CULTURE NOW

Appreciate / Appropriate

Renee Cox
Missy at Home
(from *The Discreet Charm of the Bougies*)
2009
Digital ink-jet print on watercolor paper
31¼ × 40 inches
Tang Teaching Museum collection, purchase, 2019.9

"*The Discreet Charm of the Bougies* is a psychodrama. The star's name is Missy. She lives a very privileged life. She is very much self-aware, but she is very much alone. She's got a white maid, but she's blasé about it. It's expected, in a way. Throughout this series, you see her going from living in this depressive, unconscious state to becoming enlightened and realizing she can live a life of joy. Obviously, it's my own personal journey. Because for me, one of the key things was when I realized I didn't need anybody to validate me except myself." —Renee Cox

Exploring the Limits of Cultural Appropriation in Popular Music

Matthew D. Morrison

As long as cultures have (co)existed, there has been cultural appropriation. Since the 1980s, however, the term has emerged in popular discourse as a critique of the misuse of the cultural attributes or performances of one community by those who do not belong or cannot claim an immediate connection to that group. Many of these criticisms developed in response to the appropriation of Indigenous American culture by non-Indigenous people, such as the coopting of the Native headdress (which has specific ritual and communal meanings) by a sports mascot in a decontextualized or exploitative context (for instance, the NFL's Washington Redskins). Appropriation itself is an act that involves one entity taking possession or making use of the cultural property of another with or without their permission. Today, *appropriation* is a buzzword that is frequently used to suggest that the culture of a marginalized group has been "stolen" by a dominant one, generally in fashion, art, language, or music. But cultural appropriation is complex, and the implications of the term get especially murky when considering how popular music is made, performed, and consumed. I am interested in wading through a bit of this murkiness by drawing connections between the legacy of blackface minstrelsy and the current understanding of the impact and meaning of cultural appropriation within the history of popular music in the United States. Focusing on this history is my attempt to provide some clarity about what is at stake when we talk about cultural appropriation, as well as what is at stake when cultural appropriation occurs in the commercialization of popular music—a multibillion-dollar industry that continues to be shaped by Black innovative and creative practices.

Within the exchange of culture, appropriation is unavoidable. Once one group begins to interact with another, language, food, customs, and other aspects of culture are impacted over time. But when we talk about cultural appropriation in the context of popular entertainment in the United States, we must also consider the history of colonialism and slavery that created the unequal conditions and power structures in which early Indigenous, African, and European traditions were "exchanged" in the development of US culture. Enslaved African Americans were considered property, and Indigenous people suffered genocide and were mostly stripped of their land and

personal rights; thus European-descended Americans were able to engage with the culture of "others" from a position of authority that left them unaccountable for their appropriative acts. The structures of white supremacy that developed within slavery are the context out of which blackface minstrelsy, the first original form of American popular music, laid the foundation for the US entertainment industry in the 1820s.

Blackface began with white, mostly Irish American, men blackening their faces with burnt cork, dancing to tunes of British folk origin ("Jump Jim Crow," of about 1827, is one of the first popular blackface tunes), and performing their stereotyped interpretations of Black movement and dialect. Blackface minstrelsy continued to influence the growth of American popular music throughout the nineteenth century as other white ethnicities donned blackface and performed stereotyped roles like Jim Crow (enslaved "darky"), Zip Coon (urban "dandy"), and Lucy Long (cross-dressed "wench"). After Emancipation, women, African Americans, and other marginalized groups who wanted to enter into popular music were economically and structurally pressured to do so through this dominant commercial form of entertainment.[1] It is difficult to determine to what extent the earliest of these blackface performances contained actual representations of Black aesthetics, but it is clear that these minstrels performed and were often received (especially by white audiences) as though the performances reproduced accurate cultural (music, dance, language) aspects of Blackness. Black people were largely unable to challenge these racist caricatures or represent themselves on the popular stage in large numbers until the turn of the twentieth century, almost seventy years after blackface had already established itself as the driving force of American popular entertainment.[2] Black Americans were also largely denied awards (recognition) or rewards (compensation) for any contributions to popular music despite the counterfeit or real imitations of Black aesthetics that laid the foundation for the music industry.[3]

Within our cultural and legal understanding of property, we have not yet graduated from the idea that the aesthetic and creative contributions of African Americans and other minoritized groups belong to the public domain. In fact, copyright laws and notions of intellectual property are founded directly upon the belief that they do. The fact that Black people were considered property and had no ownership over their aesthetic innovations, during either the development of blackface during slavery or the Jim Crow segregation era, continues to impact how we think of cultural appropriation in the context of US popular music. These aesthetic innovations—which involve sounds, movements, and performance practices that are ephemeral but key in popular-music-making practices (such as the twelve-bar blues or the blues scale)—were deemed to be in the public domain and outside of copyright protection because they were interpreted by modern intellectual property laws as unfixed "ideas" and not as tangible "original works of authorship."[4] In short, the aesthetic innovations of Black cultural production often find their way into popular consumption through commercialization. This process takes place within an industry that was founded on the exploitation of Black performativity and the negation of Black aesthetic practices as forms of intellectual property under copyright law. It is important to note that this process occurs within the context of actual Black people being under- or devalued as humans and citizens, within the racist systems that have shaped society since slavery and the invention of blackface. Furthermore, non-Black people—particularly white people—are often rewarded and awarded for engaging in these exploitative practices by a market that is itself made up of customers with the financial and technological access to purchase and consume popular entertainment produced by a commercial music industry that is based in our unequal and racist societal structures—economically, socially, and culturally.

This is not to suggest that African Americans or other marginalized groups cannot culturally appropriate, that white people are the only ones who engage in this act, nor to argue that all cultural appropriation is, by default, a negative act. I raise these considerations to emphasize that cultural appropriation or exchange occurs within structures of power that must be considered when determining impact and meaning. Appropriative acts of cultural exchange can be reciprocal or exploitative or a mixture of the two, depending on who is appropriating whose material, the power relations among these groups, the channels through which the appropriation is disseminated, and who is doing the consuming.[5] When we speak of cultural

1 It is also important to note that blackface minstrelsy was the United States' first export of popular entertainment internationally. In the mid-nineteenth century, the custom of blackface reached as far as Japan and Australia. Many other forms of American and Black popular music developed out of blackface (vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, blues, country, and so on), and these styles came to influence the development of popular music and identity worldwide.

2 Film, popular records, and radio programming all developed out of the economic and aesthetic impact of blackface performance. *Birth of a Nation* (produced by D. W. Griffith) was the first full-length US film and featured whites in blackface portraying stereotypes of Black people; "race" and "hillbilly" records were among the first commercial records marketed to audiences in the early twentieth century and developed their aesthetic and marketing practices out of blackface; "Amos & Andy" was one of the first comedy radio shows and became one of the longest-running and most popular of its type. This radio show (which became a TV show that featured the first all-Black TV cast performing in these roles) featured white men using blackface tropes and its sounds to perform stereotyped Black roles on the radio.

3 Perry A. Hall, "African-American Music: Dynamics of Appropriation and Innovation," in *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, ed. Bruce Ziff (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 32.

4 The sheet music of the nineteenth century and the sound recordings of the early twentieth century are examples of "tangible" works that might be protected under copyright law. For more on this topic, see Gerald Carr, "Protecting Intangible Cultural Resources: Alternatives to Intellectual Property Law," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 18, no. 2 (2013): 364.

5 Richard A. Rogers, "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation," *Communication Theory* 16, no. 4 (Nov. 2006): 477.

appropriation in popular music, specifically, it does not always imply theft. But to act as though this exchange occurs outside of the history of cultural exploitation of marginalized groups by the popular music industry is to be complicit in a system in which, as African American studies scholar Perry A. Hall has written, "white-dominated wider culture absorbs aesthetic innovation, [as] it continues to avoid engaging or embracing the human reality, the very humanity, of those whose shared lived experiences collectively create the context in which such innovation is nurtured, maintained, and supported."[6]

The goal of the commercial music industry, from its founding until now, is to sell music. The players (executives, producers, artists, marketers) in this industry have relied heavily on the appropriation of Black aesthetic practices since the origins of blackface minstrelsy within a context of unequal societal structures and copyright/property laws that typically exploit Black innovation. It is up to consumers and creators to give careful thought to how their listening, purchasing, and borrowing practices are informed by a reciprocal or exploitative engagement with the actual people who are often the creative arbiters of popular culture in the United States yet who continue to fight for equal rights, representation, and justice within a system that has, since its founding, capitalized on and exploited its most marginalized people for economic, cultural, and political gain. As long as we (as a popular audience) continue to conspicuously consume popular music and entertainment without giving careful thought to our purchasing practices or to who/what we are consuming, the industry and its actors will continue to blur the lines between reciprocal exchange and exploitation. In this case, African American and other marginalized groups will continuously suffer grave and often life-threatening structural inequities throughout society while their cultural products lay the foundation for our collective sources of enjoyment and commercial entertainment. ▲

6 Hall, "African-American Music," 33.

Jessica Andrews

writer

Renee Cox

artist

Matthew D. Morrison

scholar

Isolde Brielmaier **In an age where images, ideas, and sounds are widely accessible, the topic of cultural appropriation, particularly within popular culture, is a hot-button issue. How do we define cultural appropriation? To get to that, we have to define or identify how cultural appropriation does or doesn't differ from cultural appreciation. Do we have to even talk about who owns culture, or if somebody owns culture?**

Jessica Andrews I've written about cultural appropriation at *Teen Vogue*, and a lot of people look at me as the cultural appropriation police. I'm not at Coachella running behind people telling them to take off their feather headdresses—I don't do that. It's actually a really nuanced conversation. In the fashion industry specifically, it's about respecting other cultures and giving them credit when they inspire you. A lot of designers take inspiration from other cultures or marginalized groups and then won't acknowledge them. I say respect is the minimum. That's a basic courtesy.

And secondly, give who inspired you a seat at the table. When you're taking from a culture that you aren't a part of, it's not going to seem authentic when you don't have anyone in the room who represents that culture.

Lastly, you see a lot of stereotypes in fashion. That's a big part of how cultural appropriation offends. Designers will pull from African fashion, but it's safari with people running around in animal prints and the idea that they're all in jungles. If you've been to Africa or even read about it or Google-searched it, you know that's not the truth. It's a dehumanizing stereotype. And we've seen it happen over and over again in fashion. There was Gucci and Dapper Dan. And Dapper Dan wanted to be a part of the fashion industry.

IB **Can you give a quick snapshot about Dapper Dan?**

JA In the 1980s, he was embracing the logo trend that we see resurfacing now, and he'd do custom designs for affluent shoppers, who were mostly of color. He'd take logos from Louis Vuitton or from Gucci and incorporate them in such imaginative ways—nothing like what was on the runway. He's really a genius, and as someone outside of the fashion industry, he had a loyal following and so much support. But when the fashion industry got wind of his work, instead of embracing him and giving him an opportunity, they sued him and put him out of business. He was out of work for about three decades.

Fast forward to this year, Gucci puts a look on the runway in their Resort collection that is a clear copy of what Dapper Dan was doing decades before. And because social media gives a voice to people who didn't formerly have one in the industry, people called them out. You're saying his work is good enough to steal but not good enough to get him a job.

Once they were called out, to their credit, Gucci reached out to him and sponsored his atelier, which is now back up and running in Harlem. So it is a success story, it does have a positive ending, but you wonder, without social media, would that have happened? Those are the kinds of things that we are fighting for at *Teen Vogue*: to give marginalized people a platform and to hold designers accountable and make sure they give

credit and make sure they're giving opportunities rather than cherry-picking from cultures and making money off of them while shutting us all out.

Matthew D. Morrison I'm going to draw on the work of Richard A. Rogers, a media theorist who gives a basic definition of cultural appropriation that speaks to what Jessica has already pointed out. Rogers describes cultural appropriation as "the use of a culture's symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture." We could think about cultural appropriation, as Rogers points out, in a number of ways. Often, we think about it as a system of exchange where there's some type of reciprocity being offered. As you said, after thirty years, Gucci is in conversation with Dapper Dan, and they have a reciprocal relationship now. Then there's cultural dominance. Those who are marginalized are retooling, or finding other ways to use, the tools of those who are dominating them for their own purposes. This is what Dapper Dan was doing prior to being admitted into the structures of the fashion houses.

And then there's cultural exploitation, which is what we are having the most direct conversation about today, where those who are marginalized, often Black and brown people in the context of the United States, are not only *not* given credit for work, but are seen as being *less than* by enacting their own cultural creations. It's this idea of appropriation to the extent of taking on that of what bell hooks calls "eating the Other," absorbing another's culture, another's practice, without dealing with the humanity and personhood of those folks.

There is not a way to talk about appropriation without thinking about the dynamics of power involved in that exchange since the moment of development of the West, which was developed out of the transatlantic slave trade and the genocide of Native peoples. Because of the globalization of American culture and entertainment in particular, appropriation is always on the table when we think about how things are absorbed in popular culture at large.

IB **Even before we can talk about cultural appropriation, it's important to think about ideas of privilege and power—history, capitalism, imperialism, assimilation, how those come into the creation of culture, the consumption of culture, the spotlighting or upholding of one culture over another. Renee, I'm thinking of your work from the late 1990s, particularly the series that takes back the visual identities of superheroes.**

Renee Cox When I was shooting for *Essence* magazine, they had me shoot somebody called Sunman, a superhero they were trying to develop. I shot him and it was great, and then I never heard about Sunman ever again. Fast forward, I'm in Toys "R" Us, I have two little kids, and I'm climbing over people and fighting with them to get Power Rangers. I'm walking around the store, and I realize there are no superheroes of color. What happened?

In my art practice, when I see there's a void, I feel like I've got to go in and do something. I'm really into the notion of revisionist history because, as we know, the victors have written the history books. If that's the case, then I should be able to go in there and write my own history. But I can't just pull it out of the sky. In order to give it credence, I went and did my research, and I came across the fact that back in the 1970s, there was a Black Wonder Woman named Nubia who appeared on two or three covers. I thought, perfect. This is the license for me to expand on Nubia. My character is Rajé, who is actually named Rage, but I knew if I named her Rage, I would cut off a lot of people because they'd see some angry Black woman.

I created scenarios and stories that I could illustrate using this character that I portrayed. There was an image I did called *Taxi*. Why? Because Black people couldn't get taxis in New York at the time. So I decided that I'm going to have this superhero actually picking up taxis in the middle of Times Square.

There's a reactionary point as well. Another work in that series is called *Liberation of Aunt Jemima and Uncle B*. Why was this needed? Because Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben were the desexualized slaves that lived up at the big house. My superhero goes in there and restores them, and they become Roshumba, who was a supermodel at the time, and Rodney Charles, an actor. I drag them off of the box, and they join forces with me to cure the ills of the world.

In terms of appropriation, I consider it more about revisionism. I got the idea for *Liberation of Aunt Jemima and Uncle B* from Betye Saar because she did a liberation of Aunt Jemima. But I changed it around entirely. I can be inspired by other artists, I can have those same thoughts, but I can bring the idea into my time frame or my generation. That's when you have great, healthy art production: when you change it.

IB **There's some slippage in this fine line. There's straight-out copying or, in music, sampling. Art has been borrowing and morphing and shifting for decades. Even the medium of collage brings together all these disparate parts to form a whole.**

RC My latest work is basically collage, but I'm happy to report it's all my work. I don't cut things out and use other people's work. And yes, I'm saying that with a little bit of disdain: "You're so damn lazy you can't go out and create your own imagery." That's coming from the photographer in me who thinks, No, you don't get to just cut up my work and reconstruct it into something else. Do it yourself.

You have Titian and his *Venus*, Manet and his *Olympia*. Then I do *Olympia's Boyz*. I take the flowers and the slave and the maid and all of that out, and I do a similar but completely different piece.

IB **If there's an element of critique, does that make appropriation okay? Does the individual doing the appropriating have to match the culture that is being appropriated? Where do we draw the line? I want to identify this slippery space between appropriation and appreciation.**

JA One of the articles I've written about the Kardashians is about the idea that they invented boxer braids. "Boxer braids" are not a thing. They're cornrows. Boxer braids is a name that was given to them by a magazine that I won't name but is not *Teen Vogue*, and Kendall or Kylie was credited with making them a trend. When I first learned to braid, my grandmother

taught me on a doll on the floor of our kitchen. She learned down South with grass stalks and passed it down through generations. This practice has been going on in our culture for years. And then to credit a Kardashian with inventing it—it's erasure at its worst. That's the kind of thing where it's copying and then totally ignoring a sector of people and saying, "Your hairstyle is okay, but your humanity isn't." That's the message that it sends.

MDM What we often see when things go from a local, more communal space into a popular space is a dissociation from those with whom something originated. This is true especially when it's connected to the oral or bodily traditions of a community that's marginalized or seen as *less than* because of their actual creative performances.

I'm going to read a short quote from bell hooks's essay "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance" that speaks directly to what Jessica pointed out, that is, taking these things on without considering the actual people that they're connected to. "To make one's self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the Other"—in this case, if we're talking about the Kardashians, we're talking about the boxer braids, known as cornrows to Black people in America—"does not require that one relinquish forever one's mainstream positionality." So often the mainstream personality is in a place of dominance or privilege—again, a Kardashian. "When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure"—when we take on these ideas or these styles or these performances or these aesthetics to find pleasure for our own selves—"the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals"—the actual people, the human beings who exist in those bodies—"can be seen as constituting an alternative playground"—meaning that those human beings are commodities to be played with, that their cultural productions can be playthings—"where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other."

This goes back to Hottentot Venus, to the founding of this nation, to the founding of the West. Sarah Baartman, an African woman whose actual genitals were on display for a long time starting in 1810, was referred to as the Hottentot Venus. She had a particular posterior that was out of place to those who were watching her—the white colonizing gaze—and it became seen as exotic, as other, as animalistic, but that also became an inspiration for a whole damn fashion trend.

JA And for Kim Kardashian's whole career.

MDM Yes, the whole career, even down to replicating a photo of Sarah Baartman for her *Paper* magazine cover. So the dissociation from particular cultural resonances also becomes stereotyped onto those same bodies they are taking from.

Using Black vernacular English, wearing a hoodie, or wearing certain types of pants may look and sound and be cool on a body that does not actually have to experience the resonance of being a Black person in real time in this country: those are things that are always held next to one another when thinking about what it means to replicate or engage with cultural performances that are attached to a community that is then not able to claim ownership over those things.

RC The Hottentot Venus, that also was about forwarding colonization. It's business, it's capitalism. It's like taking one group and saying, "Look at them, they look like crap," and then putting them on display and, for Sarah Baartman, showing her like that until she dies. It took almost two hundred years, until Nelson Mandela became president, to get her remains back to South Africa.

IB **The business element is important because at the end of the day we are talking about consumption—commodification and consumption. In music, appropriation, or how you see appropriation as most commonly functioning—sampling and improvisation—has a long and rich history. It almost feels like things become more blurred.**

Music is not just audio, of course. It becomes about the persona and the profile of the individual—think of Elvis. That's where the commodification and consumption component comes in because you're selling that whole package that encapsulates the sounds. How does appropriation come into play here?

MDM For me, it goes back to Renee's work around Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben. These images have had a strong hold for such a long time on presentations of Black women and men, and they stood in for actual Black people. Within the larger arc and history of American popular entertainment and consumption, we have blackface minstrelsy. Blackface minstrelsy is at the foundation of American popular music. With the continuing genocide of Indigenous peoples on these lands, with the enslavement of Black folks at the hand of white colonizers, you have a whole class of people, a whole race of people, who were erased, who were unable to speak for themselves. Property relations in the United States developed in relation to slavery, meaning that people were considered to be property. If a person is a property owned by another person, then the person who owns the person as property also owns their cultural possessions as property.

At the same time that these human beings, Black people in particular, were considered property under chattel slavery, the very first form of original American popular music develops. Blackface minstrelsy began with white men, Irish American men mostly in the North, darkening their faces with burnt cork and performing English and Irish folk tunes in what they imagined were Black dialect, movement, and performance. So the first form of American popular music begins with an imagined performance of Blackness by white men in blackface. As time goes on, a whole industry of blackface minstrelsy forms, which becomes the base of theatrical entertainment.

By the end of the twentieth century, we have copyright laws to determine what property value is assigned to any particular item, including music. It wasn't until 1976 that actual recordings were considered to be copyrightable material. The record was copyrighted so that whoever owned the record, the master usually, held the property value for that particular record. But the sounds on them were not protected, and the sounds and the movements that accompanied them were often created by Black people.

Almost all forms of American music in general and Black music in particular are about borrowing and pulling and re-creating and reproducing. Sampling became a different methodology when the technology was available to take sounds from one record and re-create them for another.

IB **And those sounds were not copyrighted.**

MDM Because the sounds on the records were not yet copyrighted. In 1978, "Rapper's Delight" becomes the first popular rap song, and it's a sample of Chic's "Good Times" where Sugarhill Gang essentially loops the bridge of it and raps over it. Later on, Nile Rodgers and those folks were like, "Hey, this is our record." But the way popular music developed in the mid-century was through larger record companies taking the records of smaller R&B companies, records by Black artists, and remaking them. This is how we got Elvis Presley and "Hound Dog" and the erasure of Big Mama Thornton.

Big Mama Thornton is the originator of "Hound Dog." She was a queer Black woman—an icon within the local community. But because the record that Big Mama Thornton created was not protected as property under copyright laws, as many of the cultural productions of Black people had not been at that moment, it was able to be taken, remade, repackaged. Also, look up Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti," then look up Pat Boone's "Tutti Frutti," then Elvis Presley's "Tutti Frutti." You have to think, Oh shit, is this what was really happening here? It's also an indication of what's going on today.

IB **Does it feel more clear-cut in music? In art and in fashion, it's still a bit nebulous.**

JA It's more nebulous in fashion for sure. Unless there's a design that you have copywritten, you don't have legal standing. But designs are copywritten only if you have the access and the resources to copyright them. When we talk about Dapper Dan, what standing did he have to sue Gucci? That is a huge fashion house with a whole legal department. If it wasn't for social media, the story probably would have been buried. That's why cultural appropriation is always about access and power. When you have a dominant group that has access to spaces that marginalized groups don't, you can steal from the marginalized groups easily and then make money off them. And they don't have standing to fight against it.

IB **I'm even thinking about professional sports. How many Indigenous communities have tried to sue the Cleveland Indians or the Atlanta Braves? They've failed because it takes so many resources to fight in that way.**

JA That's why I'm slow to criticize call-out culture. Sometimes if you're coming from a marginalized group, all you have is social media. All you have is your voice and your platform. A lot of times we've seen with brands, like with H&M and their photo of a monkey hoodie on a Black child model, that outrage makes them wake up and realize they need to fix a wrong. We didn't have that in fashion before. That's why so many situations were going unchecked for so long. But with social media, we're starting to see a shift.

IB **Can appropriation be a good thing? When is it okay or "acceptable"? Who gets to decide that it's acceptable?**

MDM When we think about cultural appropriation, it's always within a system. Cultural exchange is always happening within a system, a structure, a society. That's why, at the outset, I tried to outline cultural appropriation with various stances. One that takes into account reciprocity or reciprocation in some sense, and the others involve dominance or exploitation.

IB **That's a key element, the reciprocity.**

RC And credit. You've got to credit people.

JA You've got to credit.

MDM You've got to credit.

RC History is a good thing—to know where things come from. They didn't just happen yesterday.

MDM That's something that we get away from in an easily consumable Google era. Because it is a system, we often let the consumer off the hook. It's important to bring the consumer into the fold. One of the reasons that Bruno Mars is a star is that he's really good at what he does. He also comes from a lineage of R&B singing. He's done the work and done his homework. But there is also a way that Mark Ronson, his producer, who also produced Amy Winehouse, took from the sound of Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings. If you love Amy Winehouse, then you would really love Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings. But it's a feedback loop. The industry is trying to create and present things that they think will be consumed; and then the consumers either consume them or reject them.

I taught a class on music, copyright, and intellectual property. If you go through websites of court cases, you'll see many cases against Beyoncé, Jay-Z, and others by folks who don't have as much money or by companies who bought a catalog and then say, "Hey, you used this one little thing, so you need to pay us $2 million." The litigation, the power, how people move around, and the credit make a huge difference. With Beyoncé and "Run the World (Girls)," her choreography was from Tofo Tofo, the brothers from Mozambique. But Beyoncé invited them to be part of the video—she didn't just take their choreography. Cultural appropriation is about power. It could also come from people of marginalized backgrounds.

JA A lot of times I am asked, "What's the difference between cultural appropriation and appreciation, and how is it appreciation?" I look at Beyoncé's Coachella performance, which was incredible. It paid homage to historically Black colleges and universities, which she did not attend. Going back to people of color being able to appropriate, she could be called out for appropriating HBCU culture. But she hired people who worked at these HBCUs to perform, and, after the performance was over,

she donated money to the schools. The culture is acknowledged and respected and then you're giving back and you're giving them a seat at the table. That's appreciation to me. When you're robbing someone's culture and you're not giving anything back and you're not hiring them and you're not acknowledging them, that's when it becomes an issue.

RC But did the greater public know that she was doing that at Coachella? All those white kids sitting up there…did they know about historically Black colleges and universities?

JA They should have known.

RC I don't think they knew.

JA Once she did "Lift Every Voice and Sing," people were looking around saying, "Oh, I've never heard this song from her albums. What album is this from?" I'm thinking, I've been singing this song since I was a kid in elementary school. A lot of them didn't know, but the media did write about the history and the inspiration. And she acknowledged it. That information is there. A lot of times, with fashion designers, that information is not there. When you ask designers what the inspiration is, they'll never say people of color or marginalized groups. With Bantu knots, for example, people will mention Björk or Gwen Stefani, not the Zulu tribe. I do credit her for giving acknowledgment.

MDM Be an active consumer, not passive.

IB **Being active is crucial. It can take two seconds to find out about "Lift Every Voice and Sing," James Weldon Johnson, the Black National Anthem. Being active, educated, informed consumers is so important.**

MDM These industries rely on us not to be.

JA Fashion is always cyclical. There's literally nothing new under the sun. There's always an inspiration.

IB **You can say the same for music and probably for art as well.**

Audience For me, the gray area is important. This country is the gray area, and I am patriotic about the gray area, and I'm proud of the gray area. In acknowledging the origins of what made us a complicated tapestry—it's the most beautiful thing that's been invented. There's a song by the Coasters called "Down Home Girl." The song with "Lord, I swear the perfume you wear smells like turnip greens."

In the song, an African American in a Northern urban setting is commenting on someone from the South. The girl from the South is trying to act urban-sophisticated, but he can see and smell that everything about her is "down home girl." It's an unbelievably great song with a funky beat, written by two Jews from New York, Leiber and Stoller. It's also a document about African American culture. It's from the 1960s, and it has everything in it: the Northern diaspora from the South, commentary about the urban and the rural. It's a beautiful and complicated song.

It has been sampled many, many times. The same people also wrote "Spanish Harlem," which Aretha Franklin sang. Nowadays, they wouldn't write that song. How do I wrap my mind around these songs in this context?

MDM But they do write those songs today. It's not really complicated because it's based in history. Take "Strange Fruit," which was sung by Billie Holiday. The text itself was also written by a Jewish American. At the turn of the twentieth century, the popular music entertainment industry developed out of Tin Pan Alley, primarily by Jewish American immigrants who came toward the end of the nineteenth century. It was developed straight out of the legacy and history of blackface minstrelsy. This idea of the Southern woman coming up North is a narrative that's already seen in the figure of Zip Coon.

"Zip Coon" is one of the first blackface tunes to help set blackface as primary. Zip Coon is also a character, this urban city slicker who is in the North posing as a dandy, posing as educated. You are meant to see him and think, "You're still a Southern plantation darkie like Jim Crow." So there's an ability for Leiber and Stoller, who wrote lots of amazing songs, to enter into these flights of fancy that bell hooks talks about. One can also absorb the styles, the rhythms, the sounds. But they were making a song to be a hit, a hit that would be read as authentic by Black performers.

There are also questions about authenticity, but, in the end, we still have the folks who get the credit, meaning those who get the royalties, who are the authors and the composers. The performers receive less than the composers. So it is complicated in the sense that it's a long history, but in the history of popular music, the actual act of ventriloquizing one's own self for another by non-Black folks is part of the basis of the construction itself.

Audience If you take "Hound Dog" from Elvis, that's clearly been appropriated, but how far back do you need to go before it gets really blurry? This relates to culture, to fashion, to art, in general.

JA With cornrows, there was a lot of talk about Vikings having worn cornrows. But in this country, there are Black people who are being kicked out of classes for wearing cornrows. There's definitely a reigning perception that if you wear cornrows to a job interview, you're not going to get the job. That's something that Black people face all the time. When cornrows are on Black people, they're stigmatized; when they're on the Jenners or the Kardashians, they're praised. So I start with the originating culture or the culture that something is most associated with. Especially if a group is stigmatized for a particular fashion, you have to think twice about appropriating it.

RC Forget the Vikings, go to Africa. We were the first people.

JA Who owns this thing from culture? There are Black people who have been wearing cornrows for decades in this country. It's not starting with the Jenners or the Kardashians or 2018. That's basic information. That's a Google away. But then you can go back into history and find out where

something originated and how it became popular. I did that research for myself with Ankara print, which is popular in West Africa. I had a moment where I was really into that print and making it a part of my wardrobe, so I did the research and learned that actually, it was invented by the Dutch. It wasn't invented by West Africans, but it is something that they embraced and popularized, and it became associated with that culture. Colonization obviously plays into it as well.

RC It's cross-fertilization.

JA When I'm wearing Ankara print, I'm very aware of all the cultural connections that are wrapped into it, but I'm also aware of the stigma that's attached to it in this country because Black people embrace it in Africa.

Audience You talked about reciprocity. In music, a lot of people talk about how if you're just being your authentic self, you can do whatever you want basically. But for someone who grew up in a world being socialized by appropriated culture, what comes out can be problematic. How do you think a person with a lot of privilege can approach music in a way that could potentially empower people? It feels like I don't have anything to give in music that's not stolen.

RC Look at the Beastie Boys.

IB **A lot of us are recycling through things and putting our own imprints on them. Our guests touched on the idea of not only reciprocity but acknowledgment and being informed, so that if you're DJing or you're painting or you're creating fashion, you know that there's a rich history. Inform yourself. Know your history and be able to articulate it. That's a good starting place.**

RC But tell your story. If you're white and privileged, tell it, find a beat for it.

MDM Reflect on your taste. That's part of being an active consumer. There are ways that certain things are fed to us because the industry is relying on us to consume them passively.

IB **And they don't think we're going to think on it.**

JA And we don't.

MDM Be thoughtful about what you listen to. If you find yourself always listening to the top 10—because that's what's streaming, that's what's on rotation, that's what's on the playlist, that's what's at the party—you're getting what's being fed to you quite often. Go beyond the top 10. Think about what you listen to and why, and in a way that it comes from your own vantage point of positionality or privilege or what have you. Then talk to people about these things. Talk actively.

RC And also consciously, because there's a lot of negative stuff out there that is basically poison for your ears, your eyes, everything else. And people call it entertainment.

Audience Matthew referenced bell hooks, and that made me think about a topic she often discusses: being enamored with the oppressor's gaze. What are the ways in which oppressed groups internalize the ideas of cultural appropriation?

RC If you're talking about the gaze, I just throw the gaze back at you. I'm not going to be objectified. My work is always engaged and always looking back at the viewer. You don't get the opportunity to judge or to say whatever you want. That's been part of my practice since the very beginning—I'm not interested in being anybody's victim. If anything, I want the power and I want to own that power and I want it to work the way I want it to work, just like others before me did. I take a note from them. I'm not pandering at all. You can just give it back. You own it. You own yourself.

JA Knowledge is so wrapped up in power, and a lot of what I try to do as a writer is to educate. If there's an instance of cultural appropriation, I'll go back to the originators and talk about its history and educate readers about it. These things aren't being taught or talked about, and I'm in the perfect position with a platform to bring that topic to a national conversation.

RC We talk about the consumer. But really, what does the consumer know? You're asking a lot of the consumer to start digging through and trying to find information. The world is not geared for you to do that, either—in fact, it's the polar opposite. The world says not to do that. That way you can keep consuming, and you're not thinking about it. But you have a responsibility.

As an artist, I have a responsibility. Some artists say they don't have a responsibility. Some artists say, "I'm not a Black artist," whatever that means. I take issue with that. I'm Black and I'm proud to be Black. I'm not going to sit up here and tell you, "I'm just an artist." Everything that I do revolves around my Blackness. Why shouldn't I own that?

Audience Jessica, you have educated yourself on the histories of West African textiles, but a West African woman walking down the street who sees you and identifies you as American could easily say, "She's appropriating. She doesn't appreciate my culture." Does appreciation have to be only on the inside? If not, how do you express your appreciation while still wearing those kinds of fabrics?

JA Because I'm a writer, I express appreciation by always writing about it and educating people. Even if it's something where I'm not in my professional capacity, I'm just out and somebody remarks on the skirt, I'll say, "Oh, this is Ankara print. This is where it comes from. I bought this garment when I was in West Africa," and I'll share that information and really embrace it. Not everyone has to do that, but that's what I do, and that's what makes me feel comfortable when I'm participating in anyone else's culture. This includes food, too. I went to Thailand and learned to cook peanut-sauce dishes. When I have people over and I'm making dinner, I'll explain the history of what I'm making.

Culture is so fascinating to me. There's such a beautiful tapestry, especially in this country, and you can't get caught up in the negativity and the racism and the bigotry and the xenophobia. There are so many people who participate in other cultures in a way that is respectful, in a way that pays homage and offers acknowledgment.

RC It's totally about paying homage. My dog's name is Dogon, and people say, "What's the name of your dog?" And I say, "Dogon. They're this ethnic group in Mali. They discovered the Sirius star long before Western astronomers," and I say this whole thing about the star system and where they felt their ancestors came from. And people are blown away. I do that in the Hamptons all the time on the beach. I give people an entire freaking history lesson on the Dogon each and every time. I feel like it's my responsibility to do that. I'm not going to let them walk away and think, oh, that cute dog's name is Dogon. And I say, "Okay, now that I gave you that little background information, look it up."

JA And people do look it up. That's how information passes. It's storytelling.

Audience A discussion at large, especially on social media, has been about the separation of an artist and their art in relation to an artist's negative actions. Do you think it is an ethical decision to separate an artist and their art in our consumer-heavy society?

MDM Unless you can split a person into pieces, it's not possible. The artist exists. The person exists in society in the world that they live and create in—even if they sit inside a box for ten years. Harriet Jacobs, an enslaved woman, was isolated in a crawl space for seven years; later she would write a memoir. It was still reflective of what was happening in the world around her. So an artist declaring that their work is "apolitical" or "separate from" or should just "be seen as art" is bogus: it carries political statements and it's made by a human being who is living in this world and society in real time.

IB **It's a multilayered question. There are ethical issues that arise when you have an artist who, as an individual, is problematic. You also have their cultural output. There are ethics involved: How could this person who did X, Y, and Z, create this? At the same time, as a creative person, once you put your work out there, it doesn't exist as just work. It exists as your work coming from you as a creative cultural producer and individual. Many people would say it's difficult to separate the artist from their art because the creative output has the imprint of the creator.**

Audience This is a nuanced question. What about people who are racially ambiguous or white-passing or are of two different races or have grown up with a culture whose creations they're using but don't get the flack of the stereotype that other people do? Halsey, for instance, is white-passing and received negative feedback for wearing braids, but she's part Black.

MDM People have to exist in their own bodies in the way that they feel they belong—which also comes with dealing with one's own relationship to an awareness of both privilege and the oppression that one carries simultaneously. And those things can vary depending on where you are, who you're interacting with, and what's happening.

Because colorism is about reception, it's also about understanding how people are perceiving. So that means recognition of whether someone is white-passing is required in that public sphere because there's also a claiming of a certain Black ancestry publicly. There are concerns about capitalizing on the "one-drop rule" without actually engaging with both the privilege and the difficulty of what it means to live in that ambiguous racial space.

Audience I'm Dominican and Puerto Rican and when I see someone who's not Dominican or Puerto Rican rocking a *chacabana*, I think it's interesting that people think it's fresh and it's cool. When I talk to my parents about it—my father is an immigrant from the Dominican Republic and my mother is a child of immigrants—they are happy that people like our culture. I don't know how to respond to that—we're coming from different viewpoints. My father's a working guy. My mom is working. We're on a college campus talking about these things. How do I respond without seeming uppity?

MDM Herman Gray's essay "Subject(ed) to Recognition" hits on the difficult part of what you're saying, especially being in our neoliberal consumer commercial culture. What does it mean for people to gain visibility but that then becomes another way of consumption and erasure? The essay takes into account what it means for people to see themselves represented or appreciated in any space, which makes a difference when they have been so marginalized or jettisoned. So there's great value to that recognition that your folks have.

IB **History is important and it's incumbent on those of us who are younger to acknowledge that. My father comes out of a colonial culture in East Africa. Your parents had a different experience than you did. What may seem like a step toward positivity or a step toward assimilation for their generation could seem undesirable to you and me, but that doesn't minimize it or make it less than.**

There's a way that you can have a conversation with questions: "When you came and you wore the clothes that you wore, what did people say? What was the reception? What was the perception?" You might be amazed at some of the similarities between your parents' experiences and your current-day experience. It's a way of listening and educating yourself. We think Black Lives Matter just appeared, but it was preceded by the civil rights movement. It's educating yourself, and it's also listening to your parents' experience. Then work to establish that lineage from then until now and share your experience. It's about having that conversation with older generations where you actually have an opportunity to extend lineage. ▲