulterating the power dynamics between the insiders and outsiders of the cultures connected to the original wording of the quote.

Dolezal did not consider the gravity of the experiences individuals had to face, and how the experiences caused the formation of such movements. Individuals today transform icons and leaders of social movements as symbols of leadership and racial justice. As followers of such iconic movements, we wish to include their words as personal daily mantra, but sometimes forgetful of what the original intent of the movement. Yes, let these leaders inspire individuals, and their legacies may perpetuate through repetitive use of their meaningful quotes, but as with fashion and music, there is a difference between explication and exploitation, between analysis and homage, and clueless appropriation. Placing a hashtag in front of a movement can either make a user an instant advocate for a movement, or trivialize the movement into trendy sayings. The symbols associated with these movements connect to an individual's civil rights. The meaning behind these movements hits the core of not only the movement's culture, but directly affects the community, the people, for which it stood for and continues to fight.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

Campaign signs adorn campus—it is election season, again. A year ago, I was working on Reagan’s campaign. People now ask me if I would have changed anything or done anything differently. Now, I understand more and believe what we did may not have been out of malice, but it was offensive. What could we have done differently? We could have kept the song, but not dress Reagan as we did. Her style with the hat and the shoes, what we thought was fun and “80s” themed, translated to viewers as impersonating a person of color. What I or you may interpret as very miniscule could potentially strike the core of a culture for another.

We have seen through the literature review how scholars break down the concept of cultural appropriation in their respective fields, and applied social theory to better understand both the concept’s existence and coexistence with the media. Followed by the literature review, some of the many individuals who are strong enough to feel confident to tell the world like it is share their stories to spread awareness on this campus, to their community, and for the rest of the nation, to not shy away from these discussions. But, these same individuals still ask me questions about my ongoing research, and so they remain curious. Finally, the case studies emulate the media’s role in the discussion of cultural appropriation, as well as its facilitation in lengthening the windy line of appropriation and appreciation, creating a rulebook’s transparency fainter every day.

I thought back even further before Reagan’s campaign video incident, and times where my friends or even myself appropriated during high school homecoming weeks or dress up days, or even in elementary school for plays about American history or international days, but no one addressed it. I pondered over whether no one had the

courage to call me out on appropriation or did we simply not think about it? Fast forward to today, I feel more sure that had I done what I did as a five year old, I would be in the next day's news, blazoned all over the media.

College can be the scene of recurring social and cultural transgressions, especially on campuses that are predominantly white. Too high a premium is placed on social comfort in college, and part of the social comfort is submitting to the apparent cultural standards older, previous students adhered to, that already underlies the current cosmos of the university (Cabrera). Predominantly white universities like Ole Miss ultimately are left in “perpetual states of racial arrested development” or in relation to this study, *cultural appropriative* arrested development. Students and young adults deprive themselves of the “uglies”—the painful and marginalized aspects of cultures they find themselves appropriating (Cabrera).

Our generation of “social justice warriors” and the atmosphere of political correctness seems apparent only recently. The courage of people stepping up and confronting individuals, strangers really, for social media acts as an outlet and an invisible barrier between each other, allowing us to post anonymously. The problem of cultural appropriation lingers through the difficulty of confronting friends or family when something seems wrong.

With progression there must be space allowed for conversation. The term cultural appropriation over the past couple of years has become “cartoonized,” seen as a slur, where people debate over the sensitivity of situations, which may be why appropriation is either neglected or ignored. On a panel discussion in his HBO show “Real Time with Bill

Maheer,” Maheer exerted that cultural appropriation is “made up,” and questions where the harm coincides with the term, and when social justice advocates must intervene.

Bill Maheer said,

There is a cancer on progressivism. I guess they call themselves social justice warriors. I don't think they are interested in justice. I don't think they are interested in truth. I think they are interested in cliques. I think they're interested in things that make people clique... They would just say things to dare you, so that you would oppose them so now that you're the bad person (Morefield).

We wonder how much we can talk about this problem. While some empathize with Maheer's point of these extremists on social justice, they may fight for cultural appropriation even on the most trivial aspects of culture, but one cannot neglect the recurring appropriative acts against the core of cultures. While Maheer does not see the problem of white individuals wearing dreadlocks, panelist Michael Steele, former GOP chair, responded, “It is not a good look. I think a lot of it is how you use it,” stated Steele, “If you appropriate it in a way to try to be something you're not, ingratiate it and using it to make a point socially or politically, that's grating to the people you think you're trying to support” (Morefield).

### **Where do we go from here?**

In recent news, Augustana College in Illinois has asked students to “sign a pledge promising not to appropriate any culture” (Nelson). Indoctrinating cultural appropriation through policy and reform may be a step for some, but while I applaud the university for taking very progressive steps, I do not believe that is the resolution. With the different definitions of cultural appropriation and misunderstanding, the grey areas between appropriation and appreciation, I'm interested to know exactly how they define the term

in this pledge's context. Does this include banning students from trying different cuisines or from wearing brands whose companies are based in outside countries? How do we determine how extremely sensitive one situation is compared to another?

“Given the array of processes that can fall under the rubric of an appropriation, and the communities that it can affect, we can see that cultural appropriation is a pervasive phenomenon. If we conceive of the letters of the alphabet used in the English language as a cultural artifact belonging to the ancient Phoenicians... we can appreciate how much latent traffic can occur in just this one cultural good. Acts of appropriation happen all around us in a vast number of creative domains as cultural influences blend, merge and synthesize” (Rao and Ziff).

One solution would be providing forums of discussion by the appropriate voices and moderators. It starts with me and you building the confidence of accepting when we know something feels off, whether we are right or wrong, the conversation becomes a learning, transformative experience; otherwise confusion, being left in the unknown, persists.

### **Where's the handbook?**

As we continue to build conversations with one another, we are each building our own guidelines, personal opinions, and handbook of cultural appropriation. The boundaries of cultural appreciation are constantly evolving, so some may argue it is difficult for individuals to keep up and maintain awareness around issues of social justice. It is a matter of taking the time to understand, be informed, and then, act. Once I graduate and step into a marketing or media related profession, I will do the same.

After a year of studying and listening to the dialogue of cultural appropriation, I have created my own “handbook” when looking at cultural appropriation as an emerging media practitioner:

1. **Cause**— Not only do I need to think about my intentions and the purpose of my actions, but also delve into whether it is necessary to include cultural elements to what I am trying to communicate. Based on the context of my actions, I must ask, “Is what I am about to do a misappropriation?”
2. **History**— Research, research, research. The worst kind of information is misinformation. I cannot believe I did not watch the music video of “Finesse” to the end when it clearly states its dedication to *In Living Color*. Missing a second of information like that can be detrimental to my message. If I am unsure, I will investigate so that I am prepared to defend my intentions appropriately. The past and current struggles of various cultures is an evolving challenge to know and understand as a continuing education project.
3. **Ownership**— I will recognize the social, cultural, historical, political and other kinds of symbols that are attached to my content and give recognition when it is due. If I appreciate another culture or community, and I wish to learn more about them, I do so from a sincere, curious, and genuine place.
4. **Introspection**— If I am asking or hesitating an idea about cultural concern, I must ask “Is it worth it?” Meditate over what gets communicated, and consider diverse perspectives.

5. **Culture**— Consider the communities, people, friends and neighbors when choosing to include cultural elements messages. Also, consider if what I am doing is for personal or public appeal.
6. **Effect**— “Impact trumps intent” is a motto resonates with me. Consider if choices lead to a domino effect, and be prepared to correct, and even apologize for, a misappropriation than remaining silent. On the other side of the situation, the accuser side, please give the misinformed a chance to learn and accept their apologies. Conversation requires empathy.

As you can see, it’s all begins from the matter of CHOICE. We have the power to choose to do something or not. We can choose to keep relying on the media to be our source of education, knowledge, and credibility. As an emerging media professional it is my job to stay aware, discuss this topic more openly and not be afraid to find the source rather using simply social media platforms and interpersonal discussions as my resources.

The reason cultural elements exist is the preservation of such elements, but it is a matter of how that preservation takes form—appreciation and adoption of elements, or possibly appropriation. Contributing an idea that provides the “shock” value media professionals strive to possess, and not using a cultural element can be perceived as difficult since this is what draws attention. The advancement of media and its use starts with the people behind it. We have to prepared to answer and back up anything we produce and promote, especially with the inclusion of cultural elements into messaging.

The media has the power to be the voice of these conversations but indeed functions as a double-edged sword by causing such problems. The media is where every single industry intersects, a place where they share common desires and also endure the

instantaneous connection with their public audiences. We are all so eager to capture and post moments at the cusps of our hands with no hesitation, but when led to a table to sit down and discuss real problems affecting real people, we think twice.

There are times today that many of my friends and classmates who aware of the research I am doing look to me as their walking “handbook of cultural appropriation.” What do I tell them? I merely suggest I probably still know as much as the person asking me does, but I also remain curious to keep asking questions.

“People hesitating? That is such a beautiful thing though,” Brian Foster stated. Foster expressed that hesitation suggests an individual’s actual preemptive concern of his or her action, truly thinking before doing.

When I first started this research, I remember professors and students looking at me as if I have loaded an extra burden on my shoulders, and not because I have a thesis to write, but that I have “taken on this challenge” of trying to write or understand cultural appropriation. But in a way, are we not all taking notes about this concept and other difficult things? Today, people are impressed with the topic and rather walking away from the topic, they become engrossed in wanting to know more. In one year, the culture of conversations has changed and will continue to do so. My peers ask about how they can avoid cultural appropriation. I suggest that they do not avoid talking about it in an educational approach. I do not have all the answers, but I have become much more informed on how I view people, culture, and society.

Another interesting question I have received this year, or more so expression, was how would this research or my findings affect how I view some of my friends who are unsure whether or not they have appropriated. The posited this question as though I will

go through this phase in my life where I go on a series of defriending and detaching myself from friendships, and using cultural appropriation as my moral compass and judgement of people. If I were to, this would be hypocritical of my purpose of this study.

Understanding cultural appropriation is not a fight between people who differ in race, socioeconomic, political, but a conversation that brings all to one common dinner table to lay everything out on the table and talk about it. Understanding cultural appropriation is a conversation between you and me, “y’all” and us, and not being afraid of creating distinctions among each other.

Acknowledging differences is the beginning of a dialogue; many fear or hesitate, as Foster praised, to express some sort of reaction towards the notion that someone is different than them and act like one’s differences does not shape the way they either view that individual or American culture today, almost like an unheard superstition to not acknowledge those differences or unique traits we each hold. Also, we as humans do not want to begin war, debate, or controversy, and so we believe the best way to not veer into these dangerous waters is to silence our opinions.

Yet, silence incites the greatest controversies. Our differences are the roots that uphold our society, and rather than being inclined to feel as though we’re walking across a land mine to talk to someone, let us desire to lead and listen in on these conversations. Sadler said,

We have become more cognizant of what we choose to speak and do, and this has made people much more sensitive about particular topics and conversations around things like race and [cultural appropriation.] While it is important to have sensitivity, allow some room for patience and clarity.



After a year, I have not found nor created a rulebook, yet people have engaged more than ever in conversations around delicate topics. People are not tip toeing around eggshells over these topics; rather, they walk forward to address these discussions, and learn, make mistakes, and grow. Reagan's video may be the first of many media mishaps for my personal career as an emerging media professional, which is something I have accepted only recently; but it has taught me how to be mindful, to be curious, and to be proactive, not letting the conversation end here. Maybe if we lived in a Utopian society where there were no distinctive labels such as race, gender, or class, there would be a simple answer.

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# APPENDIX

## IRB Exemption Application



The University of Mississippi  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
Division of Research Integrity and Compliance – Institutional Review Board  
100 Barr Hall – University, MS 38677  
[irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu) 662-915-7482

### Screening / Abbreviated IRB Application

Purpose: Many studies qualify for an abbreviated review, according to the federal regulations and university policy.

- Part I of this form screens for a brief review.
- Part II of this form completes the abbreviated IRB application.
- Part III of this form gives instructions for obtaining the required assurances.
- The IRB makes the final determination on whether you must fill out a full application.

Always download the most recent version of this form: <http://www.research.olemiss.edu/irb/protocol/forms>.

Prepare and send application form as a Word document. E-mail the completed form and attachments (and forwarded email assurance if PI is a student) to [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

Note: Some class project studies may qualify for a classroom waiver of IRB Application. Instructors: see form [here](#).

### PART I — Screening

#### 1. Do any of the following apply to your study?

##### Research Methods:

- Treatment study.....  Yes.....  No
- Exercise.....  Yes.....  No
- X-rays.....  Yes.....  No
- Collection of blood, urine, other bodily fluids, or tissues .....  Yes.....  No
- Use of blood, urine, other bodily fluids, or tissues with identifiers.....  Yes.....  No
- Use of drugs, biological products, or medical devices.....  Yes.....  No

##### Targeted Subjects:

- Prisoners.....  Yes.....  No

##### Elements of Deception:

- The study uses surreptitious videotaping .....  Yes.....  No
- The study gives subjects deceptive feedback, whether positive or negative.....  Yes.....  No
- The study uses a research confederate (i.e., an actor playing the part of subject) .....  Yes.....  No

**If you checked Yes to any of the above, STOP HERE and fill out the [FULL IRB APPLICATION FORM](#).**

**\*Anonymous or Confidential?** Anonymous means (1) the recorded data cannot associate a subject with his/her data, and (2) the data cannot identify a subject. *Examples:* surveys with no names but with demographic data that can identify a subject (e.g., the only African-American in a class) are not anonymous.

**\*Sensitive Information?** Sensitive information includes but is not limited to (1) information that risks damage to a subject's reputation; (2) information that involves criminal or civil liability; (3) information that can affect a subject's employability; and (4) information involving a person's financial standing. *Examples:* Surveys that ask about porn use, illegal drug or alcohol use, religion, use of alcohol while driving, AIDS, cancer, etc. contain sensitive information.

**If using Qualtrics for anonymous surveys, [see guidance here](#).**

The ONLY involvement of human subjects will be in the following categories (check all that apply)

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY: MUCH CHANGED WITH NEW REGULATIONS, JANUARY 2019

1) **Educational Research:** Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices. Research is not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

2) **Surveys, Interviews, Educational Tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), Observation of Public Behavior (including video or auditory recording).** AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MUST BE MET

- (i) Information recorded by the investigator cannot readily identify the subject (either directly or indirectly)
- (ii) Disclosure of subjects' responses outside the research could **NOT** reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, educational advancement, employability, or reputation
- (iii) Information recorded by the investigator includes identifiers and the investigator specifies strong security measures to protect the data (e.g., encryption for electronic data; multiple locks for paper data). Minors are **NOT** permitted under this sub-category

3) **Benign Behavioral Interventions (BBI):** Research involving interventions in conjunction with collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording, if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection.

- BBI is limited to communication or interpersonal contact; cognitive, intellectual, educational, or behavioral tasks; manipulation of the physical, sensory, social or emotional environment
- Intervention Requirements:
  - brief duration (maximum intervention = 3 hours within one day; data collection may extend more hours & over days)
  - painless/harmless (transient performance task-related stress, anxiety, or boredom are acceptable)
  - not physically invasive (no activity tracker, blood pressure, pulse, etc.)
  - unlikely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on subjects
  - unlikely that subjects will find interventions offensive or embarrassing
  - no deception / omission of information, such as study purpose, unless subject prospectively agrees

AT LEAST ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MUST BE CHECKED

- (A) Recorded information cannot readily identify the subject (either directly or indirectly)
- (B) Any disclosure of subjects' responses outside the research could **NOT** reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation
- (C) Information is recorded with identifiers and the investigator specifies strong security measures to protect the data (e.g., encryption for electronic data; multiple locks for paper data)

4) **Biospecimen Secondary Research:** Secondary Research for which consent is not required: use of identifiable information or identifiable biospecimens that have been or will be collected for some other 'primary' or 'initial' activity, if **ONE** of the following is met: (i) biospecimens or information is publicly available; (ii) information recorded by the investigator cannot readily, directly or indirectly identify the subject, and the investigator does not contact the subject or re-identify the subject; (iii) collection and analysis involving investigator's use of identifiable health information when use is regulated by HIPAA; or (iv) research information collected by or on behalf of the federal government using government-generated or -collected information obtained for non-research activities.

5) **Research and Demonstration Projects on Federal Programs:** The study is conducted pursuant to specific federal statutory authority and examines certain federal programs that deliver a public benefit [call IRB for details if you think your study may fit].

6) **Food Tasting/Evaluation:** Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**PART II — Abbreviated Application**

**2. Project Title:** Thesis: Cultural Appropriation and Emerging Media Professionals

**3. Principal Investigator:**  Dr.  Ms.  Mr. Shikha Shrestha

Department: School of Journalism and New Media Department Chair's email (for cc of approval): Jennifer Simmons

Work Phone: Home or Cell Phone: 6625908382

E-Mail Address: sshrest2@go.olemiss.edu

**If Principal Investigator is a student:**

**Graduate student:**  Dissertation  Master's thesis  Other graduate project  
**Undergraduate student:**  Senior thesis:  SMBHC  Croft Institute  Other  
 Other undergraduate project

**Research Advisor:** Mark Dolan (required for student researchers)

Department: Journalism and IMC Work Phone: Home or Cell Phone: 6628019511  
 E-Mail Address: mdolan@olemiss.edu

**4. List ALL personnel involved with this research who will have contact with human subjects or with their identifiable data. All personnel listed here must complete CITI training OR the Alternative to CITI (ATC) training before this application will be processed\*.**

NAME	FACULTY OR STAFF	GRADUATE STUDENT	UNDER-GRAD STUDENT	ROLE ON PROJECT	Training completed: CITI or ATC	
PI Shikha Shrestha	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Main Investigator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advisor Mark Dolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research Adviser	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If space is needed to list additional project personnel, submit Appendix A. \*See Exempt Human Research Policy for training exceptions

**5. Funding Source:**

Is there funding for this project?  Yes ⇨  No  
 If Yes, is the funding:  
 Internal:  Source:   
 External:  Pending/ Agency:  Awarded/ Agency:   
 PI on external funding:

**Research Methodology/Procedures**

**6. Check all procedures below that apply to your study:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-existing data or biological samples ⇒ ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> Observation <input type="checkbox"/> Oral history <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interview ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> Focus group ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire or survey ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio recording or videotaping ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> The study has misleading or deceptive: ⇒ ⇒ (1) study descriptions; (2) procedure explanations; and/or (3) survey instructions/rationales.	Source of data: [redacted] Do data/samples have identifiers? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes* <input type="checkbox"/> No *If recording identifiers, you must fill out the <a href="#">Full Application Form</a>  Attach interview questions. Attach topic and questions. Attach questionnaire or survey. If online, state program to use (e.g., Qualtrics): [redacted]  Use and attach a <a href="#">release form</a> if you plan to disseminate quoted comments or taped content. (This covers you and UM legally – Not for IRB purposes)  In the abstract, provide complete details and a rationale for employing misleading/deception information. Include <a href="#">Appendix D</a> in your attachments.
<b>7. Consent Procedures:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Oral ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information Sheet/Cover Letter ⇒ ⇒ ⇒ <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable, Explain: [redacted]	Attach script. Attach. (No subject signatures required, see <a href="#">example here</a> : Go to Examples and Templates, then 'Sample Information Sheet')

<h3 style="text-align: center;">8. Project Summary</h3> <p style="text-align: center;">Briefly summarize your project using non-technical, jargon-free language that can be understood by non-scientists. See <a href="http://www.research.olemiss.edu/irb-forms">http://www.research.olemiss.edu/irb-forms</a> for abstract examples.</p>	
Give a brief statement of the research question supporting the reasons for, and importance of, the research: <b>The purpose of this research is to seek various opinions on the topic matter of cultural appropriation. I intend to ask open-ended questions based on how the ideology of cultural appropriation makes them feel and also how they see it in the media.</b>	
Describe the ages and characteristics of your proposed subjects and how you will <i>recruit</i> them (attach recruitment script or materials to the application): <b>I intend to interview a group of students and faculty who will have an opinion on the matter. Students will be about 21-22 years, Faculty varies, but seeking diversity in backgrounds as well as expertise in the field of sociology and culture and media</b>	
For studies using only adult subjects, state how you will ensure they are 18+:	<input type="checkbox"/> First question on survey/interview <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other: <b>Will ask in interview</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable

Briefly describe the research design AND carefully explain how your study will meet each of the requirements of the category criteria you checked on Page 2: **The interview questions provide a guide to understand different opinions on cultural appropriation. I intend to create a chapter designated to journal the interviews as a dialogue for a greater discussion.**

Give a *detailed* description of the procedure(s) subjects will undergo (from their perspective): **Students and Faculty will be contacted by the researcher to see if they will participate in the interview. I plan to set up a time, go to a convenient location to interview. Interview should be 15-20 minutes. Questions are open-ended. Then conclude.**

9. Appendix Checklist:

- A. Additional Personnel not listed on first page of application?  
 No  Yes – complete [Appendix A](#)
- B. Will the research be conducted in schools or child care facilities?  
 No  Yes – complete [Appendix B](#)
- C. Does your research involve deception or omission of elements of consent?  
 No  Yes – complete [Appendix D](#)
- D. Will your research be conducted outside of the United States?  
 No  Yes – complete [Appendix E](#)
- E. Will your research involve protected health information (PHI)?  
 No  Yes – complete [Appendix F](#) if applicable

10. Attachments Checklist:

Did you submit:

- a. survey or questionnaires?  
 Yes  Not Applicable
- b. interview questions?  
 Yes  Not Applicable
- c. focus group topics?  
 Yes  Not Applicable
- d. recruitment email, announcement, or script?  
 Yes  Not Applicable: No subject contact
- e. informed consent information letter or script?  
 Yes  Not Applicable: No subject contact
- f. permissions for locations outside the University?  
 Yes  Not Applicable

\*If giving a survey, whether on or off campus, please ensure the person giving permission (e.g., the teacher of a class) has an explicit opportunity to see the survey before they give their permission for its distribution

11. If using class points as incentives, are there alternative assignments available for earning points that involve comparable time and effort?  
 Yes  Not Applicable



12. If using an anonymous survey through Qualtrics and giving incentives in a separate survey, have you read and conducted the testing of the surveys according to the [procedures here?](#)  
 Yes       Not Applicable

**PART III: ASSURANCES**  
**Conflict Of Interest And Fiscal Responsibility**

Do you or any person responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of this study have an economic interest in, or act as an officer or a director of any outside entity whose financial interests may reasonably appear to be affected by this research?

YES      ⇨      ⇨      If Yes, please explain any potential conflict of interest.  
 NO

Do you or any person responsible for this study have existing financial holdings or relationships with the sponsor of this study?

YES      ⇨      ⇨      If Yes, please explain any potential conflict of interest.  
 NO  
 N/A

**Principal Investigator Assurance**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S ASSURANCE**

I certify that the information provided in the application is complete and correct. As Principal Investigator, I have the ultimate responsibility for the protection of the rights and welfare of the human participants, conduct of the research, and the ethical performance of the project. I will comply with all UM policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of participants in human research, including, but not limited to the following:

- Informed consent will be obtained from the participants, if applicable and appropriate;
- Any proposed modifications to the research protocol that may affect its designation as an exempt (brief) protocol application will be reported to the IRB for approval prior to being implemented.
- Adverse events and/or unanticipated problems will be reported to the IRB as required.

I certify that I, and all key personnel, have completed the required initial and/or refresher CITI or CITI Alternative courses in the ethical principles and regulatory requirements for the protection of human research participants.

**Shikha Shrestha/SHIKHA SHRESTHA**

Typed signature/name of Principal Investigator

**01/22/19**

Date



**RESEARCH ADVISOR'S\* ASSURANCE (REQUIRED FOR STUDENT PROJECTS)**

Email your Advisor with the following:

1. Email subject line: "IRB Advisor Approval Request from (your name)"
2. Your IRB submission materials as attachments
3. Copy and paste the statements below into the body of the email
4. Forward the reply email from your Advisor to irb@olemiss.edu along with your IRB submission materials attached.

**\*The research advisor must be a UM faculty member. The faculty member is considered the responsible party for the ethical performance and regulatory compliance of the research project.**

Please review my attached protocol submission. Your reply email to me will constitute your acknowledgement of the assurances below.

Thank you,  
[type your name here]

As the Research Advisor, I certify that the student investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human participants and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular research in accordance with the approved protocol.

I agree to meet with the investigator on a regular basis to monitor research progress.

Should problems arise during the course of research, I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving them.

I will ensure that the investigator will promptly report incidents (including adverse events and unanticipated problems) to the IRB.

If I will be unavailable, for example, on sabbatical leave or vacation, I will arrange for an alternate faculty member to assume responsibility during my absence, and I will advise the IRB by email of such arrangements.

I have completed the required CITI course(s) in the ethical principles and regulatory requirements for the protection of human research participants.

## IRB APPROVAL



Shikha Shrestha <sshrest2@go.olemiss.edu>

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### IRB Exempt Approval of 19x-173

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irb@olemiss.edu <irb@olemiss.edu>

Thu, Feb 7, 2019 at 2:19 PM

To: Shikha Shrestha <sshrest2@go.olemiss.edu>, "markdolan18@gmail.com" <markdolan18@gmail.com>

PI:

This is to inform you that your application to conduct research with human participants, "Thesis: Cultural Appropriation and Emerging Media Professionals" (Protocol #19x-173), has been approved as Exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(#2, ii, iii).

Please remember that all of The University of Mississippi's human participant research activities, regardless of whether the research is subject to federal regulations, must be guided by the ethical principles in The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.

It is especially important for you to keep these points in mind:

- You must protect the rights and welfare of human research participants.
- Any changes to your approved protocol must be reviewed and approved before initiating those changes.
- You must report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.
- If research is to be conducted during class, the PI must email the instructor and ask if they wish to see the protocol materials (surveys, interview questions, etc) prior to research beginning.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the IRB at [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

**Miranda L. Core & Mary K. Jourdan**

Research Compliance Specialists, Research Integrity and Compliance

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

The University of Mississippi

100 Barr Hall

## **INTERVIEW QUESTION SCRIPT**

1. How do you identify yourself? Would you identify yourself as a cultural minority?
2. What does cultural appropriation mean to you?
3. How is cultural appropriation different from showing appreciation for a particular culture?
4. What do you think makes cultural appropriation problematic on our campus? In Mississippi? In our country?
5. To what extent should cultural history affect how we view present day issues?
6. How would you feel about being “accused” of cultural appropriation?
7. What racial dynamics characterize acts of cultural appropriation?
8. What political dynamics characterize acts of cultural appropriation?
9. What economic dynamics characterize acts of cultural appropriation?
10. What role does the media play in how we come to understand cultural appropriation in America?
11. Because popular cultural images are all around us, how do we navigate cultural appropriation in the creative process?
12. How do you personally avoid appropriating or misrepresenting a culture or community? How do you educate yourself for better understanding and practice?
13. What advice would you give to an emerging media professional on how to avoid cultural appropriation in their work?