

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO ASK

SOURCE

- Does the source group or culture have a history of exploitation, slavery, or genocide?
If so, there is already a social power dynamic at play regarding the use of their culture.
- Are the people/the culture from whom this imagery, item, or custom comes benefitting?
Are you buying this directly from the community? Does your participation in it benefit the community?
- Has the source community invited you to share in this?
This could look like you being invited/requested to dress in traditional attire for a friend's celebration or event.
- *Is a cultural representative involved or being consulted?*

SIGNIFICANCE

- Is it an everyday object, or is it sacred?
- Is it to be used to make something or someone feel more sacred or meaningful?
- What is its original meaning? Is it represented here? Is it lost, demeaned, or made fun of?
- Is the source's significance filling a hunger (for "sacredness," for "meaning")? Is this facilitating or participating in "shopping" from cultures?

SIMILARITY

- How similar is this to the original?
- *Who am I representing with my visuals? What message am I sending? Who is being centered?*
- Is it portraying the original in a cartoonish or "cute" way? Is it demeaning or degrading?
- Is it taking just a piece of an image, custom, or practice out of context?
- *Does it develop a modern understanding of the culture and people?*

COMMODIFICATION/CAPITALISM

- Is this about commodification or making a profit?
- Is this piece of culture being sold to you?
- Are you benefitting/How are you benefitting from participating or using this piece of culture? *(Are you using this to gain social power, been seen as "hip" or "cool," or gain access to spaces or people?)*

NOTES

- People most often do not have bad intentions. This is good, because it means this is an opportunity for education and communication.
- It can be hard for people to define "culture" here (in the USA).
- The more invisible a culture is to the dominant culture, the easier it is to be appropriated (and/or the harder it is to catch).

Source, significance, and similarity are based on writings by Susan Scafidi, author of *Who Owns Culture? Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law*

- *Comments in blue were added by the Equity Advisory Team*