

Administration

▼ Folder administration

- Edit settings
- Locally assigned roles
- Permissions
- Check permissions
- Filters
- Competency breakdown
- Logs
- Backup
- Restore

► Course administration

Navigation

Dashboard

🏠 Site home

▼ My courses

CCI_REGISTRATION

Crane_Faculty_Association

MUSIC_HISTORY_THEORY_COMPOSITION

85342_MUCB323.002_brooksem_SPRING21

86004_MUCH695.001_brooksem_SPRING21

New_Faculty_Staff_Seminar

Online_Pedagogy_Session_8

86003_MUCH495.001_brooksem_SPRING21

93064_MUCH611.001_brooksem_FALL20

75398_MUCH611.086_brooksem_SUMMER20

■ More...

▼ Courses

▼ (hidden)

82135_MUCH495.001_MUCH695.002_brooksem_SPRING20

► Participants

Badges

Competencies

Grades

Week 13: April 27 through May 1—Cultural Appropria...

▼ May 1—Cultural Appropria...

Reading and Forum Posts: Monday, April 27: Cultura...

► Spring 2021

► Winterim 2021

Committees, Professional Development, & More

Dashboard > Courses > (hidden) > 82135_MUCH495.001_MUCH695.002_brooksem_SPRING20 > Week 13: April 27 through May 1—Cultural Appropria... > Reading and Forum Posts: Monday, April 27: Cultura...



Reading and Forum Posts: Monday, April 27: Cultural Appropriation

Reading:

1) Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao, Excerpts from "Introduction to Cultural Appropriation: A Framework for Analysis," In *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997): 1-8, 17-20.

* I apologize that the quality on this is slightly blurry (exciting distance-learning library workarounds!). While the reading as a whole can get a little technical, I'd urge you to think about the following issues:

How do the authors define cultural appropriation? What is problematically broad about this concept? What does this concept have to do with power? What are four common arguments that people often make about why cultural appropriation is bad? (pp. 8-9).

2) Brent Michael Davids, "Cultural Appropriation in Classical Music?" <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/cultural-appropriation-in-classical-music/> (I have also attached a PDF of this blogpost below)

Listening:

Caroline Shaw, "Allemande" from *Partita for 8 voices*, score attached below.



- ▼ 
- Davids Cultural Appropriation.pdf

Shaw Sheet Music.pdf

Ziff and Rao edited.pdf

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Edit

◀ Discussion Forum: Overall thoughts on the week, only discussion leaders need post

Jump to...

Forum for assignment explained on the Moodle post for Monday, April 27, 2020. Everyone should complete the required post on or before Wednesday, April 29, 11:59pm ▶

Music, Power, & Politics, post-1945

Spring 2020

Student Discussion Forum on Music and Cultural Appropriation

Discussion Forum, Week 13: due on or before Wednesday, April 29, 11:59pm

Topic: Music and Cultural Appropriation

Hi all!

On the forum:

- 1) Please write a short paragraph response considering the concept of cultural appropriation in relation to the readings for this week (the Ziff/Rao and the Davids). While you can pick up on anything you'd like to discuss, this paragraph should at minimum include two fleshed-out comments and one question based on the readings.
- 2) I'd like you to think of a piece of music that you have heard mentioned in relation to the concept of "cultural appropriation." This can be any style of music from any period in time—except it can't be the Caroline Shaw, since we're reading about that already! Please provide the title of the work and a link.

Don't worry about whether you agree that this piece is an example of cultural appropriation or not—just bring up a piece that you've heard someone or some source describe as cultural appropriation. We can talk through some of the various issues at hand on Friday.

Thanks and talk to you all soon! —

Student Response: Cultural appropriation is something we discuss heavily in our choral education classes. I have always been a bit confused on the topic because of how many layers there are to the definition. I'm always too scared I will unintentionally appropriate something when trying to teach my students about a culture they might not be familiar with. This part of the Ziff and Rao reading really stuck with me:

"If our inventive domains are too constricted by this reasoning, are we thereby doomed to creative projects that cannot extend beyond the realm of autobiography?"

I kept going back and forth on how I felt like this. It would be easier if we all just sort of stayed in our own lane, teaching what we knew best. We could collaborate with other artists from different cultures to understand more about their music, but we would never claim to be an expert on music that isn't our own. But does that create too much of a separation? Is there any true learning that would occur if we all stuck to what we knew? I like how in the Davids blog post, he talked about Chanticleer and Kronos Quartet's "modus operandi" to "collaborate directly with indigenous composers for their indigenous-inspired commissions." I feel like that's doing it right. But what if I'm teaching choir in a rural area with very little funding? How am I supposed to navigate this without crossing into the realm of cultural appropriation?

There were two points in the Davids blog post that I found poignant. He said "Forced Culture Change is basically genocide" and "Native Americans today are cultural survivors of the American holocaust, the real world effects of which we still face." I had forgotten that in my 11th-grade American History class, we had this whole discussion on whether or not the actions made by the United States government towards Native Americans were considered genocide. I argued

yes, specifically thinking about The Trail of Tears. Now, reading this article and thinking of it in terms of culture rather than literal deaths, I think it only strengthens the argument that the United States government committed genocide (both literally and figuratively) towards Native Americans, eradicating their culture and forcing them to assimilate. It's extremely disturbing to think about. It's fantastic that people like Brent Michael Davids are out there spreading musical traditions of his culture to others because we need to acknowledge what the US government has done and we need to collaborate with artists like Davids to help their cultures thrive outside of where they derived.

Student Response: 1. As a part of my final project for this class I am researching cultural appropriation as it relates to a specific piece of "Western" classical music. As a part of my project I am also looking into discussions on possibilities of how to continue performing this work while being culturally sensitive. Due to this, I found the discussion in Ziff and Rao's article about legislation connected to cultural appropriation quite intriguing. The authors describe the difficulties of trying to construct an effective legislative response to cultural appropriation. It seems that for such a complicated issue like cultural appropriation the conventional "solution" for problems of injustice cannot apply. From my own research and from personal testimony given in Davids' article, it seems that a very popular response to approaching performing works connected to a culture is having input and in-depth discussion with someone from that culture. Although this might not solve all the issues with the piece in question, it seems to be a necessary first step.

Something I noticed about both of these articles was the amount of open-ended question in them. This similarly occurred in our discussion about border-crossing last week. I think it is really important to acknowledge this fact to show how far we have left to go. It also brings up the fact that there might not be answers for many questions connected to cultural appropriation. Because this is such a sensitive and intricate topic there might be many opinions and perspectives connected to it. I know last year in Phoenix Club we had many discussions about cultural appropriation when trying to plan our program. When looking into a piece from a specific culture, we had two ensemble members bring in perspectives from their friends of that culture and they ended up being completely opposite opinions. Many conversations we had were uncomfortable but that only showed that they were no doubt necessary.

How can we start holding people accountable for cultural appropriation in our own field? What can one do when asked to perform a piece that includes aspects of cultural appropriation?

Ariana Grande/ Seven Rings

Student Response: I feel like whenever cultural appropriation comes up in discussion there's always that one person who says something along the lines of, "Well I don't see why this is offensive, I'm just trying to make art and you're policing my creativity." When it's phrased like that it makes cultural appropriation seem like it's focused on stopping any cultural diffusion in the arts rather than what it really is: someone profiting off of the work and ideas of a less privileged group of people. There can be harmonious exchange of ideas if the people in the higher position of power reach out to the marginalized culture they are interested in and allow them to take the reins on the particular project. Brent Michael Davids' comparison of Inuit sounds as used by Caroline Shaw and the Kronos Quartet shows the difference between appropriation and appreciation: Shaw did not acknowledge any Inuit singers for sharing their vocal techniques while the Kronos Quartet seeks out Indigenous artists to commission works by. In a justification for Shaw's culture-mixing, Brad Wells said that, "The question of cultural appropriation assumes that the powerful culture is the only one that is involved in the exchange, but in fact these exchanges are happening constantly...They can enrich everybody." The ignorance in his statement astonished me; how can he equate white Americans using the music of a culture they almost wiped out with that same culture assimilating to American culture in order to survive? Shaw and Wells have since apologized for their uncredited use of Inuit techniques, but is this too little too late?

I can't find a recording of this piece, but in September 2019 it was revealed that Keiko Yamada, a composer of pieces for young string players such as 'Konnichiwa', was actually the pen name of noted composer Larry Clark. Clark has claimed that he assumed the fake identity of Yamada to help promote diversity, but was he really just stealing opportunities from actual Japanese women? 'Konnichiwa' is still being published (now under Clark's name), leading many to question if it should still be performed.

Student Response: The article defined appropriation as “taking from a culture that is not one’s own of intellectual property, cultural expressions, or artifacts, history, and ways of knowledge.” This is a broad definition and can have many interpretations. “Taking” can be defined in many ways as we have seen throughout history. It is also controversial as to what “culture” is defined as. Does culture fall on the individual or the group? One may associate their own practices or belongings with their culture, but does that mean it is universally associated with the culture? These are a few of the controversies pointed out in the article as to how messy this topic can be, especially if it is discussed as a legal issue. As a response, laws have been discussed, though it is still tough when the topics of copyrighting and trademarks would fall on an owner vs a copier, and if a tradition or practice cannot be traced to one specific creator, this may be hard to enforce.

I have always been curious about the line between cultural influences and appropriation in the music education setting. How can students of any culture learn from others, without the disrespect associated? It was pointed out in the Davids article that not all cultural exchanges are equal, when deep historical powers of taking and genocide can be linked to the situation as well. If the neutralized approach disregards the special properties that every culture has to offer, it is bad to not acknowledge them in the general education setting, though it is also terrible to do so disrespectfully. How can we come to an agreement for learning and growth as a human population, while still protecting the importance of diversity and unique individuality in a respectful way?

2. “Norwegian Wood”- The Beatles

This is a commonly debated song by the band specifically for George Harrison’s use of the sitar in the song. On one hand it can be seen as taking from a culture by the musical elements used in the song, but also it is viewed as an interest that was not taken without credit. Harrison studied with Ravi Shankar, a well-known sitar player and was invested in studying the culture behind it. A quote I read in an article that seems to be applicable to this controversy is “are they a traveler or tourist? A traveler learns from the culture to participate while a tourist looks around for a bit, then takes what they want back home.” There are very clearly multiple sides to the debate, though it is one that we discussed in the History of The Beatles course.

Student Response: The examples laid out in the Ziff and Rao reading highlights the clear moral contradiction that occurs with cultural appropriation. The marginalized group’s ideas/creations do not receive the credit or praise that the person who “stole” it gets. I found it interesting when the article described cultural appropriation having to do with “insiders and outsiders.” I think that is a perfect descriptor of the system in place. Those who are “in” have the world’s attention and get the credit. In addition, the discussion on how to define a connection between communities and the authorship that comes with a community. I had never thought of a group’s ideas in such a way, but it’s absolutely true. Also, I found it interesting when the article discussed the Model Act. I had never heard of government intervention in terms of protecting indigenous intellectual/cultural property. I wonder why the government decided to intervene in this issue? It shows morals legally defined under similar copyright principles.

2) This is pretty self-evident... haha. (link to Katy Perry, “Dark Horse”)

Student Response: Part One: Reading Response

One thing that shocked me when I read it in the Ziff and Rao reading, was the part where they listed stern rebukes in relation to those who view cultural appropriation with derision. The authors listed the quote: “Appropriation is a key buzz-word in the bash-a-honky rhetoric now popular among “minorities” and others who have decided history has given them a raw deal.” When I read this I was taken aback, and it just made me think about the dynamic of those in power vs. those who are oppressed. This stance obviously comes from someone with power who is trying to discredit those who are trying to stand up for themselves. This is how power works, those who have it, discredit the voices of the oppressed in order to keep control and power over them. In the Davids article I was also thinking about the dynamic of people of power keeping their power as I read the following quote. “non-western traditions are more often than not considered unimportant and rendered invisible in western music until, for example, a non-western composer wins a prestigious award.” This got me thinking about how the world of music is so heavily skewed towards western music and it is extremely difficult to win competitions with non-western music because there are so many guidelines that contribute to

the dominance of western music to assure that it keeps hold of that power. What can we as educators do to help educate our students about this and help break the norm?

Part Two: Musical Example

Katy Perry singing "Unconditionally" at the 2013 American Music Awards. This particular song hasn't gotten any backlash for cultural appropriation, but this specific performance was particularly problematic and received a lot of backlash.

Student Response: 1. Within the Ziff and Rao reading, I found it important to note that the authors stress that cultural appropriation as a concept is broad and has no clear definition, stating it "is as indeterminate as any [term] found within the social sciences". This further proves to me that we need to be incredibly cautious when looking into borrowing from other cultures in any matter, not just music. This is a hot topic in the field of higher education and residence life, a field that I am quite involved in outside of music. In a similar vein, I found the quote "culture was a musical fact like gravity" from the Davids reading to further enforce the Ziff and Rao reading. People are all products of their culture, and music is written by people. Those two facts being as they are, all music is of a cultural nature, and must be treated as such, especially within a music classroom. Teaching music without the cultural context is in and of itself appropriation. You have no understanding of what the piece you are teaching means, what function it serves to those within the culture the piece is from. Not only does teaching the cultural background of music give cultural significance to the piece for your students, but it allows for a more "appreciative" approach, rather than appropriation.

2. Vanilla Ice, "Ice Ice Baby"

Student Response: 1) I think that both of these articles mention really important information pertaining to cultural appropriation and the cyclic nature of it all. In the Davids article, I was particularly intrigued in his discussion of how Western music plays a different role in culture in comparison to native American song-ings. According to Davids, these song-ings are sung in powwows to promote sharing, interactivity and individuality. Davids states that cultural borrowing can take place by ensuring specific actions like seeking out cultural leaders from this community, acknowledging equity and respect in that exchange, and forming genuine relationships. But does this necessarily mean that we should? I feel that now knowing what the nature of the powwow is, I would feel uncomfortable performing that music wearing all black during a chorus concert. It personally does not seem right to me.

At the very end of the Ziff/Rao chapter, I found the quote, "Rights are to the law what conscious commitments are to the psyche" very valuable. The fact that the Model Act's purpose was concerning the use of folklore in a state, but then was controlled by the authority of the state also coincides with Patricia Williams' statement. The central idea is that everything is connected to power, and no matter how you present it, I find that its tricky to discern whether or not you are a "countervail oppression" or a "a source of empowerment." Moving forward, how do we navigate this specific idea revolving around cultural appropriation?

2) Music videos and performances provide such clear visuals of cultural appropriation. Selena Gomez/Come and Get It

Student Response: One thing that stood out to me from the Ziff and Rao chapter had to do with the overall idea of intertextuality. I feel as though this concept makes the general idea of cultural appropriation even more difficult to discuss. If one defines cultural appropriation as the act of taking some form of "object" from a culture outside of one's own, it then becomes challenging to prove that these objects are linked to any specific culture. As stated in the chapter, it cannot be assumed that a given artist is working as a tabula rasa. Rather, they are drawing inspiration from many different factors that can easily be linked to other cultures. Nowadays, it doesn't seem very likely that many ideas that people have will be able to connect back to only one culture as the world is incredibly interconnected at this point in time. A question that I can ask based on this is then, "can we truly provide a concrete definition to what cultural appropriation is? If so, where do we draw the line between borrowing from other cultures and taking from them?" Another point that I found to be interesting comes from the Davids article. I realized in reading through that it is very difficult to determine what we define as culture in music. For example, Davids states that he was taken aback by the thought of there being people that do not recognize the cultural aspects of Western music. This is a topic that can be (and has been) disputed by many people. While culture, itself, can be given a definition, it tends to be very broad. For

this reason, there will end up being things that certain people consider to be "cultural" while others do not. It is a very hard thing to give a concrete meaning to.

The song I chose for this is "Ayumi" by Aqua Timez, a Japanese rock band. It seemed like a bit of a stretch, but I'm pretty sure the musical style of this song can let it be classified as cultural appropriation.

Student Response: 1) Between the two articles, there is no easy way to define cultural appropriation. With culture being such a large topic with so many subtopics within, these terms can get looked over. Those who cultural appropriate in music or in other forms claim to be speaking for minority rights. When power is put in the equation, it is easy to over look the history between the two groups. The second article was very informative and spoke well to the truths of ethnic cleansing and forced cultural change. I see it as the history between the oppressor and the oppressed, once killing those for celebrating a "different" culture are now performing it. When ROT was awarded for throat singing, it was for something that was never celebrated before prior to being ripped from the Inuit culture. Why don't they collaborate with these artists, combining and brining together these cultures, rather than taking over?

2) When looking into music, at one point I probably sang along to a song or thought it was catchy but some artists and music videos do it with bad taste. In comparison to last week's topic, there is a difference between using cultural aspects respectfully and in admiration, and stereotyping a culture for comedic effect. Music Videos are a large part of this problem. Katy Perry, "Dark Horse"

Student Response: 1. I know this topic is a topic that is talked about a lot in today's world in music. What Brent David said right at the beginning of the article was really hit home for me in terms of culture and what that means to other people who think about the United States and the culture that we have here. He hears a statement that was said by the Dean of Fine Arts, "Hearing Chinay's work is the first time I've ever heard culture in music." Then David jaw dropped internally and thought that does western music have a culture. This a question that we all think about when we are performing these pieces, what was the time period when composers of western art music are composing their works. Was there a war going on, was there a hard love break up that happens. We don't know unless we do our research. In Music Education classes we talk about this all the time with children's songs and how that can be used in the classroom. My question for you is that When will we have the power to evolve this topic and find the people who know more about a culture and be that bearer that people need to educate people about their own culture?

2. Coldplay and Beyonce Hymn for the Weekend:

Student Response: While reading the articles a few ideas came to me. One of these ideas is tracking how what qualifies as appropriation through time. What was once deemed socially acceptable is no longer the case. One of these examples is minstrel singing and performing, especially in black face. Like Ziff and Rao show, power determines whether something is culture, cultural appropriation or can be allowed to be culturally assimilated. This power is ever changing and evolving with society as well.

What can we as student's do to change the current saturation of Western Musical history and theory in our educational institutions?

Link to Aristocats, "Everybody Wants to Be a Cat"

Student Response: Cultural Appropriation is a very tricky subject as it exists in many contexts in music. I like how Ziff and Roe defined it as "open ended". I think including and blending of cultures in music can be a great thing as long as whoever is composing the work has contextual knowledge of the culture and what they are including makes sense. Some pieces of music and music styles have meaning on their own and no meaning blended with another culture. Unfortunately in music there are many cases where music is not culturally appropriate and one culture is taking advantage of another minority culture. A big example of this could be jazz as it was originated from African American culture but brought up in America and recognized only by white Americans. For musicians to be culturally appropriate they must educate themselves on context. What is being performed? From what culture does it come from? How is it normally performed in that culture? Who is involved? As Ziff and Roe put it, defining the parameters of a cultural group is

difficult. Much thought needs to be put into it before blending cultures in music together. A question I have is when will cultural appropriation be regulated in the music classroom? I see many cases of cultural in-appropriation mostly from high school concerts. Bending cultures is great if done correctly, I think it would be a great chance to have students be more diverse and open minded as well as have somebody from whatever culture they are learning about come in to explain context.

In my high school my chorus teacher assigned the song "Old Man River" to many students for NYSSMA scoring. She gave it to many students without explaining the context of it or how and why it was written resulting in the piece being culturally inappropriate for many students performing it.

Student Response: Cultural appropriation seems to be a very tricky topic to discuss because there is so much ambiguity surrounding it. It is very difficult to describe exactly what cultural appropriation is and it is hard to describe exactly how far something has to go to be defined as cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation can even go the other way in "cultural assimilation." Understanding cultural appropriation, however, is very important in our current political landscape. Many issues today are about minority groups and subjects who are seeking to claim and protect their rights to a cultural heritage.

How can we better define cultural appropriation and try to have more defined lines of what is cultural appropriation and what is cultural appreciation?

Vogue - Madonna

Student Response: Reading the Ziff and Rao article, I realized that there are lots of different kinds of cultural appropriation. I kind of assumed it was only one kind, like a western culture taking from another, like African or Indian. I didn't realize it could also include cultural assimilation. In the article, they bring up the point that maybe Shakespeare appropriated Danish culture in Hamlet. Even though those are both Western cultures, it could still be considered appropriation. Another point this article brings up is if we were to try to limit cultural appropriation, would individuals only be able to write about their own culture? For example, I would only be able to write about female musicians, saxophone related material, and western music culture. I frequently write about jazz and it's history, but since it's founding was in another culture than my own, I wouldn't be able to write about that. I understand the point they're trying to make, but as long as writings are written with sensitivity and respect, I think it would be considered okay. (I didn't know many details about cultural appropriation prior to this reading, but it really helped me understand the depth and debates that go along with it).

The topic of museums came up briefly. It intrigued me because I didn't really consider museums to be related to cultural appropriation before this reading. Do you think museums would have to change their current displays or setups to follow along with the current issues of cultural appropriation? Are there any museums that excel at respecting cultures, or vice versa?

The song I chose is "Norwegian Wood" by The Beatles. This features the instrument sitar which is commonly found in Indian culture and music. This song was written before George Harrison started to take time to really learn the sitar and train the same way musicians do in Indian culture.