

How the Melting Pot Became 'Cultural Appropriation'

When our parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents voluntarily immigrated to the United States, they brought with them not only a desire to embrace a new homeland, but also a desire to become culturally "American." This didn't mean rejecting their cultural identity; it meant making room in it for new influences, which is why they often identified themselves as Italian-Americans, or Irish-Americans, or Chinese-Americans. Not all Americans came here voluntarily, of course, but while the Native Americans fought to retain any cultural identity, freed slaves generally sought to assimilate into the greater American culture too.

This impulse to adapt by keeping some traditions while embracing new ones is what has made our country the rich and diverse "[melting pot](#)" it is today; the notion that one's identity as an American always included space for new things, whether that was food, hairstyles, language, or even relationships, has made our nation wonderfully heterogeneous. Not everyone loved the idea, of course, and there have always been people who embraced a misguided, nostalgic, or even racist view that our national identity was somehow better in the past.

For the vast majority of immigrants, however, coming to America was about pursuing the dream of a better life; what better way to celebrate that aspiration than to learn the language and adopt American ways of doing things? That's the melting pot. And this American Experiment has been a tremendous success because of our willingness to embrace many aspects of immigrant culture and make them our own.

Today, however, the melting pot has gone cold. Instead, there are members of the left that view the adoption of cultural

traits and characteristics as “[cultural appropriation](#)” and who try to shame anyone who practices it. In their view, language, dress, cooking—even makeup and jewelry—have a specific ethnic or cultural identity and *only people who are of that ethnicity or cultural heritage can wear or use them*.

Previous generations of immigrants saw opportunity in encouraging their fellow Americans to embrace their Old-World traditions. Today, this cultural *mélange* is viewed with suspicion and deemed politically incorrect. Consider a few recent examples: If you wear hoop earrings on a college campus, the Cultural Appropriation Police might [assault you for stealing a Latino fashion style](#); if you’re white and have [braided your hair](#), dare to [wear a kimono](#) when you’re not Japanese, or even produce a clothing ad with women dancing on the beach (to [a song](#) that was “appropriated” from African-Americans), you are also in breach of PC norms. [A white superhero who knows martial arts](#)? Yup, that’s cultural appropriation too, even if you’re The Iron Fist. Or [a line of shoes inspired by gay activists](#)? That’s also appropriation because only gay people should be allowed to wear “Queercore” shoes.

What these activists don’t seem to understand is that not only is it perfectly normal for cultures to absorb elements of other cultures, but that this is precisely what has made America such a wonderful nation. Without cultural appropriation, we can’t cook and eat favorite American foods like pizza, burritos, or gyros; we also can’t wear many popular fashions; we can’t decorate our houses to match our own tastes. We can’t even talk. After all, most slang and many words in modern English [originated from other languages](#). And that, *mis amigos*, would not be dope; we’d have to stop rendezvousing with friends at the local cafe, deli, or patio area, and the Renaissance would need a new name.

Come to think of it, if we continue on this path of labeling anything and everything an act of “cultural appropriation,” we

can just call our future The Dark Ages. Assuming that phrase doesn't originate in another language or culture, that is.

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