

Adriana Castillo  
BUF 4700  
Prof. Appelstein  
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## Racism and Cultural Appropriation In The Fashion Industry

It can not be ignored that like in many other industries, the fashion industry has been home to many incidents that have been occurring in the last couple of years related to bad behaviors including racism and cultural appropriation. Although these behaviors should not be acceptable, it is noted that many brands or fashion companies have not or are not doing enough to avoid such uncomfortable and unacceptable episodes. Three fashion companies related to this kind of behavior are Gucci, H&M, and Dior.

Although H&M is one of the largest and most successful fast fashion brand in the United States and around the world, that does not mean that many unethical incidents and bad behaviors never occurs. Last year, this multinational company was under fire after they had had a black kid modeling one of their hoodies with the slogan “Coolest monkey in the jungle” (Blanchard, 2019). After many had erupted in outrage as a response to this, H&M stated: “We have got this wrong, and we agree that even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated wherever it exists (Blanchard, 2019)”. The thing about this whole incident is that they put a black kid to represent what the hoodie was stating instead of a kid with another ethnicity. Therefore, they should have known that this was so wrong and racist.

Unfortunately, H&M is not the only company where this kind of behavior occurs. Gucci, an Italian luxury brand was flooded with critics after they designed a polo neck jumper

and balaclava combo that was labeled “Blackface” (Blanchard, 2019). This jumper not only was black but also had a cut-out around the mouth which was also outlined with thick red lips (Blanchard, 2019). Although they never confirmed that it was inspired by Black people, it certainly was and very racist.

Like racism, cultural appropriation in the fashion industry is another bad behavior that has been happening and not enough has been done to stop it from happening. Dior, a luxury goods company featured Jennifer Lawrence, a Caucasian model, for their Cruise 2019 campaign honoring Mexican heritage (Soh, 2018). According to Soh (2018), one person on Instagram stated that “the brand was exploiting the Mexican culture for profits and that they should have used someone from their culture to represent them. The truth is that it should be very comfortable and unfair for Mexicans to see models of other ethnicities honoring a culture heritage without including any real representation of their culture. Not only they are representing a culture, but also wearing their typical clothes, use their music and festivities, when at the end of the day is not even their own culture.

Another brand that was accused of cultural appropriation and heavily criticized for it was Gucci. This was after they sent white models down the runway wearing traditional Sikh turbans in their autumn/winter 2018 show (Petter, 2108). What is very upsetting about this is that there are many successful Sikh models or even brown models in the fashion industry but instead, they decide to have white models. Also, they treat the turban as a fashion accessory, when in reality is something that for Sikhs represents faith, honor, and courage. Indeed, Gucci has no right to give the Sikh turbans another meaning when it is not even part of their culture.

In order to become more aware and culturally sensitive, companies and brands should

“make sure people from the culture it originated from should take part in producing the clothes that are inspired by them” (Soh, 2018). In other words, they should use or hire models that are from that particular region or culture. These models would not only have the opportunity to be part of such an important event but they will also get to represent their own culture or region. If they want to honor culture, they might as well honor and recognize its people in the most respectful way.

In regards to racism, Pham (2019) stated that the idea of “increasing the number of non-white people in top-level positions will produce anti-racist effects is what workplace researchers Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati call the “racial trickle-down effect.” This means that by having more people in top-level positions, there will be more diversity in the workforce and therefore less racism. Not only that but those that are racist within a company will have less chance or power to discriminate against anyone. Another way is by honoring and celebrating every race no matter if it makes or not part of the company’s target market. For example, Gucci, a brand accused of racism, in April 2017 released a “Soul Scene” campaign for Pre Fall 2019 in which they celebrated and captured black the essence of black seventies souls (Lawson, 2019). For many, this was a progressive win.

In conclusion, racism and cultural appropriation are two issues in the fashion industries that have become part of everyone’s lives. Whether or not many of the incidents related to H&M, Dior, and Gucci, are racist or dishonoring a culture, it is something that should not be permitted. Because this issue can not continue happening, many brands such as Gucci are learning from their mistakes and taking action to promote cultural appreciation.

## References

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