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# ACKNOWLEDGING APPROPRIATION

## CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

Objects created by a culture that gives important insights to the people and the history it relates to.



**NATIVE AMERICAN WAR BONNET:** Eagle feather headdresses are worn to symbolize power and authority among Native Americans. It is not just an accessory; it is reserved to commemorate specific achievements. The war bonnet as a contemporary fashion accessory perpetuates erasure of post-colonial Native groups. **SOURCE** Khan Academy **ART BY** Mazzy Warren



**HIJAB:** In Islamic teachings, it has been said that God asked women to wear hijab to achieve modesty and to redirect focus from the materialistic world to the spiritual world. Hijab are various head coverings worn by many Muslim women; there are controversies surrounding hijab as it was transformed into a symbol of oppression in Iran. Hijab is not just an accessory; it is a sense of religious duty. **SOURCE** World Hijab Day **ART BY** Mazzy Warren



**MATRYOSHKA DOLLS:** Also known as "Russian dolls," each wooden doll symbolizes fertility. The largest doll is considered the matriarch of the family, while the smallest is called the "seed," representing the soul. Together, a set of matryoshka dolls is said to represent a chain of mothers who are carrying on the family legacy through the child in their womb. **SOURCE** Cornithia Group **ART BY** Mazzy Warren



**HENNA:** Henna designs are temporary tattoos that decorate someone's body during celebrations like weddings and birthdays. Henna has been practiced in Pakistan, India, Africa, and the Middle East for over 5,000 years. The art symbolizes good health and prosperity in marriage, and in some cultures, the darker the stain, the deeper the love between two individuals. **SOURCE** Her Culture **ART BY** Mazzy Warren



**KIPPAH:** Also known as a skullcap or koppel, this is a brimless cap traditionally worn by Jewish men. Some communities choose to wear the head-coverings at all times, while others choose to wear them while eating, praying, studying Jewish texts, or entering religious places. There is no requirement to cover one's head, but it is considered a sign of reverence for God. **SOURCE** My Jewish Learning **ART BY** Mazzy Warren



**GANESHA:** The elephant-headed Hindu god of beginnings, who is traditionally worshipped before any divine enterprise. His name, Ganesha, is said to mean "Lord of the People." He is seen as a remover of obstacles, and a ten-day festival dedicated to him in late summer. This festival is called the Ganesh Chaturthi; this year, it takes place from September 19 to September 28. **SOURCE** Hindustan Times **ART BY** Mazzy Warren

## Students consider compassion in addressing cultural questions

Mazzy Warren  
Editor-in-Chief

Sophomore Izi Kalyoncuoglu lives in two very different households.

At her mother's house, Kalyoncuoglu celebrates the Hispanic heritage that has traced her mother's ancestry for generations; at her dad's, she explores her Turkish culture with the language, food, and traditions from her father's history.

She loves nothing more than caring for and supporting her family, no matter how different they can be. Displayed on the offrenda in her mother's home, Kalyoncuoglu smiles at the nostalgic photos of her late family and friends, happy to recall the way her family comes together, celebrating their love for each other and their culture.

"Both halves of my family are extremely different, but I'm used to it," Kalyoncuoglu said. "There are many aspects of our home cultures that we stick to; my parents speak the languages that relate to the cultures and to be exposed to things that others in America may not get to experience."

She loves that her heritage allows her to share different cultures, and she doesn't understand how anyone could attempt to hurt the communities she loves so much. Kalyoncuoglu knows that cultural appropriation is a common problem in the United States; she believes it is a problem that will always be around, hurting her community with each and every instance of incorrect assumptions and stereotypes.

"Our education system often speaks about history and cultural developments through a single, white, colonial perspective," Kalyoncuoglu said. "Not everything they say is correct, and it is very biased. We aren't taught from multiple perspectives, so we are shown depictions of culture that often give misleading or incorrect information."

### APPROPRIATION

According to Britannica, cultural appropriation takes place when members of a majority group adopt cultural elements of a minority group in an exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical way. This occurs when dominant groups borrow cultural practices from marginalized groups who have historically faced oppression for those same practices.

"Cultural appropriation can often be mixed up with cultural appreciation," Kalyoncuoglu said.

"The way I see it, as long as there isn't any clear disrespect, it's okay for people to explore traditions from other cultures. For example, wearing a traditional dress for a cultural event is okay, because you are wearing it in an appropriate setting, and are showing off a beautiful part of the culture. But wearing it to get more likes on social media is a different story; you're not appreciating the culture, you're simply exploiting it for fame and attention."

Senior Daria Abramovitch left Israel when she was five, moving to live in America with her immediate family. Even though she has left Israel, she hasn't left the culture; she especially values the holidays and food that connect her with her community.

"Being further from my extended family has made it even more important for me to connect with my culture, because it's what ties me to my heritage," Abramovitch said. "It's important to make sure my religion isn't misunderstood or misrepresented, because Judaism has a uniquely violent history that has resulted from the misrepresentations of my people."

According to MTV Decoded, there is an incorrect belief that, in holding someone accountable for acts of cultural appropriation, they are unfairly being labeled as racist. Discussions on cultural appropriation focus on misrepresentations of marginalized cultures; it does not purposefully target the dominant white culture, or consciously attempt to accuse all white people of appropriation.

"If you get called out for appropriation, you need to adjust your actions," Abramovitch said. "If someone from that culture explains why your actions are harmful, but you decide to continue those actions anyway, you are being extremely racially insensitive."

According to the New York Times, cultural exchange occurs when members of different backgrounds share their own heritage and customs with others. This is different from appropriation, because the exchange is mutual, and members are being invited to enjoy the culture. Ethnic studies teacher Chrissy Hejny believes cultural exchange can be a great tool for cultivating understanding.

"Exchange is very important, but we don't have enough of it," Hejny said. "We tend to fear other cultures, because they're different from our own. Appropriation happens when we give into this discomfort, and we start cherry-picking what we like from other cultures, and don't participate in exchange with genuine understanding."

Although white culture is the largest force of appropriation, this practice isn't exclusive; anyone has the ability to appropriate elements of marginalized cultures. Abramovitch

believes that it's often white culture that appropriates, but they are also the largest demographic to defend minorities for actions that she believes aren't truly offensive. "Cultural appropriation is a multifaceted problem," Abramovitch said. "White Americans tend to attack appropriators on behalf of a culture they aren't part of. These people have the least say, so they should leave the minorities to decide what offends them."

One of the most well-known debates over appropriation centers around dreadlocks. According to Esquire, this hairstyle has historically been worn among African American communities to symbolize a connection to Africa, and a rejection of Western domination. Although anyone can wear their hair in this style, African Americans often face stigma for wearing dreads; some companies and schools even prohibit dreads. Meanwhile, white celebrities receive praise for wearing these hairstyles.

"The problem isn't that white women want to wear their hair like that, we should all be able to wear whatever hair we want," Hejny said. "The issue is that black women have been discriminated against for their hair, for centuries. They've not been able to wear their own cultural hairstyles because white supremacist culture doesn't allow it; but there's no problem when white women decide to wear dreads."

### CONSUMPTION

Not all appropriation is intentional. In fact, Hejny believes that most appropriation stems from consumerist culture in America, which takes the desire to show appreciation for another culture, and turns it into a thoughtless item to be bought and forgotten mindlessly.

"Appropriation is hurtful because it paints a false picture of different cultures and peoples," Hejny said. "It takes a belief, an idea, and turns it into something that can be used for consumption, as a capitalistic commodity or as entertainment. It's generalizing, it's stereotyping, and it's unacceptable."

Take the example of indigenous peoples. Every year, the Halloween costumes return anew, featuring feathered headdresses, moccasins, and colorful leather clothing. According to the National Museum of the American Indian, dressing up as a Native American is never appropriate, and costumes like these are inherently harmful examples of the stereotypes placed on indigenous people.

"Costumes perpetuate the narrative that indigenous people are a thing of the past who no longer exist, which isn't true," Hejny said.

"This idea helps us ignore the fact that there are millions of indigenous people in the United States, who have been shoved off to live on

reservations in unfair circumstances."

According to Education Week, this erasure stems from American education, as Native people are hardly mentioned in standardized textbooks after the 1890s. Hejny believes this suggests that Native culture was wiped out by white settlement.

"As children, we are taught about how Natives lived 'back then,'" Hejny said. "While I understand that it's not appropriate to teach kindergarteners about the current struggles with addiction and poverty among Native peoples, we can still balance that narrative, and teach real stories of the Natives who are here today, living their very real lives."

The Maori of New Zealand wear facial tattoos that hold familial and cultural significance. In 2007, French fashion designer Jean-Paul Gaultier used these tattoos in a sunglasses ad, stripping them of their cultural meanings to sell his products.

"Consumerist culture affects everything in America," Abramovitch said. "You can't get away from it, and advertisers have been using different methods to get attention for a long, long time. Misrepresenting cultures is damaging, and this practice doesn't help."

In the seasonal area of the local grocery store, HEB, there sits a section filled with items featuring Dia de los Muertos products. Plates, mugs, napkins, straws, and pillows all replicate the distinct Latino style used to celebrate this holiday. According to Hejny, this portrayal is exploitative and unfair.

"What are we doing with this? We are currently keeping these people, this culture, on the other side of a barbed-wire border," Hejny said. "We are stealing this one aspect of their culture, a part we don't even truly understand, and putting it on display. All the while, our nation is forcing these people out of the country, separating their families and holding them at the border. Does that seem fair?"

### PERSONAL OFFENSE

Appropriators don't usually believe their actions are offensive; Hejny claims this is because it is not their culture getting disrespected. Some may say that they received permission from someone in that culture, so their actions are not offensive. Abramovitch believes everyone should remember that one person doesn't speak for a whole community.

"It's always safer to ask if your actions are okay before doing something you're iffy about," Abramovitch said. "But it's important to remember that one member doesn't speak for everyone, that's just poor representation." Plenty of people don't believe appropriation is a real problem. To them, Hejny says this: You're not listening.

SOURCE: United States Census Bureau 2020 Report

38.4%

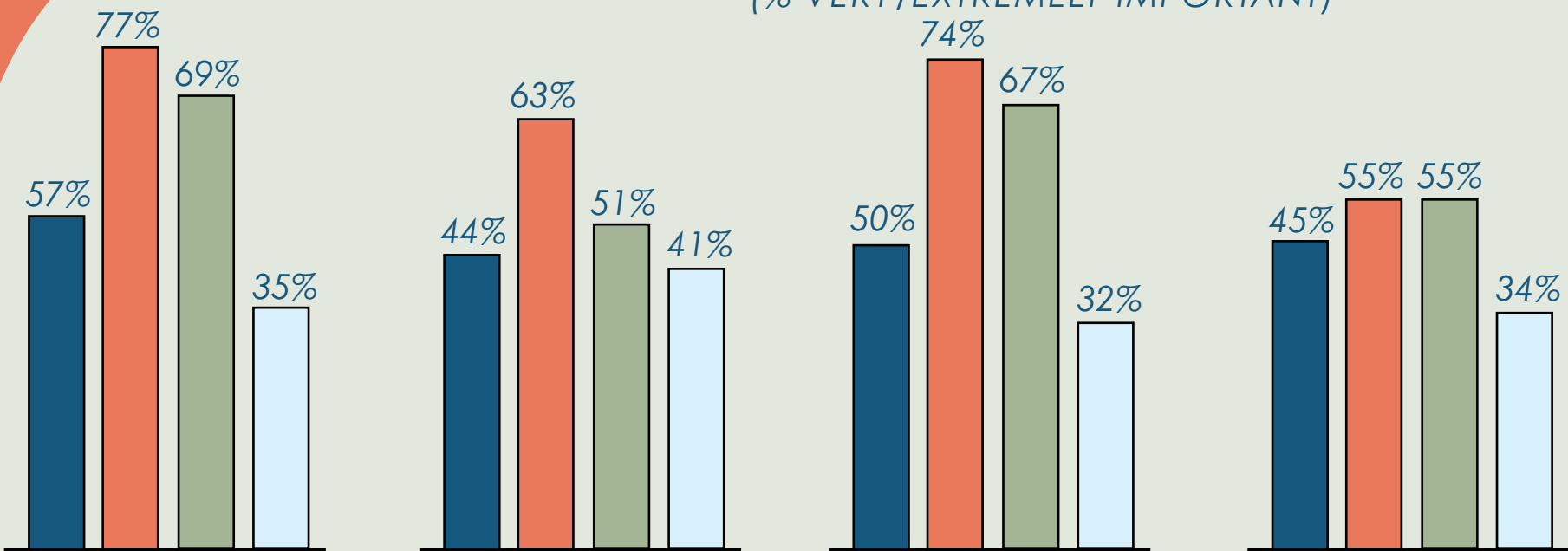
AMERICAN CITIZENS ARE PART OF A NON-WHITE MINORITY GROUP.

45.1%

TOTAL TRAVIS COUNTY POPULATION IDENTIFIES AS NON-WHITE

## HOW IMPORTANT IS EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TO YOUR SENSE OF IDENTITY?

(% VERY/EXTREMELY IMPORTANT)



### DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

WHITE  
HISPANIC  
AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER

SOURCE: How We Understand Diversity in America, Hartman Group

ART BY Mazzy Warren



CULTURE?

ASSIMILATION?

EXCHANGE?

## INCREASING DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

COUNTY-LEVEL CHANGE IN DIVERSITY SINCE 2000

SOURCE: The increasingly diverse United States of America, Washington Post  
ART BY Asher Hagan

