The Appropriation of African American Culture

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What is cultural appropriation?

● “The adoption of elements of one culture by members of a different cultural group, especially if the adoption is of an oppressed people’s cultural elements by members of the dominant culture.”

● These cultural elements can be: music, dance, fashion, spiritual ceremonies, speech, social behavior, etc.  
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZT1sTYpOJ04 0:46-1:40
Appropriation vs. Exchange

- Exchange = two parties or cultures on relatively equal footing in society choosing to share parts of their culture with one another
- Appropriation = a party or culture adopting part of an oppressed people’s culture without an understanding of cultural or religious significance
Hair

- “Black hair requires upkeep in order for it to grow and remain healthy, so black women have always done our hair, it’s just part of our identity.” - Amandla Stenberg
- Different styles have different functions, but most tame or hold back the hair while maintaining a stylish look
- Braids and dreadlocks of all varieties carry stigma with them. If someone has dreads, they’re automatically labeled as lazy, uneducated, or causing trouble and braids are stereotyped as “ghetto”
Hair

- These styles when replicated on a non-African American are accompanied with pretty mild stereotypes in comparison
  - example: A Caucasian man in his twenties with dreads is stereotyped as a hippie while an African American man in his twenties with dreads is stereotyped a thug.

-Appearances of cornrows on runways and red carpets prompted media to discuss this “new” “trendy” and “edgy” style
Music

- Rock n Roll (partly derived from R&B) was played for years by African Americans but because of segregation in radio, little was heard of it until white teens tuned in secretly around the mid ‘50s.
- White stations began playing it to fight competition from TV and pull back in teen listeners. Then, white artists started covering songs by black artists and suddenly rose to fame, leading the public to believe that the genre was created by those cover artists.
- Because of racial segregation and stigma in society, the music industry drove black artists into obscurity and exploited their originality and musical achievements.
Still today, people are able to capitalize off of a culture that's not their own, and make a living off of it without so much as a nod to who they've stolen from. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1KJRRSB_XA 1:29-2:26

Black artists who have never won a Grammy: Snoop Dogg, Nicki Minaj, Tupac, The Notorious B.I.G., Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix

Azealia Banks has been known to speak out about artists who don’t seem to, as Stenberg said it, “love black people as much as [they] love black culture.”
The Effect

- members of the dominant culture get more recognition or praise for adopted behaviors while the oppressed culture is stereotyped for it
- leads people to believe that the appropriating group created the practice (& further enforce stereotypes that minorities are lacking intelligence and creativity)
- further separates minorities from pop culture
- dehumanizes the members of a culture by generalizing them and wearing them as a costume
- trivializes the struggles faced by minority citizens because their identity is theirs for life, not theirs to make a fashion statement

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57XgMlnbMLA 1:28-2:12
Cause & Solution

- MEDIA. The media teaches people stereotypes, gives generalizations, and shows a simplified 2D version of a culture AND does not show why that is wrong.
- Leads to ignorance regarding racial and social issues as well as denial of wrongdoing.
- Once future media is understanding about matters of culture, the country can start taking steps toward racial equality. Media has the strongest influence, we’ve got to do something constructive with it.
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Powerpoints by Mrs. Shen
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