

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION: WHERE IS THE LINE DRAWN?

Seeking Understanding: My Sister, My Responsibility®

Developed by Dr. Suzette Walden Cole

Senior partner and co-founder of Cross Cultural Fraternal Advisors Initiative (CCFAI)

TIME | 60 minutes

Objectives:

- Distinguish between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation or exchange.
- Recognize the ways cultural appropriation occurs and the impact on those characterized.
- Explore action steps to celebrate other cultures and prevent and respond to incidents of appropriation.

Group size:

- The program is best facilitated with a group of fewer than 150 members.
- If your group has more than 150 members, we suggest running two or more sessions (either separately or concurrently) to cultivate a more conducive learning environment.

Setup:

- Choose a space where the group can sit and face the facilitator comfortably.
- Use a room without fixed furniture and with an open space in front.
- It is best to reserve a room where groups of two to three people can work comfortably throughout the workshop.
- You will play a PowerPoint presentation during the workshop, so you will need to connect a laptop to a projector and screen or open the presentation from a web browser.
- Confirm you can amplify sound. You may need a mic depending on the space and your ability to project. Using a mic is the most inclusive option in case of unknown hearing impairments.
- Make a copy of the “Cultural Appropriation: Where is the Line Drawn?” handout for each participant.
- It is preferable to have a remote to change the PowerPoint slides.

Preparation:

- Reflect on personal experiences with cultural appropriation both as a perpetrator and target. You may find **this article**, discussing how cultural appropriation is normalized and why it is often difficult to recognize helpful.
- Think about the ways these concepts show up on campus and in everyday life for members of the chapter. It may be helpful to refer to the handout with images and examples captured from across the U.S.
- Familiarize yourself with the shared language definitions and the concepts in the Unpacking Power and Privilege and Microaggressions: Why They’re not so Micro workshops.
- Consider the areas where you and/or the Executive Committee officers think the chapter has work to do and/or any incidents that may have occurred on campus.
- There are six workshops in the Seeking Understanding component of *My Sister, My Responsibility*. We recommend facilitating the workshops in this order: In My Sister’s Shoes, Personal and Social Identity, Genuine Conversations, Cultural Appropriation, Microaggressions, Unpacking Power and Privilege.

Materials needed:

- Projector and screen
- PowerPoint
- “Cultural Appropriation: Where is the Line Drawn?” handout
- “Cultural Appropriation: Where is the Line Drawn?” supplemental resource
- Flip chart paper and markers

Resources:

- 1. 6 Ways You’re Taught to appropriate (Not Appreciate) Other Cultures**
 - <https://everydayfeminism.com/2015/11/ways-taught-to-appropriate/>
- 2. Teens on TikTok Have No Clue They’re Perpetuating Racist Stereotypes**
 - <https://bit.ly/RacistStereotypesTikTok>
- 3. Unsettling America**
 - <https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/about/>
- 4. Savior Complex**
 - <http://bit.ly/WhiteSaviorIndustrialComplex>

INTRODUCTION | 7 minutes

The facilitator should introduce him/her/themselves, welcome and thank participants for attending, and share why they are excited to lead this session.

Distribute the handout for the session.

FACILITATOR TIP

Expand on the objectives as a quick preview of what is to come.

Share:

- Let's start with talking about why we're here today.
- As we engage together today, I want you to reflect on how this aligns with our Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom Key Value.
- As we know from our *Creed*, Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom means we are open to new ideas and perspectives, we seek out opportunities to interact with and learn from people of different backgrounds, and we discuss different values and beliefs in a comfortable manner.
- While there may be times today that our conversation feels uncomfortable, remember we are sisters and we are all here to learn and gain a deeper understanding of our values.
- With that, I want to share some of our objectives for this workshop.

Read the objectives on the PowerPoint.

Ask:

- Why are these objectives important to us as a chapter, as sisters and as a community?

Thank volunteers who share. Be sure to touch on the following:

- These objectives ground us in the Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom Key Value. Along with furthering our growth in one of our Nine Key Values, these conversations allow us to further develop Belonging, one of ZTA's Five Areas of Sisterhood.
- For us to grow as a chapter and as sisters, it is important to take the time to understand each other in a deeper way.
- Beyond impacting our sisterhood, having a better understanding of identities strengthens our empathy and compassion with everyone we meet.

Share instructions:

- We should set some common expectations for our time together today.



- We're talking about cultural appropriation. This topic can be tough to talk about because we all have different experiences with cultural appropriation.
- Honesty and vulnerability are important. This workshop is only effective when you participate. The more we share our personal stories, the more experiences we can learn from; but more importantly, this knowledge gives us a greater understanding of each other.
- Even though I am presenting, I will also share my story with honesty and vulnerability.

Discuss:

- What are expectations we have of each other as we navigate the session together?

FACILITATOR TIP

Give them time to process. Count to at least ten before you fill the potential silence in the space.

Be sure to touch on the following that expand beyond honesty and vulnerability:

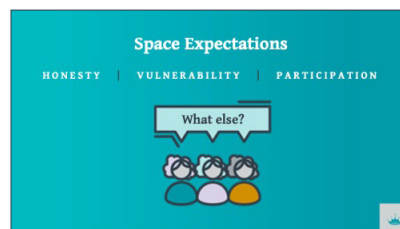
- Speak from the first-person ("I") perspective.
- Listen actively.
- Respect silence.
- Share your thoughts, even if you don't have the right words.
- Uphold confidentiality. Treat the candor of others as a gift. Assume that personal identities, experiences and perspectives shared in this space are confidential unless you are given permission to share them.
- Lean into discomfort. Learning happens on the edge of our comfort zones. Push yourself to be open to new ideas and experiences, even if they seem uncomfortable.

Share:

- In an effort to ensure we are all in a position to contribute today, let's be sure we have a common understanding of some terms that may come up in our discussion.
- Given the complexities of how cultural appropriation shows up, there are a number of terms listed. These are also on your handout for reference as we explore cultural appropriation in a more focused way.

Refer to PowerPoint slides with definitions.

- Now that we have some group definitions, let's begin exploring cultural appropriation, how it shows up and the ways it impacts our lives and those around us.



Shared Language	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture: The cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religions, customs of time, values, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people over the course of generations through individual and group learning. • Inclusion: Creating an environment of open participation from all individuals with different ideas and perspectives where everyone feels they have a voice, are valued and feel validated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intent vs. Impact: A concept typically applied when there is a negative outcome or experience. Intent is a crucial aspect of our actions, and it does not negate the impact to ourselves or another whether intentional or unintentional, just because the intent behind a statement or scenario is innocuous does not mean the impact is not harmful. In other words, just because we didn't mean to hurt someone in a situation does not mean we didn't hurt them. • Privilege: Unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged or dominant cultural group membership.
Shared Language	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypes: A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular group of people or culture. • Dominant culture: A community of people whose access to institutional and structural power has been structurally guaranteed, regardless of the size of the population. As a result, the community routinely disenfranchises and disempowers the most vulnerable communities, known as the minoritized populations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minoritized culture: A community of people whose access to institutional and structural power has been severely limited, regardless of the size of the population. As a result, the community is constantly being disenfranchised and disempowered by the dominant population.
OWNING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES	OWN THE SPACE. BE HEARD. BE RESPONSIBLE.

HOW DO I KNOW IF IT'S CULTURAL APPROPRIATION? | 18 minutes

Share:

- Recognizing that we may have different levels of understanding regarding whether or not an action is considered cultural appropriation, we want to provide a foundation for our discussion.
- MTV's "Decoded with Franchesca Ramsey" tackles issues of race, pop culture and other difficult topics through sketch comedy. Let's listen as this episode debunks seven myths associated with cultural appropriation and breaks down the distinctions between appropriation, appreciation and exchange.

Advance slide. Video should play automatically.

Share instructions:

- Find someone who you haven't talked to in a while or do not know well. Once you find your partner, determine who is going to share first. Address the questions on the slide and listen for the "switch" at the halfway point.
- You will each have three minutes to share.

Walk around to different people to check on the progress of participants throughout the activity. Remind the participants to raise their hand if they are able or call out if they have any questions.

At three minutes into sharing, announce that it is time to switch so the other partner can share their responses to the questions.

After two more minutes, give participants a one-minute warning.

Discuss:

- What are the distinctions the video made between cultural appropriation and exchange?
- What groups of people can be possible targets of cultural appropriation?
- Does anyone want to share their takeaway?
- Why is this type of conversation important to us as ZTA members?

Allow for five to seven responses.

FORMS OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION | 11 minutes

Share instructions:

- Cultural appropriation is defined as "the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture." This disrespect is often the result of not understanding the impact our actions or words may have on others.

How do I know if it is cultural appropriation?

 **Play video in PowerPoint.**

THINK | PAIR | SHARE

- Find a partner.
- How are you feeling?
- What stood out to you from the video?
- Did any of the examples resonate with you? Why?
- You will each have three minutes to share your thoughts.

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LET'S TALK ABOUT MY SISTER, MY RESPONSIBILITY

Cultural Appropriation Defined

- The act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture

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LET'S TALK ABOUT MY SISTER, MY RESPONSIBILITY

- Navigating the relationship between bias, privilege and cultural appropriation does not absolve people of taking responsibility for their problematic behaviors or language.
- Let's tackle how they show up in everyday life as a group. As we delve deeper, we may have to confront some past harms we have inflicted. Be gentle with yourself and others as we learn more about this topic.
- Stories/examples shared in the next part of our session may also trigger those who have experienced their culture being appropriated. Let's all be mindful and practice self-care by stepping out of the room if needed.

FACILITATOR TIP

It may be helpful to refer to the **supplemental resource** with images and examples captured from across the U.S.

For TikTok-specific references, you may find the information [here](#) helpful.

For groups of 75 or more people, consider asking participants to share with the person they are sitting near. For groups of fewer than 75 people, we recommend mini-group breakouts following the instructions below.

- As you are able, get into groups of four to six people with those in the room who you haven't talked to in a while or do not know well.

Once everyone is settled in their groups, walk through a few of the examples of cultural appropriation listed on the slide for reference. Then, provide the instructions below.

- Cultural appropriation is often highlighted in high-profile media reports manifesting in a variety of instances ranging from blackface to inappropriate fashion choices.
- However, it can also arise in very personal and intimate settings when close family, friends and sisters share inappropriate jokes or actions based on how people identify.
- Use these discussion prompts to guide your discussion. You do not need to touch upon all of them. We are going for depth, not breadth.
 - Do any of the examples stand out to you?
 - How do you feel seeing this list?
 - Have you experienced cultural appropriation, either by committing an act or having your culture targeted? If so, what happened? How did it impact you?
- You will have about seven minutes to discuss.

Walk around to different people to check on the progress of participants throughout the activity. Remind the participants to raise their hand if they are able or call out if they have any questions.

Examples of Cultural Appropriation

- **Themed events:** First Nation themes (tribal events); Mexican
- **Costumes:** "Sexy Indian Princess" wearing sombreros/ponchos; use of cultural makeup, including tribal symbols
- **Comments/gestures:** "spirit animal," "tomahawk chop"
- **Hairstyles:** Wearing locks or cornrows when not natural for your culture
- **Social media posts:** "Hot Cheetos Girl," "Snow Bunny," and other TikTok trends that feature stereotypes
- **Advertisements:** "Go Greek and Meet Your Migros," "Welcome to the Tribe"
- **Programs** that typify the stereotype of a culture

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- Do any of the examples stand out to you?
- How do you feel seeing this list?
- Have you experienced cultural appropriation, either by committing an act or having your culture targeted? If so, what happened? How did it impact you?

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At three minutes into sharing, announce that it is time to switch so the other partner can share their responses to the questions.

After three more minutes, give participants a one-minute warning.

Discuss:

- What are you thinking?
- How are you feeling?
- What were some of the situations you discussed?
- Would anyone else like to offer anything up to the group for consideration?

Allow for four to five responses depending on time.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS | 11 minutes

Share:

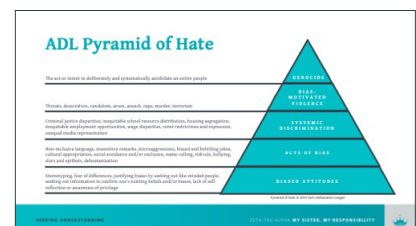
- There are those who say people have become too sensitive when it comes to cultural appropriation. We must remember that sometimes we lack the lenses to see the impact of appropriation because of our privilege and/or bias. This is why it is necessary for us to engage in discussions like these and educate ourselves.
- We want to be certain we hear the voice of a community that feels appropriated through their first-hand experience. With that in mind, let's consider this quote.

Read the quote from an *Unsettling America* post on the slide.

- This quote provides some context for us from the lens of a group who experiences their culture being appropriated on what they say feels like a “regular basis.”
- **Unsettling America**, is an indigenous people advocacy and education group. If this quote feels heavy, it should. Let's explore what this means on a different level.
- The Anti-Defamation League released a new Pyramid of Hate in 2019 to highlight “the prevalence of bias, hate and oppression in our society.”

Walk through each level of the pyramid. Highlight that you will come back to the “Acts of Bias” tier and cultural appropriation in a moment.

- We see “cultural appropriation” listed in the second tier under “Acts of Bias.” We said we would come back to that point in a moment. The ADL chose a pyramid to illustrate the escalation that unchecked bias can have as it becomes accepted and normalized.
- In essence, the actions at the bottom provide the foundation for discrimination. This is one of the reasons we need to work toward preventing and disrupting cultural appropriation.
- As members of Zeta Tau Alpha, we know that creating and fostering a sense of belonging only makes us stronger. We must



be willing to accept and understand that engaging in cultural appropriation (whether intentionally or unintentionally) harms the people of that culture.

- This is one of the reasons why talking about cultural appropriation can be so challenging. It is a complex issue.

Discuss:

- What are your thoughts?
- How does understanding the Pyramid of Hate help us recognize the impacts of cultural appropriation?
- How does having these conversations help us grow in sisterhood?
- Are there any examples we can think of where we see bias play out on campus or in the community?

Allow for five to six responses.

- Given how commonly cultural appropriation occurs, we don't often consider the impact on those whose culture is being appropriated. It's especially easy to ignore the impact if someone from that culture says they are "okay" with what is happening, as was highlighted in the video. Remember, though, one person cannot speak for an entire culture.
- It is the cumulative effects from constant negative interactions that can feel like death by a thousand paper cuts for the receiver. Unpacking the impacts is an essential step in understanding how to celebrate and foster an inclusive sisterhood and working to end these behaviors.

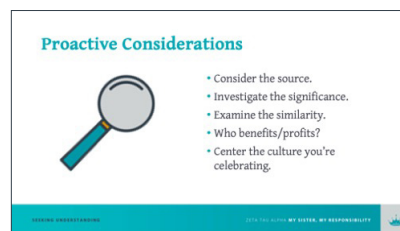
Walk through the impacts using the slide for reference.



PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION | 9 minutes

Share:

- Showing appreciation for others' cultures requires courage and commitment to diversity and inclusion even—and especially—when those individuals are not present.
- A key takeaway from our time together is recognizing our ability to tackle these complex issues. Let's talk about the ways we can take action and proactive considerations.
 - Consider the source.
 - » Is there a history of exploitation or other social power dynamic at play for the group or culture? For example, think about the exploitation of indigenous peoples and how their symbols and costuming have been used. Remember the quote from Unsettling America we shared.
 - » Are the people/the culture from whom this imagery, item or custom originates benefiting?



- » Has the source community invited you to share in this? This could look like your being invited/requested to dress in traditional attire for a friend's celebration or event.
- Investigate the significance.
 - » Is it an everyday object or is it sacred?
 - » What is the original meaning and is that meaning being preserved/highlighted?
- Examine the similarity.
 - » How similar is it to the original culture/group or artifact?
 - » Is it portraying a cartoonish caricature or demeaning, degrading, or promoting a stereotype?
 - » Is it just a piece of an image, custom or practice out of context?
- Who benefits/profits from the use of culture?
 - » Is someone selling this piece of culture to you?
 - » Are you benefiting from participating in or using this culture (e.g., using it to seem “cool” or gain access to spaces/people)?
- Center the culture you're celebrating.
 - » Are you using a reliable source?
 - » Is there a cultural center with whom you can partner?
 - » Are you inviting sisters who share that culture to assist in celebrating without tokenizing them or asking them to “entertain” the chapter?
 - » Is there a cultural exchange?
- There are ways to utilize our privilege and power to elevate others and take steps to call attention to cultural appropriation while being careful not to fall prey to a “**savior complex**”⁴ or aiding in a self-serving manner.
- Let's walk through the action steps we can take to prevent unnecessary harm and seek understanding in a meaningful way:
 - **Practice consistent mindfulness.** Learn from your personal biases and fears. Taking the Harvard Implicit Association Test, or IAT, can be helpful in unmasking our individual areas of implicit bias. Journaling and practicing and self-reflection allows us to be mindful about areas for continued development.
 - **Start with the self.** Our work in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion should not be about us. If it becomes about us, then we need to step back from the action. When we are in positions of power, we need to ensure we surround ourselves with those who have different lenses than we have to allow us to be inclusion-focused.
 - **Create space for authentic, original voices to speak for themselves whenever possible.** If there is an opportunity for minoritized voices to speak for themselves, foster that space. We should not be speaking over others or telling their stories for



them. Fostering equity means that we listen more than we speak. What voices are missing from our decision-making tables?

- **Name it.** Being silent in instances where people express inappropriate jokes or actions based on how people identify is not enough. When someone commits these acts, you have to be prepared to name it and call it what it is: cultural appropriation. “That really is not funny,” or “Can I give you some feedback?” may be helpful conversation starters to share the impact of someone’s words or actions. Also be willing to have conversations about your own actions and listen to how they may have impacted or harmed others.
- **Commit to act.** Personally stand against all forms of bias and discrimination. Engage others in conversations about cultural appropriation. Seek opportunities for meaningful cultural exchange and celebration. Be responsive. Reach out to the person who caused the harm and discuss why/what the intent behind their statement/action was. Brainstorm with the person how they might engage in a restorative practice.

Discuss:

- What actions can you take in your current roles on campus and beyond?
- What can you do to be more proactive?
- How can you engage others in these conversations?

Allow for three to four responses.



WRAP UP | 4 minutes

Share:

- Cultural appropriation happens all too often. What we do when we see it speaks to our character and our value for others.
- Take a moment to write down on your handout a commitment you can make today to share the information from our discussion or a key takeaway from our time together in your handout.

Ask:

- Can I get a few volunteers to share what they wrote on their handout?

Allow for two to three responses.

- Thank you all for the time and energy everyone brought to our conversations today. Let’s not let these discussions and the inspired actions that follow suit be limited to today. Let’s continue to move forward so we can make a difference and get better.



CULTURAL APPROPRIATION: WHERE IS THE LINE DRAWN? HANDOUT

Developed by Dr. Suzette Walden Cole

Senior partner and co-founder of Cross Cultural Fraternal Advisors Initiative (CCFAI)

SHARED LANGUAGE

- **Culture:** The cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people over the course of generations through individual and group striving.
- **Inclusion:** Creating an environment of open participation from all individuals with different ideas and perspectives where everyone feels they have a voice, are valued and feel validated.
- **Intent vs. Impact:** A concept typically applied when there is a negative outcome or experience. Intent is a crucial aspect of our actions, and it does not negate the impact to ourselves or another whether intentional or unintentional. Just because the intent behind a statement or scenario is innocuous does not mean the impact is not harmful. In other words, just because we didn't mean to hurt someone in a situation does not mean we didn't hurt them.
- **Privilege:** Unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged or dominant cultural group membership.
- **Stereotype:** A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular group of people or culture.
- **Dominant culture:** A community of people whose access to institutional and structural power has been structurally guaranteed, regardless of the size of the population. As a result, the community routinely disenfranchises and disempowers the most vulnerable communities, known as the minoritized populations.
- **Minoritized culture:** A community of people whose access to institutional and structural power has been severely limited, regardless of the size of the population. As a result, the community is constantly being disenfranchised and disempowered by the dominant population.

HOW DO I KNOW IF IT IS CULTURAL APPROPRIATION?

Notes From MTV's "Decoded" Video

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION DEFINED

The act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture.

EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Do any of the examples stand out to you?

How do you feel seeing this list?

Have you experienced cultural appropriation, either by committing an act or having your culture targeted? If so, what happened? How did it impact you?

UNPACKING THE IMPACTS

PROACTIVE CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider the source.
- Investigate the significance.
- Examine the similarity.
- Who benefits/profits?
- Center the culture you're celebrating.

ADDRESSING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

- Practice consistent mindfulness.
- Start with self.
- Create space for authentic, original voices to speak for themselves whenever possible.
- Name it.
- Commit to act.

TAKEAWAY AND COMMITMENT

What is your biggest takeaway from our time together and one commitment to furthering the work we started here today in preventing and addressing cultural appropriation?

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION: WHERE IS THE LINE DRAWN? SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCE

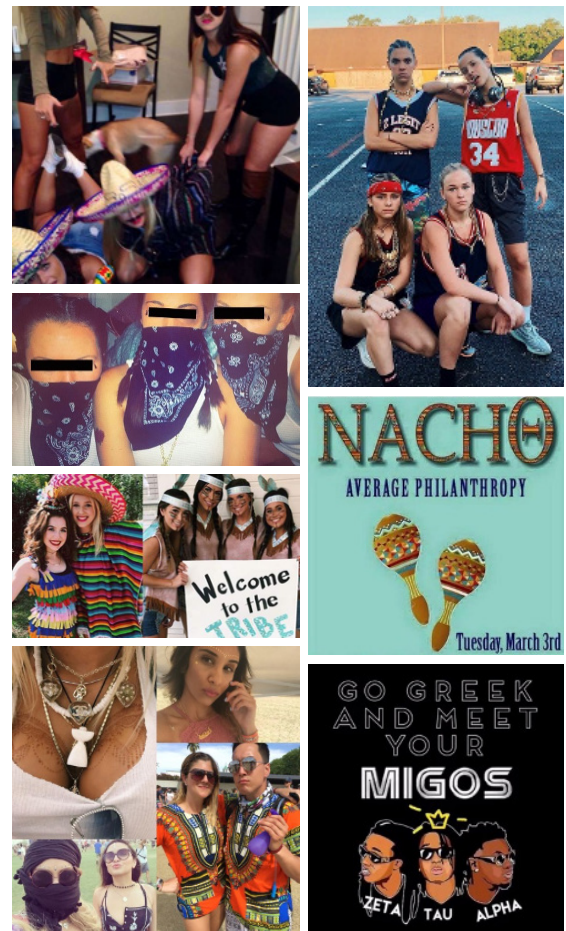
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Note: All images pulled from news stories associated with cultural appropriation or social media outlets posted for public consumption.

THEMED EVENTS, COSTUMES AND ADVERTISEMENTS FROM U.S. INSTITUTIONS

- **“USA vs. Mexico”** event where members wore sombreros, large fake mustaches and border patrol disguises and were encouraged to play a drinking game in which the students dressed as agents tried to “catch” students portraying immigrants, fake wall in the middle of the party with Mexican-themed drinks on one side and Texan-themed drinks on the other, etc.
- **“Pilgrims and Indians”** or **“Colonial Bros and Nava-hos”** event where members wore ceremonial Indigenous or Native American costumes
- **“Thugs for Life,” “Merry Cripsmas”** or **“Bloods and Crips”** event where members dressed as stereotypical gang members and drug lords and drank juice out of hollowed out watermelons, etc.
- **“Kanye Western”** event where members showed up in blackface
- **“Asia Prime”** event where members wore sumo wrestling outfits, silk robes and chopstick hair accessories, parroted stereotypical Asian accents, etc.
- **“Beer Olympics”** or **“Around the World”** event where members wore outfits that have cultural significance to other countries
- **“Go Greek and Meet Your Migos”** or **“Welcome to the Tribe”** advertisements that exploit a culture for the purpose or benefit of the organization while disregarding the culture from which it is drawing



OTHER FORMS OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

- Hairstyles
 - Natural hair discrimination has been a long-standing issue for many Black, Indigenous and people of color. Wearing locks, corn rows, etc. when not natural for your culture is problematic.
- Social media posts
 - “Hot Cheetos Girl,” “Snow Bunny” and other TikTok trends that feature stereotypes, singing lyrics to a song that contains the N-word or other mimicking/caricaturizing of a culture for entertainment
- For more information about trends and their cultural impacts, visit bit.ly/RacistStereotypesTikTok.