



# Racism, Whitewashing, and Cultural Misappropriation

An intersectional study of the confluence of playwrighting, casting practices, and progressive productions as they relate to diversity and inclusion in theatre.

Created for the students of the McLennan College Theatre Department  
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# Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the friends and colleagues who served as my peer-review committee:

Darlisha Blaylock, MCC alum, Waco, TX.

Saddiq Granger, MCC student, violinist, and poet, Waco, TX

Jessica Hall, Photographer and Graphic Designer at Stonecrop Technologies.

Alexis Koleff, Designer/Seamstress at David's Bridal, Waco, TX.

Dr. Malcom Morgan, Professor of Theatre at St. John's College—Santa Fe, NM.

Dr. Ren Powell, Theatre Teacher at Vagen Drama Norway; Playwright and Poet.

William McKeever, CEO of D20 Designs, and US Navy veteran.

# Why do we need to know this?

American theatre, film, and television have a long and problematic history with systemic racism, misogyny, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and ableism:

According to a study conducted by The University of California — Los Angeles, whites eclipse minority groups in every aspect of film and media, ranging from acting to directing films. In 1992, Spike Lee took Norman Jewison to task for directing *Malcolm X* insisting that the “nuances of the civil rights activist’s story would be better served by a Black filmmaker.” Jewison dropped out and Lee directed the film himself. Since then the number of films about Black subjects that have been made by white directors, such as *42* and *The Help*, have been noted by Director John Singleton in his 2016 essay for *The Hollywood Reporter*, saying, “It’s as if the studios are saying, ‘We want it black, just not *that* black.’”

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we should know better and do better. We hope through education and deliberate action toward inclusivity in our productions as well as our classes, to increase the representation of these under-represented groups in both our student population and the plays we produce.

<https://emorywheel.com/whitewashing-appropriation-a-media-norm/>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/white-filmmakers-black-characters-and-the-fear-of-cultural-appropriation/2016/11/11/d9357b70-a50e-11e6-8fc0-7be8f848c492\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/white-filmmakers-black-characters-and-the-fear-of-cultural-appropriation/2016/11/11/d9357b70-a50e-11e6-8fc0-7be8f848c492_story.html)

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/working-hollywood-youre-not-white-859697>

<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/critic-s-notebook-john-singleton-changed-how-black-america-looked-at-1205888>

# Racism on Screen

## First a Definition of Terms

**Blackface**: a white actor wearing makeup/costumes to impersonate a Black character.

**Redface**: a white actor wearing makeup/costumes to impersonate a Native American character.

**Yellowface**: a white actor wearing makeup/costumes to impersonate an Asian/Pacific Islander character.

**Brownface**: a white actor wearing makeup/costumes to impersonate a Latinx/Hispanic character, or an Arab/MENA/Muslim character.

This goes beyond poor casting choices or a lack of diversity, and it certainly isn't cultural misappropriation, because the guilty parties aren't admiring the cultural element, they are mocking it. This is just racism, pure and simple.



# Minstrel Shows 1820's – 1960's

The minstrel show was an American form of entertainment developed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> C before the abolition of slavery. The shows were performed by white actors in “blackface” makeup, lampooning African Americans as dim-witted, lazy, superstitious, and buffoonish. By 1848 Blackface minstrel shows were the National art form. Minstrel Shows lost popularity by the end of the century, however, amateur performances continued into the 1960's in high schools and universities, until the Civil Rights Movement gained acceptance.



Jim Crow, the archetypal slave character as created by Thomas D. Rice



Reproduction of a 1900 minstrel show poster



Al Jolson, in *The Jazz Singer*, 1927



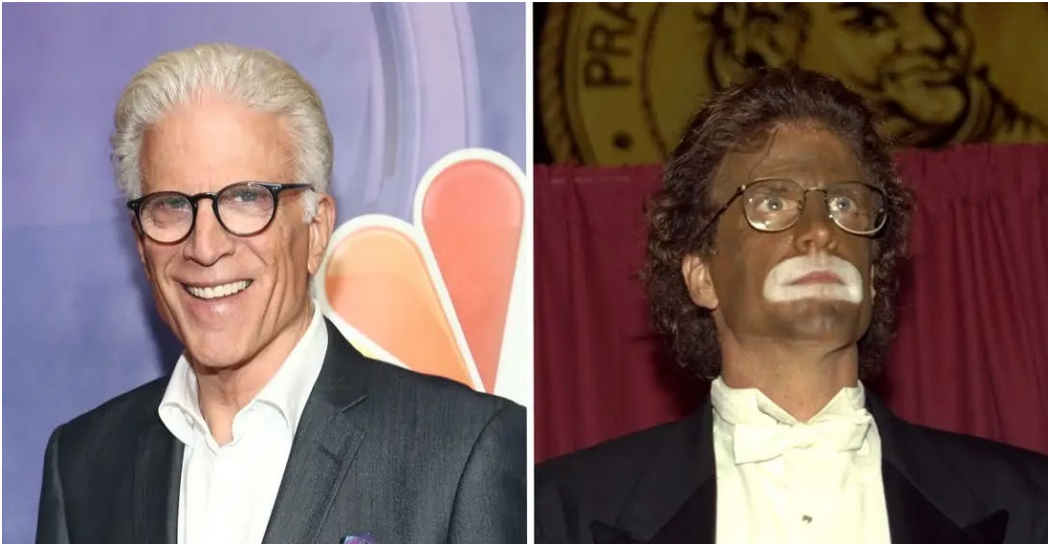
# *Holiday Inn*, 1942

Bing Crosby and Marjorie Reynolds perform a Minstrel show number, “Abraham”, to celebrate Lincoln’s birthday as an entertainment for the guests at the Inn, during which the only African American characters in the movie are stuck in the kitchen singing along with approval. *White Christmas* is basically a remake with the minstrel show sequence expanded into several songs, but without the actors wearing blackface.



# Actors in Minstrel Makeup

**Ted Danson**, from *Cheers* and *The Good Place* wore Minstrel Show blackface to the New York Friars Club Roast of Whoopi Goldberg in 1993, where his jokes included a dozen uses of the N word. Whoopi was Ted's GF at the time. In attendance were New York's first Black Mayor, David Dinkins and his wife, Montel Williams, Anita Davis, Vanessa Williams, Natalie Cole, and Shari Belafonte. The Dinkins and the Williams left during the performance. Chairman of the Friar's Club, comedian Bob Saks, said he was surprised people were offended.



<https://apnews.com/59a857fd2b10063314283c524f8a851c>

Jewish Comedian **Sarah Silverman** wore Minstrel Show blackface on the "Face Wars" episode of *The Sarah Silverman Show* in 2007. "Now it's forever there and it looks [like] it's totally racist out of context, and I regret that, but there's nothing I can do about that. I'm horrified by it, and I can't erase it. I can only be changed by it and move on."

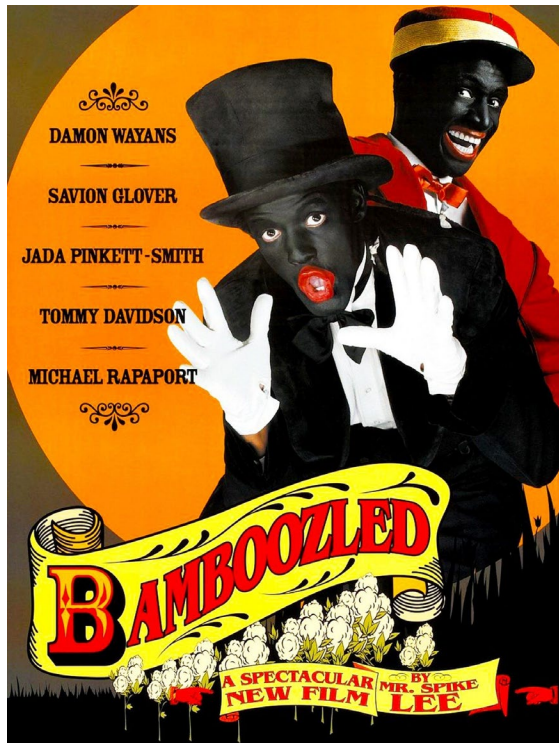


<https://www.insider.com/sarah-silverman-fired-from-new-movie-over-2007-blackface-photo-2019-8>



# Bamboozled, 2000

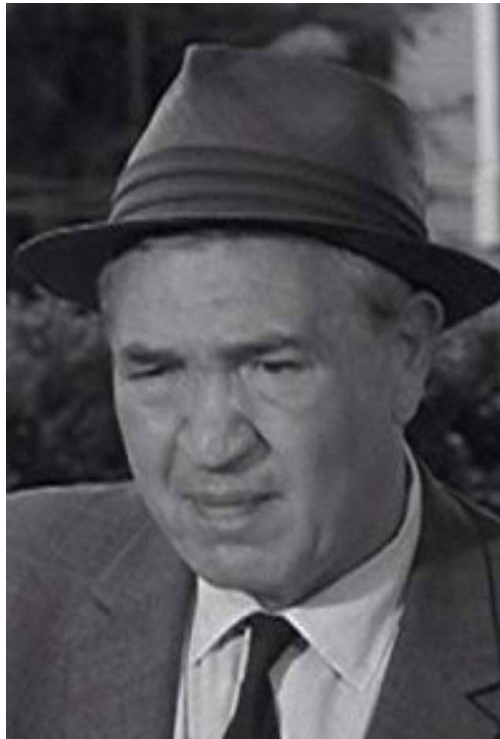
Spike Lee movie about Black actors donning Blackface to do a modern-day televised minstrel show and the resulting violent fallout from the show's unexpected success. If you are familiar with Mel Brooks' *The Producers*, this film is very similar. It starred Damon Wayans, Jada Pinkett Smith, Savion Glover, Tommy Davidson, and Mos Def. It featured The Roots as the TV show's House Band, The Alabama Porch Monkeys. It received only average reviews at the time. However, by the time of its twentieth anniversary, *Bamboozled* had been reappraised as an underappreciated work of Lee's. Writing for *Rolling Stone*, David Fear noted that "the really scary thing is that, 20 years on, *Bamboozled* feels incredibly contemporary. It doesn't look so extreme after all...and when you consider the content of this film, that's a very troubling thing. Ashley Clarke, writing for the Criterion Collection stated, "A specific and pernicious corollary of Trump's ascent has been the emergence of grotesque characters who might have walked straight from the set of Lee's film."



<https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/6862-bamboozled-new-millennium-same-bullshit>

# *Annie Get Your Gun, 1946*

This is a horribly racist show. First off, none of the Indians were played by Native American actors. White actor Harry Bellaver played Sitting Bull in “redface” makeup. If you’re not familiar with the lyrics by Irving Berlin, or the book by Dorothy and Herbert Fields, you can click on the link below to read the racist history of this musical. There’s really waaaay too much to fit on this slide. <http://www.totaltheater.com/?q=node/280>



Harry Bellaver as Sitting Bull



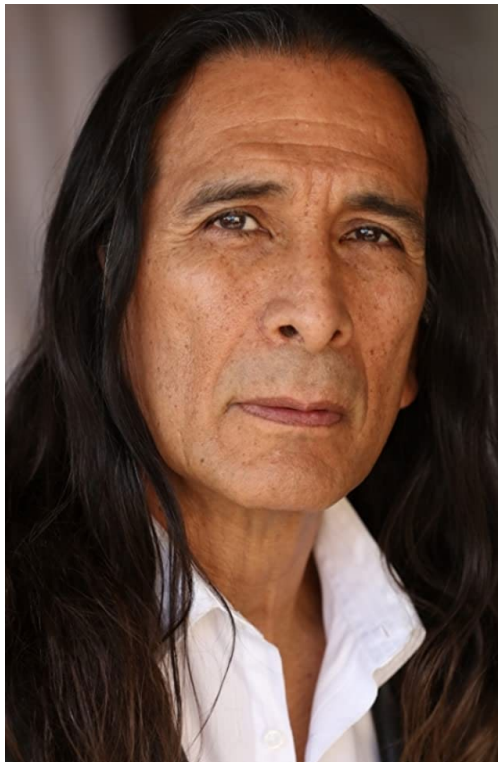
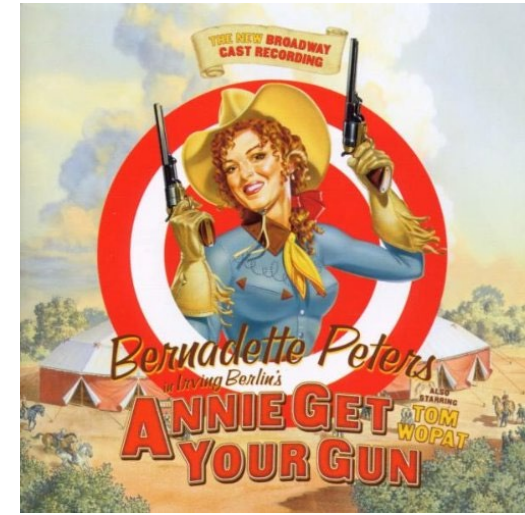
Harry Bellaver as Sitting Bull, Ethel Merman as Annie



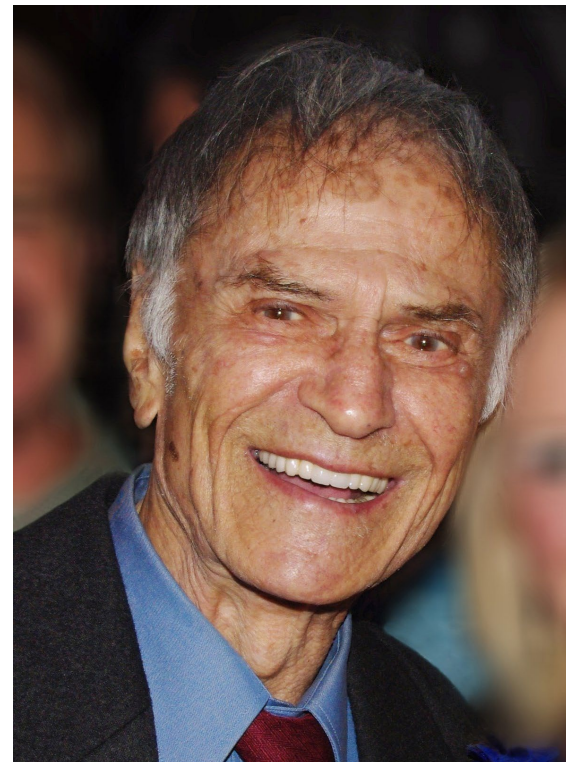
# Annie Get Your Gun, 1999 Revival

The 1999 revival starred Bernadette Peters as Annie and Native American actor Gregory Zaragoza as Sitting Bull. The addition of an actual Native American and the script re-writes still didn't make it much better. When Reba Macintyre replaced Bernadette Peters, white actor Larry Storch, replaced Zaragoza, so the casting actually got more offensive rather than less.

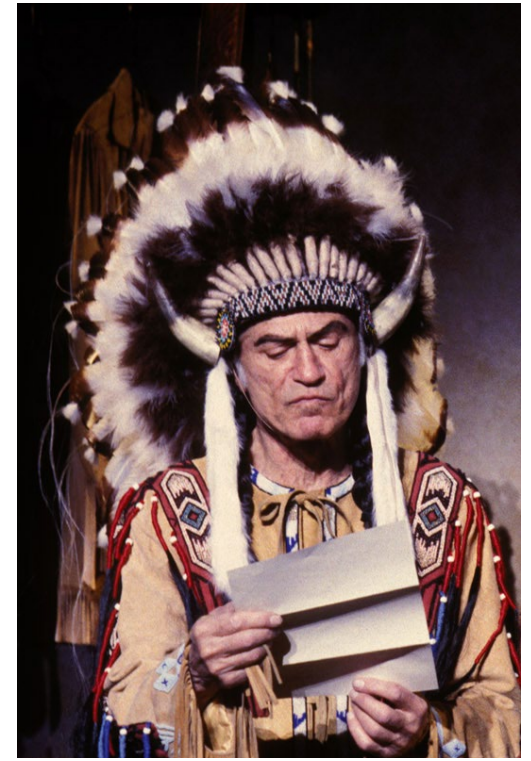
<https://variety.com/1999/legit/reviews/annie-get-your-gun-4-1200457085/>



Gregory Zaragoza



Larry Storch



# *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, 1961

Mickey Rooney played Japanese Mr. Yunioshi, in “yellowface”, as a buck-toothed, squinty-eyed stereotype.



At the time the film was released, the *New York Times* wrote, “Mickey Rooney's bucktoothed, myopic Japanese is broadly exotic.” As the years have worn on, nearly everyone, from the producers to the director, have apologized for it. The only person who seems to have a difficult time apologizing is Mickey Rooney. He does concede, however, that if he knew he would cause so much pain, he would have never taken the role.

<https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2016/11/asian-roles-played-by-non-asian-actors/short-circuit-2>



# Miscegenation in Hollywood

## First a Definition of Terms

**Anti-Miscngeneration Laws:** The prohibition of a white person being married to, or in a sexual relationship with, a non-white person, punishable by felony charges. Most states had repealed their anti-miscengeneration laws prior to 1967 when the US Supreme Court ruled in *Loving v. Virginia* that those laws were unconstitutional in the remaining 16 states.

**Hays Code:** the set of industry moral guidelines for the self-censorship of content in films in effect from 1934-1968. All films had to obtain a certificate of approval from the Production Code Administration before being released. There were two categories of guidelines:

**General Principles:** Films were prohibited from “lowering the moral standards of those who see it” and from “showing any sort of ridicule toward a law or creating sympathy for its violation”; as well as promoting the “correct standards of life.”

**Particular Applications:** A list of items prohibited included homosexuality, cursing, miscengeneration, and “perverted sex acts”; all criminal action must be punished, authority figures had to be treated with respect, and religious figures couldn’t be comic or villainous.

This affected the staging of all American productions of *Othello*. If Desdemona was played by a white actress, Othello had to also be played by a white actor. Notably New York state had never enacted any anti-miscengeneration laws in the first place, so that is the reason that Ira Aldridge, Paul Robeson, and James Earl Jones were able to play Othello as early as they did. Hollywood however, had to continue to cast white actors to play Othello until both the anti-miscegenation laws and the Hays Code were repealed.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-miscegenation\\_laws\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-miscegenation_laws_in_the_United_States)



# *Othello*: Orson Welles, 1952

Orson Welles raised the money, wrote the script, directed the film, and played the lead role himself. “The movie is a formidable intellectual achievement; Welles made it over the course of three years, earning money as an actor and channelling his pay into another few days of shooting.”

“In his last completed feature, *Filming Othello*, from 1978, Welles unfolds the strange story of the shoot, which entailed an actor, say, entering a doorway filmed in Morocco in 1949 and emerging in the same scene from a doorway filmed in Italy in 1951.”

“Welles has so clearly stamped his personality on this film that the filmmaker and his main character seem intertwined. Welles not only played Othello with enormous relish in this film (about which he cared deeply) but he also seemed to bring Shakespeare’s hero into his own very public life.”



<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26349513?seq=1>

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/orson-welless-shattering-othello>

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/ct-xpm-2014-04-24-ct-premier-attraction-othello-20140424-story.html>

# *Othello*: John Gielgud, 1961

Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-on-Avon in 1961 when Franco Zeffirelli drove into town in his Lancia that September. He was to direct *Othello*, in which John Gielgud would play the one great Shakespearean role he had never acted before.

The Gielgud/Zeffirelli *Othello* turned out to be unforgettable all right, for all the wrong reasons. It ranks today as one of the greatest disasters in theatrical history. The trouble with Gielgud was that he was too polite. He saw chaos surrounding him and couldn't bring himself to stage a showdown with the man he had invited to direct him.





# *Othello*: Laurence Olivier, 1965

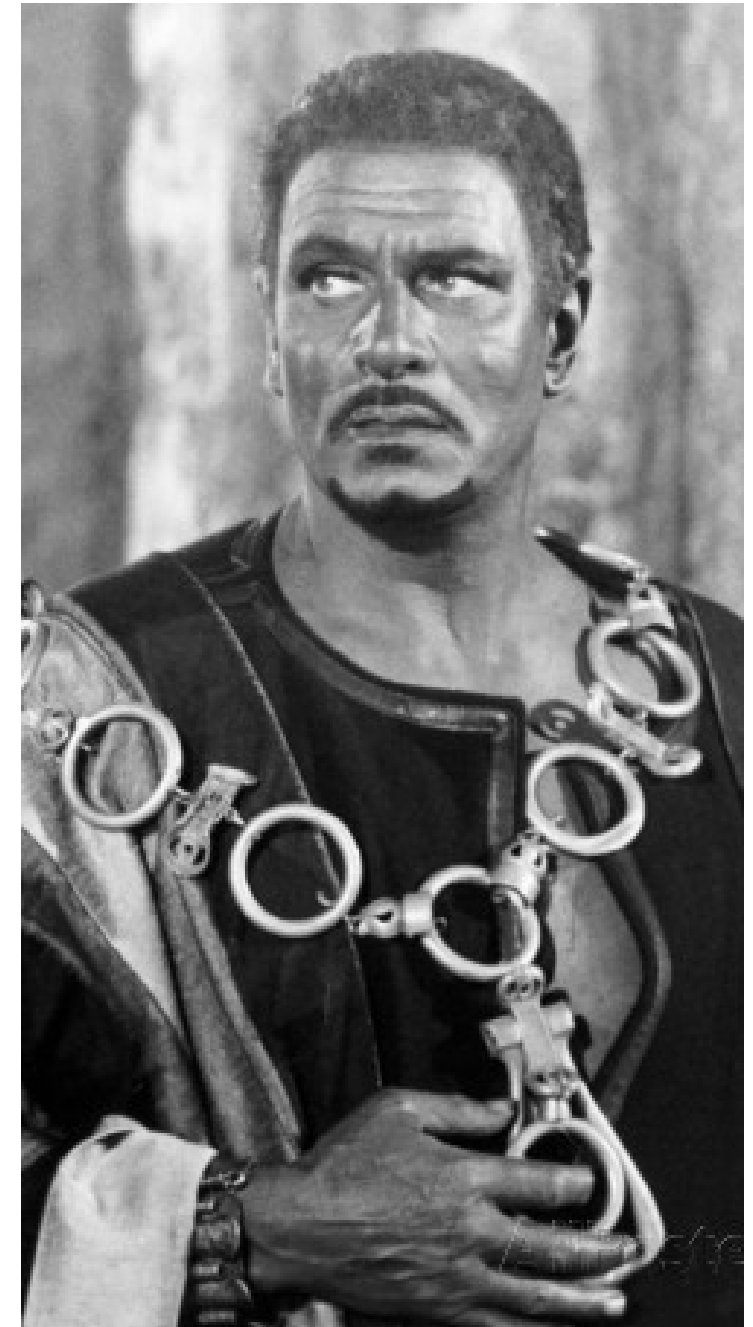
National Theatre, UK. It was the middle of the 1960's and the New York Times decried it, and yet Olivier's performance was still nominated for an Oscar. As for Olivier, in his mind (and the minds of those directly around him), this wasn't blackface in the minstrelsy sense. It was him made up as an African. His intention was to play Othello, not to lampoon or send-up. In both of his autobiographies he discusses the process of the production and film to greater or lesser degree, and he does not ever hint at any agenda other than disappearing entirely into the character.

As the Civil Rights movement in the US (and Postcolonial/ Critical Race Theory around the world) advanced, most began to see this as a distinction without a difference, since the actor donning makeup like Olivier's is still assuming a cultural background, representative burden, and personal history that cannot (like many other aspects of characterization in theatre) be learned in rehearsal. Furthermore, the casting of a white man in a role like Othello further decreases the number of available roles for actors of color (and there aren't that many to begin with). In sum, in Olivier's cultural and historical context, this wasn't "blackface," nor was it disrespectful. We have reason to see it as such now, but he wasn't working from the same operating assumptions.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43795446?seq=1>

<http://actoroscar.blogspot.com/2011/01/best-actor-1965-laurence-olivier-in.html>

[https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/1xod4r/how was laurence oliviers use of black face in/](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians/comments/1xod4r/how_was_laurence_oliviers_use_of_black_face_in/)



# White Cleopatras

As with *Othello*, the Miscegenation Laws and the Hayes Code also affected the casting of *Cleopatra* in film adaptations. Studios couldn't cast a Black actress as Cleopatra and then cast a white actor as Mark Antony, therefore all movie versions of Cleopatra were played by white actresses. Historically, the women who played Cleopatra did not darken their skin with makeup. If you'll remember the point I made at the beginning of the semester, when women were first allowed onstage in 1660, acting as a career for women was considered basically prostitution (for good reason), so I believe that the double whammy of being an actress to begin with, and then wearing "blackface" would have been too shameful, hence it wasn't done. The four film Cleopatras from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are Theda Bara, Claudette Colbert, Vivian Leigh, and Elizabeth Taylor, all Hollywood sex symbols of the day, and all of the films made before *Loving v. Virginia* and the repealing of the Hayes Code.



Theda Bara, 1917



Claudette Colbert, 1934



Vivian Leigh, 1945



Elizabeth Taylor, 1963

# One final word on blackface: *Tropic Thunder*, 2008

In this war movie parody, Robert Downey Jr. plays a white Australian method actor named Kirk Lazarus who was cast as the black character, Staff Sergeant Lincoln Osiris, in a film version of a Vietnam Vet's memoir. Lazarus has a "pigmentation surgery" to darken his skin in preparation for the role.



This movie shines a light on both the insanity of method acting--Lazarus says "Man, I don't drop character till I done the DVD commentary" --as well as the inappropriateness of white actors playing characters of color. RDJ said, "I get to hold up to nature the insane, self-involved hypocrisy of artists and what they think they're allowed to do on occasion." Ben Stiller and RDJ were still heavily criticized for not only the inherent racism of a white actor in blackface makeup, but also for the belittling of people with intellectual disabilities and the constant use of the word "retard".

In its defense, the movie is supposed to be a sendup of Hollywood's overused tropes and stereotypes. The real problem is that in the same year that Barak Obama was elected president and overwhelmingly supported and praised by Hollywood, RDJ was nominated for a best male supporting actor Oscar for his performance when Viola Davis was the only BIPOC that was even nominated for an acting award and Spike Lee's *Miracle at St. Anna* was completely overlooked.

<https://www.theroot.com/and-the-blackface-oscar-goes-to-1790868842>



# *Teahouse of the August Moon, 1953*

The play starred Japanese actress Mariko Niki as Lotus Blossom, but American actor David Wayne was cast as Sakini, a Japanese character who served as an interpreter to the military characters.



David Wayne as Sakini

# *Teahouse of the August Moon, 1956*

For the film adaptation, Mariko Niki revived her role as Lotus Blossom, but David Wayne was replaced in his role of Sakini by Marlon Brando, and American actor.



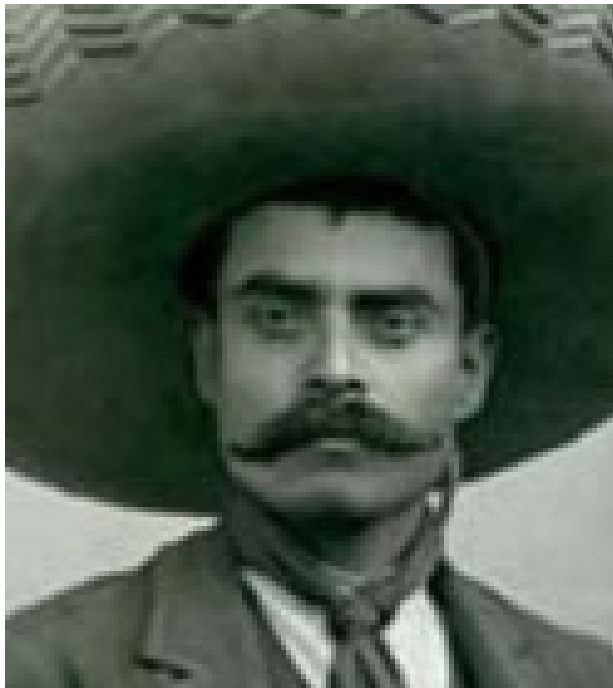
Marlon Brando as Sakini

# Viva Zapata!, 1952

The Mexican Revolution lasted ten years from 1910-1920. The director, Elia Kazan, wanted his film to be an accurate portrayal of these revolutionary heros, but only Anthony Quinn was actually Mexican. His real name was Antonio Oaxaca. Marlon Brando played Eufemio Zapata, Alan Reed played Pancho Villa, and Ray Roope played Porfirio Diaz.



Production still from left to right: Anthony Quinn, Marlon Brando, Alan Reed, Fay Roope



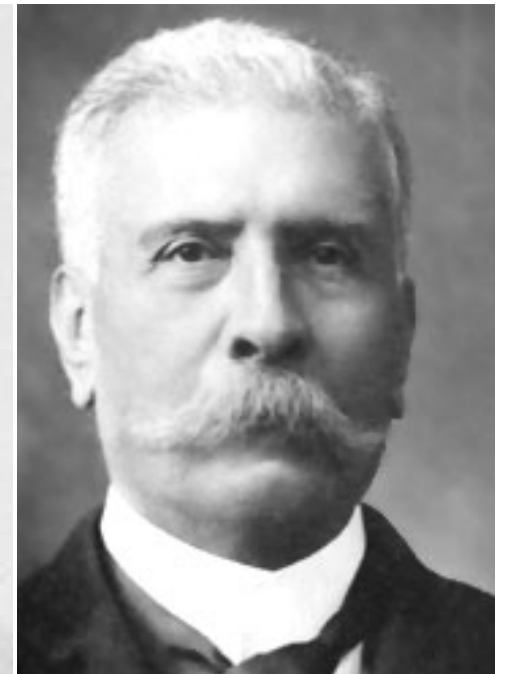
Emiliano Zapata



Eufemio Zapata



Pancho Villa



Porfirio Diaz



# *West Side Story*, 1961

All of the Sharks were Caucasian actors except Rita Moreno, who is Cuban, and even she didn't escape "brownface" makeup for the film.



Rita Moreno as Anita



George Chakiris as Bernardo

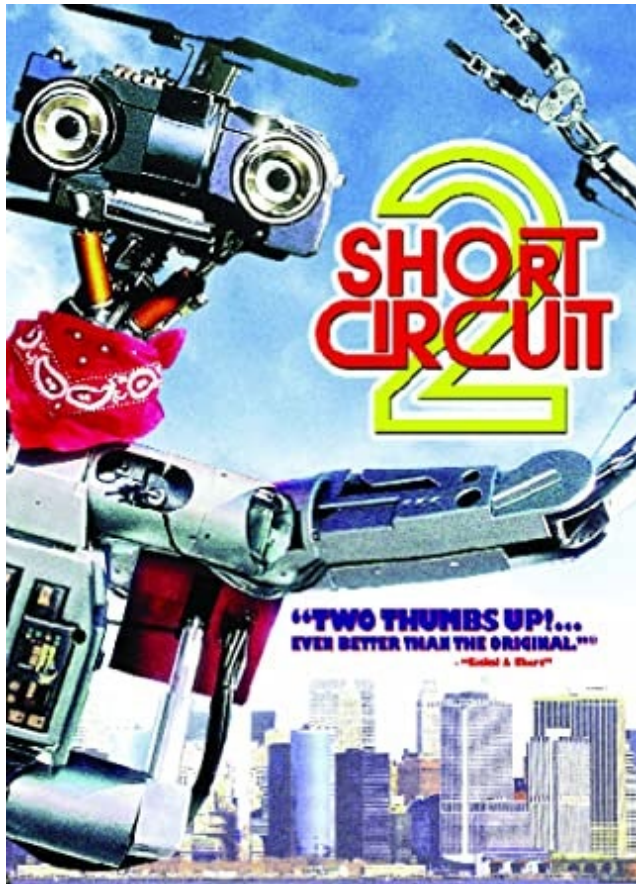


Natalie Wood as Maria



# Short Circuit 2, 1988

White actor Fisher Stevens played Benjamin Jaharvi, an Indian Character. "I originally was hired, and then they fired me because they decided to make the role Indian. Originally he wasn't Indian. And then they hired Bronson Pinchot. Then they fired Bronson and hired me back. It was a very crazy scenario."





# *The Lone Ranger, 2013*

Johnny Depp played Tonto in “redface”. Johnny Depp’s Tonto was inspired by a painting he saw. He wanted his Tonto to be honorable and self-reliant, not a sidekick, not sub-servient, not The Lone Ranger’s assistant. However well intentioned his motives might have been, he should never have been cast as a Native American. Both he and director Cameron Crowe received criticism for the casting decision. <https://entertainment.time.com/2013/07/03/johnny-depp-as-tonto-is-the-lone-ranger-racist/>



*I Am Crow* by Kirby Sattler



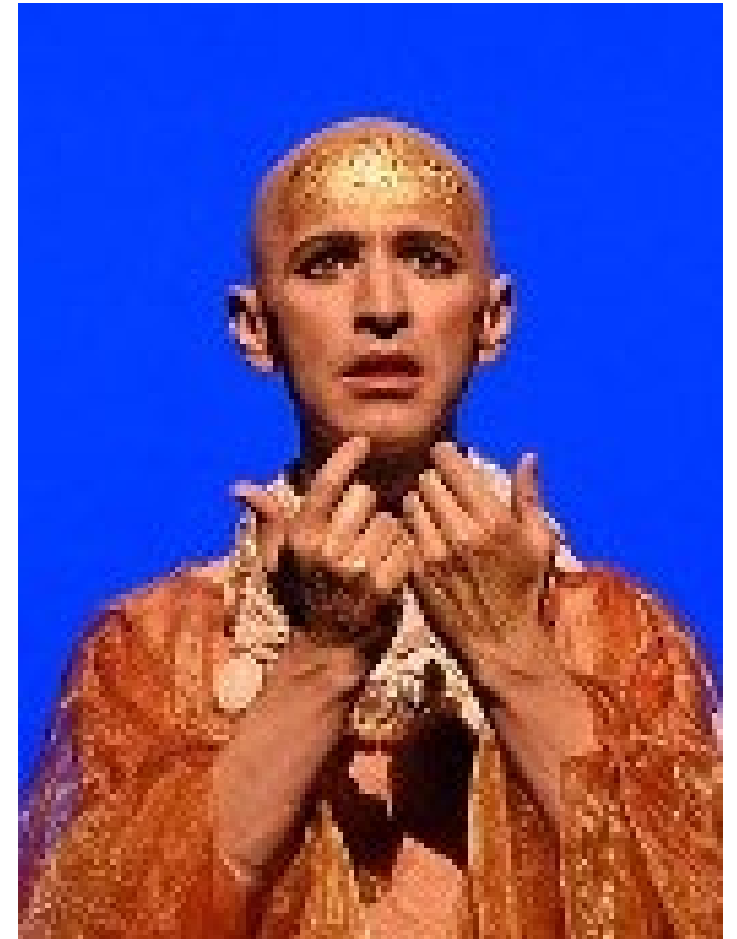
Johnny Depp as Tonto



# *Akhenaten, 2019*



English National Opera production in which the Egyptian Pharaoh is played by a white actor in dark makeup.





# Turnabout is Fair Play

Non-White Actors Play White Characters



# *Coming to America, 1988*

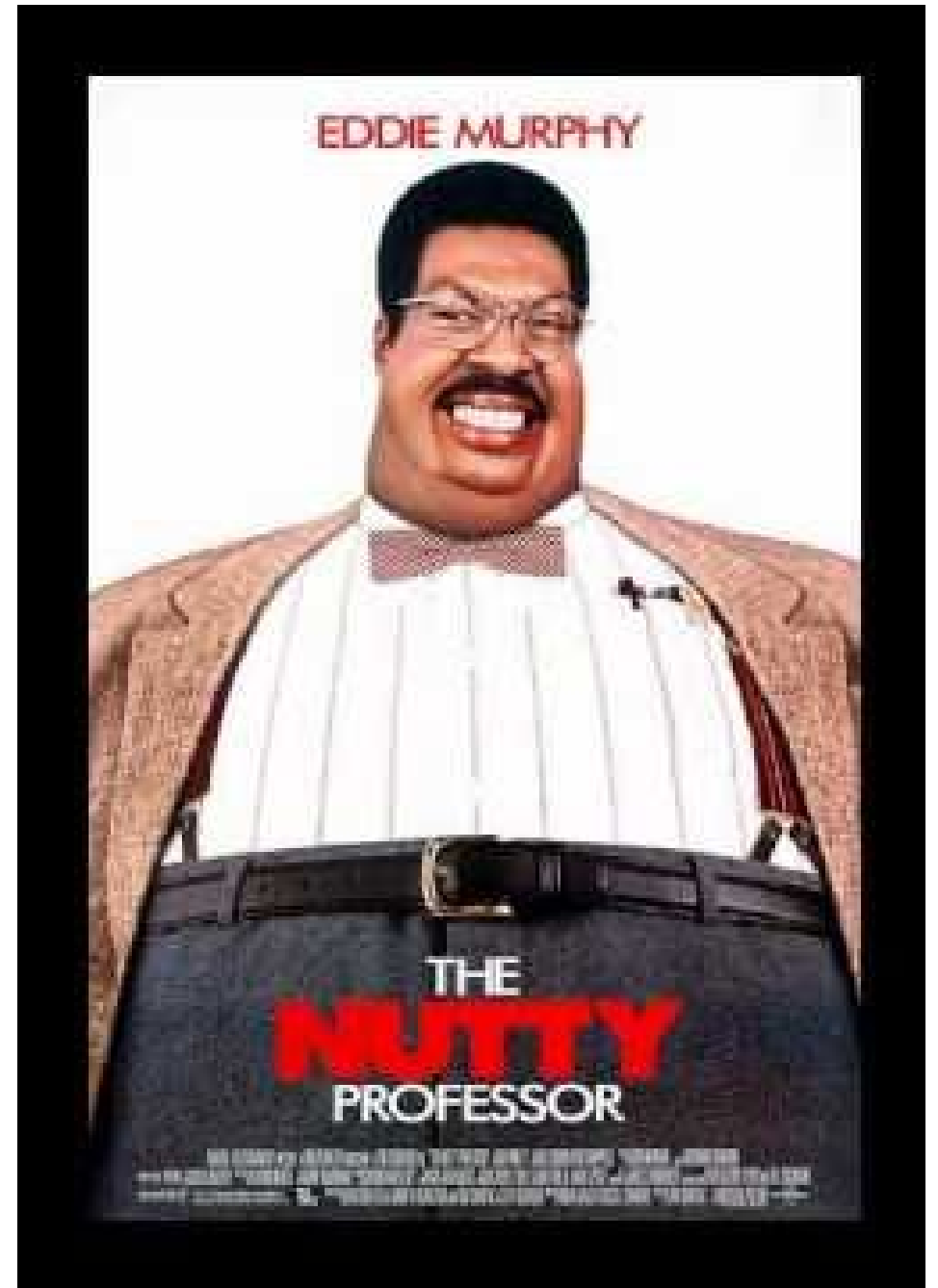
After 500 years of white actors in “blackface”, Eddie Murphy turned this idea on its head. Both Eddie Murphy and Arsenio Hall play multiple roles in this movie. However, Eddie Murphy was the only one who donned “whiteface” to play a non-Black character.

Rick Baker designed the makeup for Eddie Murphy who plays an old Jewish guy in the barbershop scene. Not only was this an ethnic change makeup, it was an old age makeup too, requiring full prosthetic pieces, false moustache and eyebrows, a receding hairline and larger ears.



# *The Nutty Professor 2, 1995*

Eddie Murphy played another white character--workout guru Lance Perkins-- based on IRL workout guru, Richard Simmons. Eddie's makeup was again designed by Rick Baker. It's both an ethnicity change and an aging makeup.



# White Chicks, 2004



Maitland Ward, Anne Dudek as the Wilson sisters.



The Wayans brothers

Eddie Murphy wasn't the only black actor to play a white character. The Wayans brothers did him one better and played two white female characters. Maitland Ward and Anne Dudek play socialite sisters, Brittany and Tiffany Wilson. Shawn and Marlon Wayans play brothers Kevin and Marcus Copeland, FBI agents assigned to protect the sisters. The brothers must disguise themselves as the sisters resulting in an ethnic change, gender change, and look-alike makeup, involving wigs and heavy prosthetic work. Their makeup was designed by Rebecca DeHerrera, and Greg Cannom.



The Wayans brothers playing the Wilson sisters.





# Cultural Misappropriation

The adoption of elements of one culture by members of another culture esp. when members of a dominant culture appropriate from a disadvantaged minority culture.

# Black Misappropriation

**Rachel Dolezal** in 2015 was revealed as a Caucasian woman passing herself off as a Black American while President of the NAACP. Her parents outed her. She was then forced to resign when she was suspected of lying about nine racially motivated hate crimes against her. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel\\_Dolezal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rachel_Dolezal)

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/07/rachel-dolezal-new-interview-pictures-exclusive>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/former-naacp-leader-rachel-dolezal-agrees-plea-deal-welfare-fraud-n991566>



Rachel's parents, Larry and Ruthanne Dolezal



Rachel Dolezal



Rachel Dolezal

# Ariana Grande's Racial Ambiguity

Professor Jack Hamilton commented on Grande's transition from a white child pop star, to a racially ambiguous R&B and Hip Hop star. In 2016 her third album *Dangerous Woman*, she is the same complexion as Nicki Minaj. "It's not about the ambiguity aspect," Hamilton said. "It's about the profiting from it, and it's about the exploiting it." Grande's darker presentation is not done maliciously. Regardless, she still reaps profits from being white and presenting as ethnically indeterminate. There is a long history of white artists profiting from the sounds and styles of black artists in the music industry.



<https://www.cavalierdaily.com/article/2020/01/ariana-grande-and-the-problem-of-racial-ambiguity>  
<https://cultplastic.com/2019/02/19/rethinking-transracialism-ariana-grande-and-racial-ambiguity/>

[https://assets.vogue.com/photos/5d1529577144e4000975cf9c/master/w\\_1600%2Cc\\_limit/VOO819\\_COVER\\_without\\_coverlines.jpg](https://assets.vogue.com/photos/5d1529577144e4000975cf9c/master/w_1600%2Cc_limit/VOO819_COVER_without_coverlines.jpg)

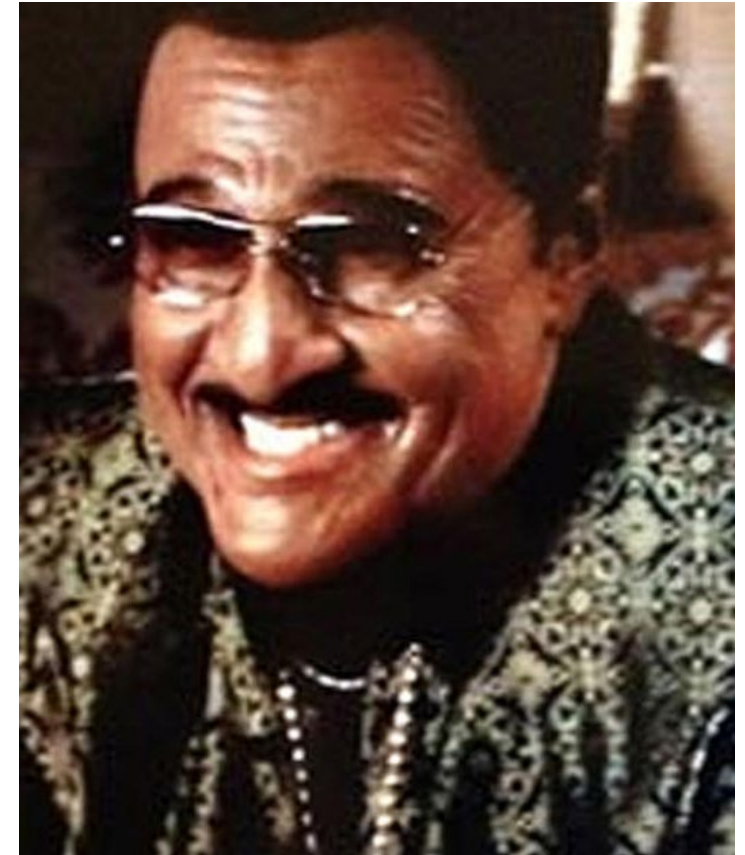


Joni Mitchell posed as a black man for her album cover, *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*, in 1977. "When I see black men sitting, I have a tendency to go — like I nod like I'm a brother. I really feel an affinity because I have experienced being a black guy on several occasions."



<https://www.thecut.com/2015/02/joni-mitchell-fashion-muse.html#Q5UmAd:KKz>

**Billy Crystal** and Sammy Davis Jr. were good friends, and Davis gave Crystal his blessing to perform imitations of him on his comedy specials after he famously did it on SNL in the 1980's. SDJ died in 1990. In 2012, Crystal revived his imitation when he hosted the Oscars. May people took to Twitter to protest the blackface makeup. However, SDJ's daughter and wife sent only love, saying that "dad would've loved it".



Justin Trudeau, PM of Canada, wore blackface to sing “Day O” in his high school talent show in the late 1980’s. He then wore blackface to go white water rafting in the early 1990’s. He then wore brownface to an *Arabian Nights* themed gala at the private school where he was teaching in 2001. "I shouldn't have done that. I should have known better and I didn't. I'm really sorry. I didn't consider it racist at the time, but now we know better."





Virginia Governor **Ralph Northam** appeared in a photo in his Medical School yearbook where he was in blackface standing next to another student in a KKK costume in 1984. Northam denies that it's him. However, Northam disclosed that when he was 25, he darkened his face with shoe polish as part of a talent-show costume in which he moonwalked like Michael Jackson. Both Republicans and Democrats called for his resignation.



<https://www.wistv.com/2019/05/21/east-virginia-medical-school-reveal-results-yearbook-investigation/>

**Joy Behar**, host of *The View*, wore blackface for Halloween when she was younger.



<https://twitter.com/LevineJonathan/status/1093272835076837377>

Jimmy Fallon played **Chris Rock** on SNL in 2000, although it wasn't criticized at the time, it has been recently.



[https://www.reddit.com/r/NormMacdonald/comments/9g8d39/whens\\_jimmy\\_fallon\\_gonna\\_apologize\\_for\\_wearing/](https://www.reddit.com/r/NormMacdonald/comments/9g8d39/whens_jimmy_fallon_gonna_apologize_for_wearing/)

**Jimmy Kimmel** played Karl Malone repeatedly in 2000 on *The Man Show*. The show has been criticized for being "proudly crass, racist, and transphobic as well as sexist". Kimmel described the premise of the show as "a joyous celebration of chauvinism".



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8EQFhj8ca4>



Florida Secretary of State **Mike Ertel** dressed as a Katrina victim for Halloween in 2005, just two months after the hurricane killed 1,800 people on the Gulf Coast. He resigned after the photo surfaced in 2019.



<https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/2019/01/24/new-secretary-state-ertel-dressed-blackface-halloween-2005/2649161002/>

**Fred Armisen** playing Obama and Prince on *SNL* in 2008. *SNL* received criticism for casting a white man to play black people.



State Senate candidate **Hal Patton** wore blackface to a 2008 Halloween party dressed as a Rapper. "There was never any intention for it to be an act of racism or racial commentary. It was a rapper. At the time, Run DMC and others were rappers. That was the look. I hate to say I regret a Halloween costume, in the sense it wasn't meant to make a statement about anything in politics or anything in race relations or anything in that nature." He failed to win his race for the Senate seat. In 2018 after the photo surfaced.



<https://www.bnd.com/news/local/article213281774.html>

Jewish New York State Assemblyman **Dov Hikind** wore blackface for his basketball player costume for a Purim party in 2013 and then posted them on FB. The next day people were calling for his resignation. "This is political correctness to the absurd. There is not a prejudiced bone in my body." He finally retired from his seat in 2018.



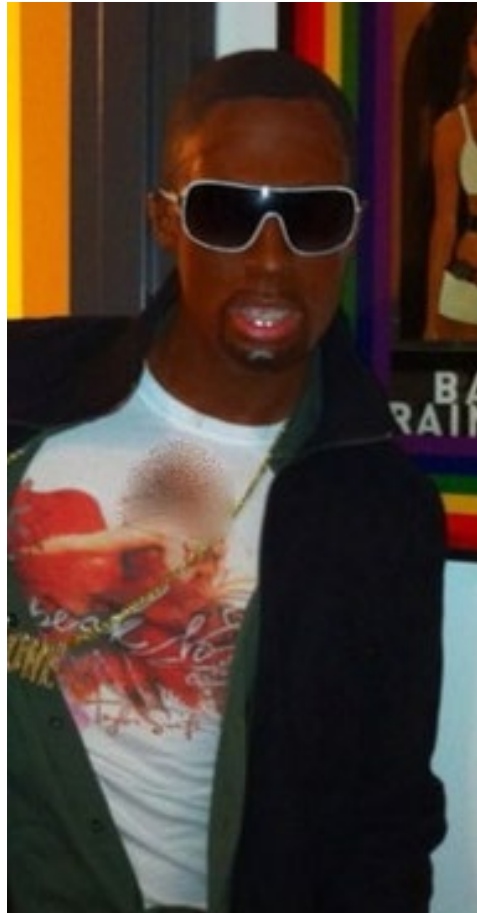
<https://www.cnn.com/2013/02/25/us/new-york-lawmaker-blackface/index.html>



*Vogue Paris* did a feature on Dutch model **Lara Stone** in 2009. “French *Vogue* has a reputation for controversy, and this month’s issue is no exception. Steven Klein shot Dutch supermodel Lara Stone in blackface makeup for a spread styled by French *Vogue* editor Carine Roitfeld. The magazine praises Lara for the “radical break with the wave of anorexic models” she represents. Never mind that she is a size 4, and, rather than embrace her supposedly curvy figure, worries about being “the fat one.” Never mind also that French *Vogue* shot other models who probably fall under their classification of “anorexic” for the issue, which is devoted to supermodels. The roster — including Kate Moss, Kristen McMenamy, Yasmin Le Bon, Eva Herzigova, Claudia Schiffer, Anna Selezneva, Diane Kruger, Constance Jablonski, and Eniko Mihalik — is entirely white. No black or Asian models made the cut. But they hired Lara — and her curves — in the spirit of inclusiveness, right?”



**Colton Haynes**, best known for *Teen Wolf*, *American Horror Story*, and *Arrow*, he did blackface makeup and dressed as Kanye West for Halloween in 2011, did “brownface” for Ghandi in 2012, and did “blackface” for a *My Chemical Romance* music video in 2016. From his Tumblr post in 2014, “I’ve apologized for those things and will continue to. I was ignorant and uneducated. I’m sorry if I’ve offended you or anyone else...I’ve learned from my mistakes and won’t make them again. Hope you can understand and forgive me.”





**Jason Aldean** dressed up as Lil Wayne for Halloween in 2015. "In this day and age people are so sensitive that no matter what you do, somebody is going to make a big deal out of it. Me doing that had zero malicious intent ... I get that race is a touchy subject, but not everybody is that way. Media tends to make a big deal out of things. If that was disrespectful to anyone, I by all means apologize. That was never my intention. It never crossed my mind."



<https://www.spin.com/2016/09/jason-aldean-lil-wayne-blackface/>

**Luann de Lesseps** wore blackface and an Afro wig to a Halloween party where she dressed as Diana Ross in 2017. "I never meant to hurt anybody's feelings," she said. "I love Diana Ross and I totally respect Diana Ross. It was really kind of a tribute to her, and it was Halloween."



<https://people.com/tv/luann-de-lesseps-apologizes-diana-ross-costume/>

Miley Cyrus twerking at the 2013 Video Music Awards performance.



Miley Cyrus

Taylor Swift's "Shake it Off" music video 2014 perpetuated black stereotypes and mocked black culture. The black women were only seen twerking and the ballerinas were all white girls.



Taylor Swift



**Bo Derek** wore cornrows in 1979 for the film *10*.



Bo Derek in *10*

**Kim Kardashian** continues to appropriate from black culture. In 2010 Kim wore them for Kanye's video, in 2015 for Hype energy drink ad, in 2018 Kim tweeted this photo of herself in "Bo Derek" braids, starting a whole new urban dictionary entry THOT or That Ho Over There, which means a white girl trying to pass herself off as a Black girl. She continues to appropriate Black hairstyles.



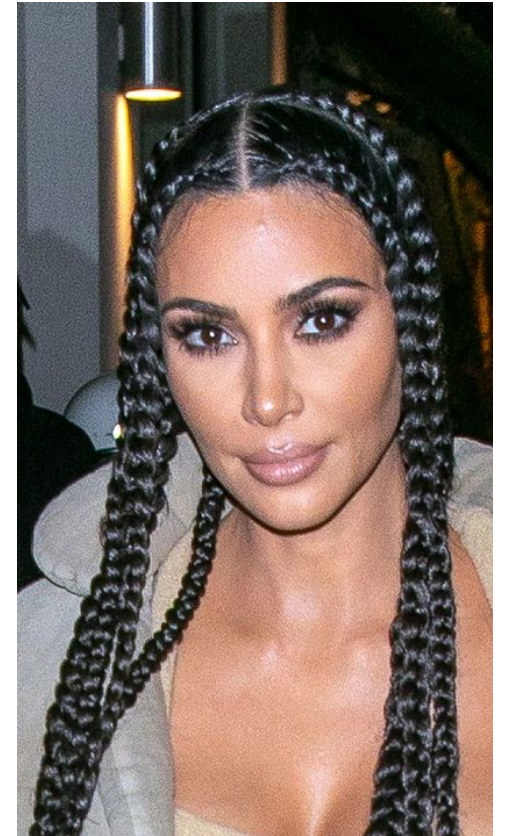
2010



2015



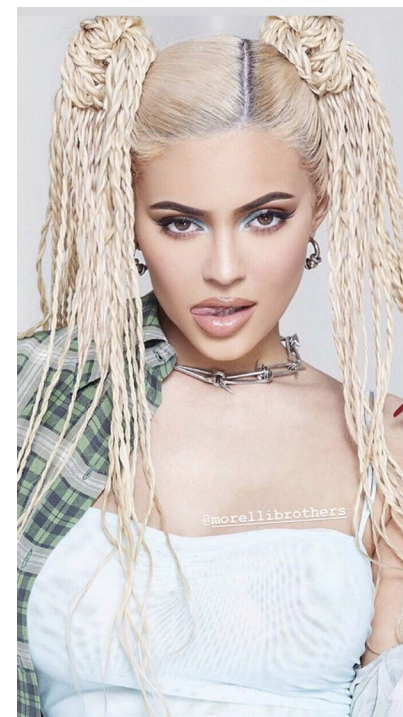
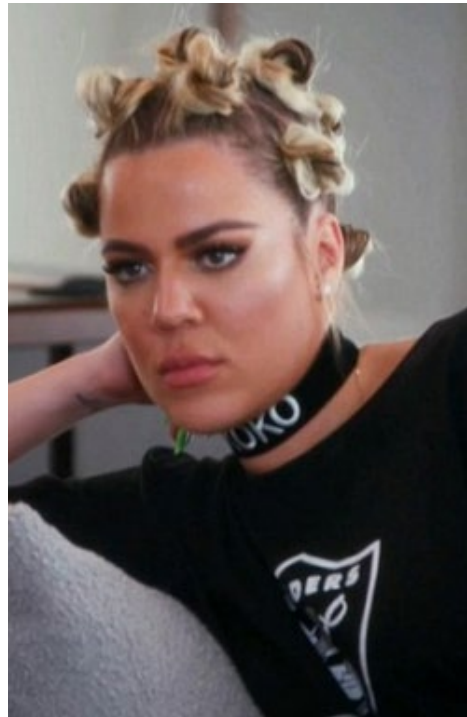
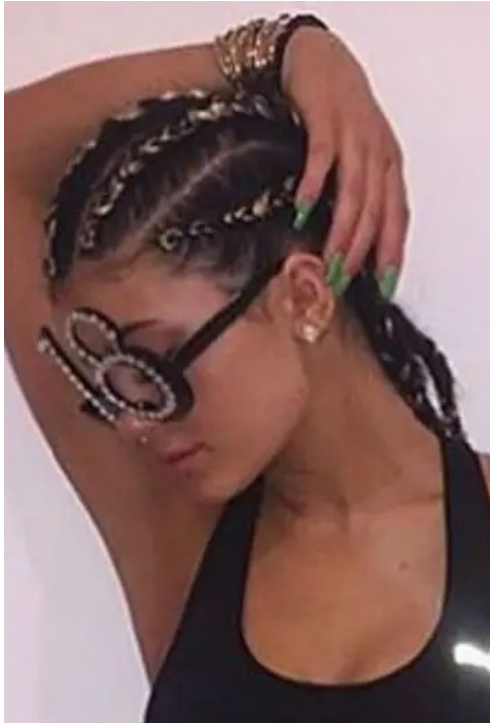
2018



2020



In 2015 **Kylie Jenner** wore cornrows. In 2016, **Karlie Kloss** and **Kendall Jenner** wore locks for the Marc Jacobs runway show which featured white models wearing dyed hair extensions. The same week **Kendall** wore Bantu knots on *Keeping up with the Kardashians*. **Kylie** and **Kendall** wore braids again in 2019. The Kardashian/Jenner daughters don't seem to care that the public has been outraged by their behavior.



<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/kylie-jenner-braids-hair-into-cornrows-again-despite-being-criticised-for-appropriating-black-10451692.html><https://www.buzzfeed.com/elliewoodward/khloe-kardashian-wore-those-marc-jacobs-dreadlocks-and-people>  
<https://metro.co.uk/2020/01/03/kylie-jenner-slammed-cultural-appropriation-posting-another-pic-braids-11994055/>  
<https://people.com/style/kendall-jenner-slammed-for-wearing-cornrows-braids-again/>



# Native American Misappropriation

Model **Karlie Kloss** wore a Native American styled feathered headdress with high heeled moccasins in the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show, 2012.



<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2012/11/12/victorias-secret-apologizes-for-use-of-headdress/1701413/>

**Michelle Williams** wore dark makeup, braids and a feather for *AnOther* Magazine, 2013.



<https://ew.com/article/2013/03/14/michelle-williams-redface/>

**Pharrell Williams** posed for the June, 2014 cover of *Elle* UK magazine in a Native American war bonnet.



<https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/oh-pharrell-is-part-native-american-here-s-why-it-doesn-t-matter-zEUyO4ugYEaRrWqbgoXTig>

# Arab/MENA/Muslim Misappropriation

**Cardi B's** "Bodak Yellow" 2017 music video shows her in an abaya dress and headscarf with a camel in the background. There's a fire sword dancing belly dancer, a sheikh in sunglasses, a hookah pipe, and in one shot she's wearing a face veil.



<https://splinternews.com/the-charged-complicated-racial-dynamics-of-cardi-bs-bo-1798278601>

**Khloe Kardashian** put up a selfie on Instagram of her wearing a niqab, a facial covering worn by Muslim women, in November, 2019. The caption read "Habibi Love". The word "habibi" is an Arabic term meaning "my baby" or "my darling". Kardashian didn't understand why she was being so heavily criticized. She



later asked two Muslim employees at the Kardashian family's Dash store about the controversy, and got a lesson in cultural misappropriation. "After talking with Nazy and Durrani, I'm really upset that I've offended anybody. I'm even more bothered that the commenters think I'm poking fun at their culture. I didn't realize how offensive it was. I didn't know I was doing anything wrong. I really just have to be more aware of what I write, even if I think it's tongue in cheek, and I have to be more sensitive to that. I'm sorry to anybody I offended. That was the last thing I ever wanted to do."

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/khloe-kardashian-niqab-instagram\\_n\\_7443352](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/khloe-kardashian-niqab-instagram_n_7443352)



# Indian Misappropriation

**Beyonce** and Coldplay received backlash over their 2016 video “Hymn for the Weekend” which used India as a backdrop, made use of Bollywood imagery and featured Beyonce wearing traditional Desi clothing. Nitasha Tamar Sharma, a professor at Northwestern University who studies hip-hop, says Indian culture is presented with the same old stereotypes and it is relegated to a background. I think when people of color and dominated groups just become a backdrop with no voice and context, no humanity, I think that's the problem."



<https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/rock/6859394/coldplay-beyonce-hymn-for-the-weekend-cultural-appropriation-debate>

<https://medium.com/applied-intersectionality/beyonc%C3%A9-and-coldplay-found-guilty-for-using-cultural-appropriation-in-their-music-video-89da9a8c7ac8>

<https://www.elitedaily.com/entertainment/celebrity/beyonce-miley-cyrus-culture-appropriation-indian-hinduism-buddhism/1894872>

<https://www.npr.org/2016/02/06/465622102/theft-and-artistry-coldplay-beyonc-in-india-spark-discussion-on-appropriation>



In Indian culture, Bindis carry both spiritual and cultural significance. This is just another example of pop stars ignoring that significance, and reducing a spiritual symbol to a fashion statement. Selena Gomez wore a bindi to the MTV Music Awards, 2013. She then wore it to Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival, 2014 which garnered protests by Indian attendees against white attendees wearing the traditional Bindi as a fashion accessory, starting the hashtag #ReclaimtheBindi.

Selena Gomez, 2013



<https://www.thecut.com/2013/04/selena-gomez-not-backing-down-on-bindi-front.html>

Kendall Jenner, 2014.



<https://www.popsugar.com/beauty/photo-gallery/35312696/image/35312705/Kendall-Jenner>

Vanessa Hudgens, 2015.



<https://www.bustle.com/articles/21002-vanessa-hudgens-controversial-bindi-trend-coachella-chic-or-offensive>

Miley Cyrus 2017



<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/miley-cyrus-cultural-appropriation-dc-pride-bindi>



# Asian Misappropriation

**Gwen Stefani** began a publicity stunt that centered on her interest in Japanese culture that quickly spiraled out of control. In 2004, Stefani hired four backup dancers who she named “Love,” “Angel,” “Music” and “Baby,” respectively, after the title of her album. These four girls were forced to speak in Japanese at all public events and were known as the “Harajuku girls.” Stefani defended her stunt, saying "When [the album] first came out, I think people understood that it was an artistic and literal bow down to a culture that I was a super fan of," Stefani told the magazine, referring to the district in Tokyo and the colorful, over-the-top style culture it created.

Asian American comedienne Margaret Cho publicly criticized Stefani by comparing the Harajuku girls to blackface: “Even though to me, a Japanese schoolgirl uniform is kind of like blackface, I am just in acceptance over it, because something is better than nothing.

In December of 2014, Stefani described the Harajuku Girls in an interview with *Time* as "dancers that were cast, but they became real" — as if the dancers themselves were not real people before they became part of Stefani's crew. Furthermore, the fact that she chose the names they were known by, rather than letting them make that decision themselves, similarly perpetuates the idea that they didn't exist as people without Stefani and her album.

<https://time.com/3622594/gwen-stefani-harajuku-girls-spark-the-fire/>  
<https://www.bustle.com/p/gwen-stefani-says-her-harajuku-girls-era-wasnt-cultural-appropriation-19368917>





Katy Perry in 2013 dressed like a Geisha at the American Music Awards.



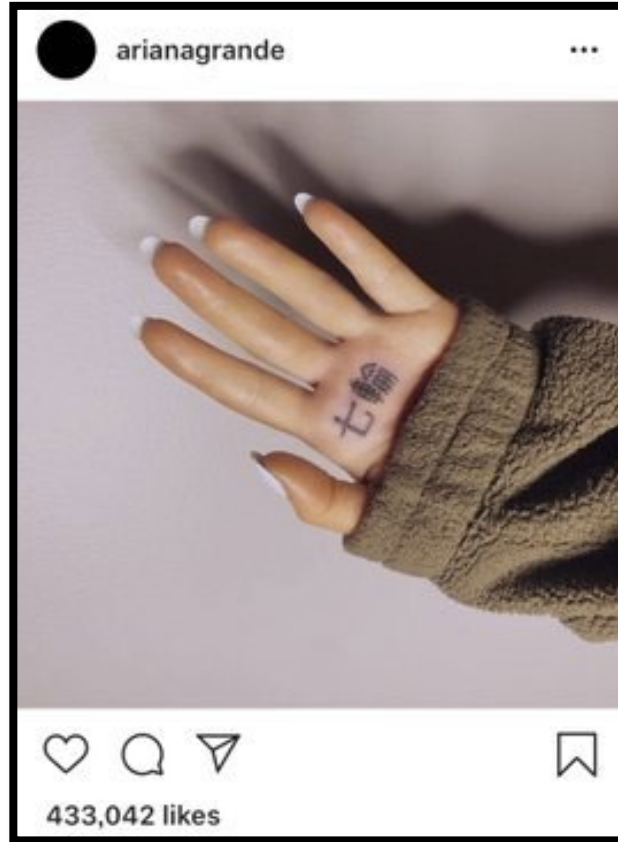
[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/cultural-appropriation-katy-perry\\_n\\_4337024](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/cultural-appropriation-katy-perry_n_4337024)

Karly Kloss in 2017 dressed like a Geisha for her Vogue shoot for the issue that was dedicated to “diversity”.



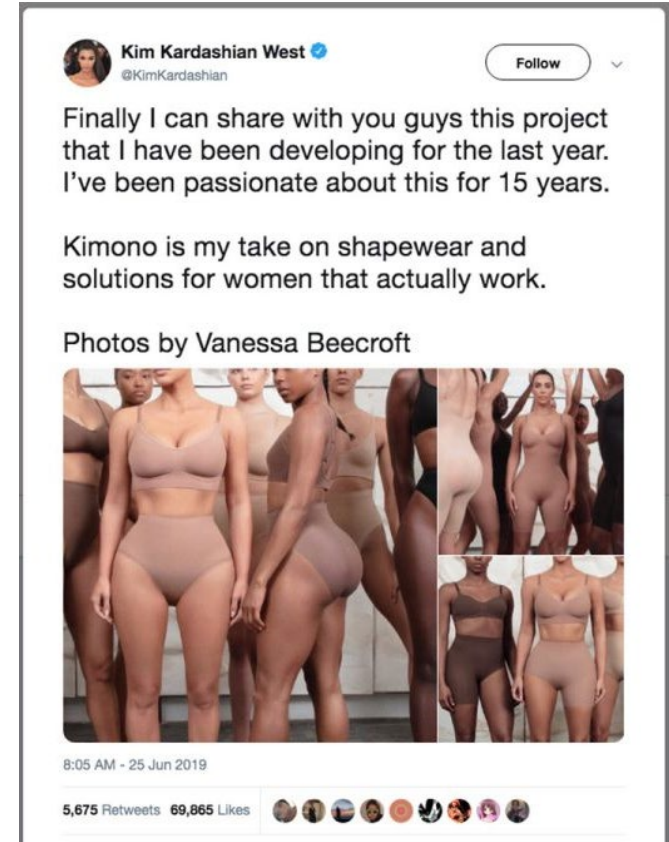
<https://www.thecut.com/2017/02/vogue-styled-karlie-kloss-as-a-geisha-in-2017.html>

In 2019, Ariana Grande got a Japanese tattoo that was supposed to mean “7 rings”, but instead meant BBQ grill.



<https://www.stereogum.com/2030449/ariana-grandes-small-charcoal-grill-tattoo-now-means-japanese-bbq-finger/news/>

Kim Kardashian tried to trademark “kimono” for her new shapewear brand name in 2019, but was unsuccessful.



<https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisettevoytko/2019/06/26/twitter-reacts-to-kim-kardashians-culturally-insensitive-shapewear-line/#248c43b43766>



2014 Kate Spade's Hello Shanghai-Cruz bag,  
Nordstrom \$750.



2017 Kendall + Kyle's Lee Leather Clutch-\$150.  
Silver Fortune Cookie Coin Purse-\$225. Sak's Fifth Avenue



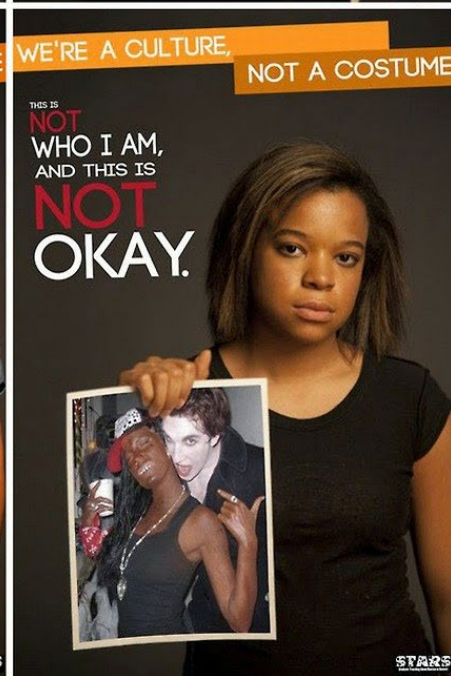
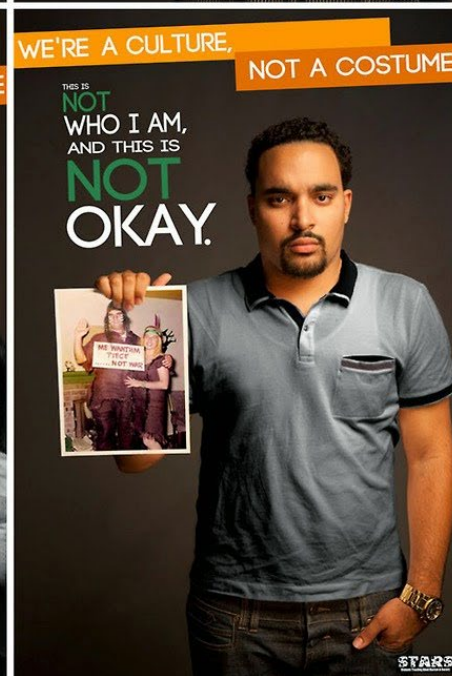
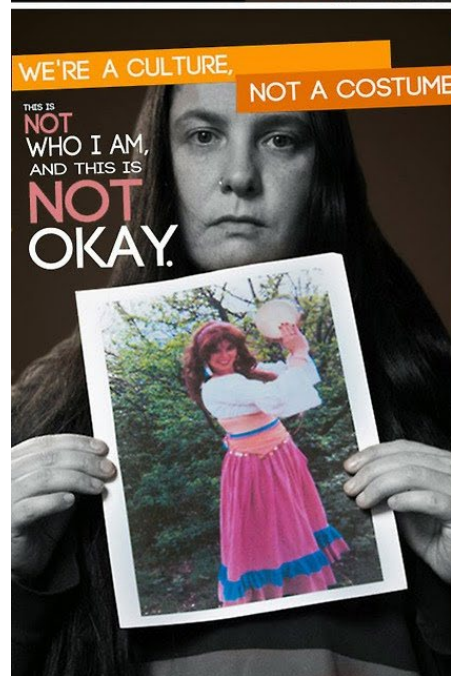
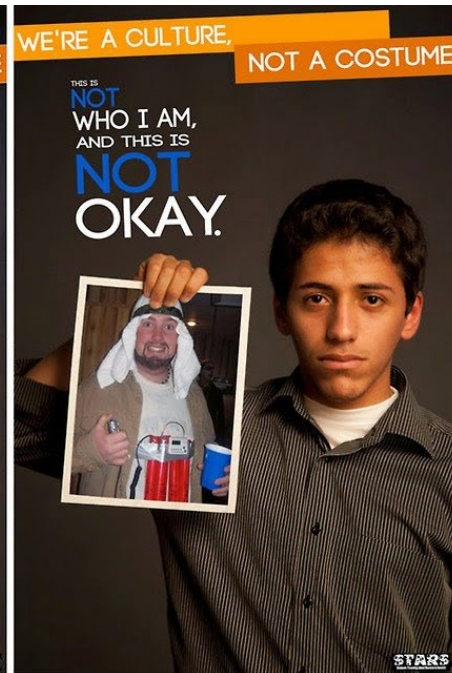
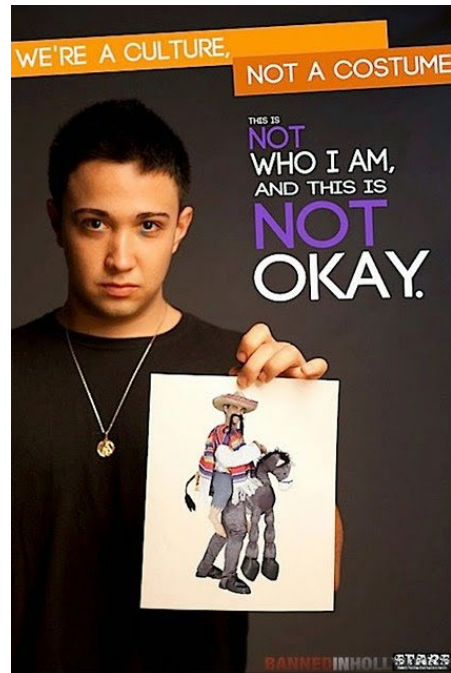


# We're a Culture, Not a Costume

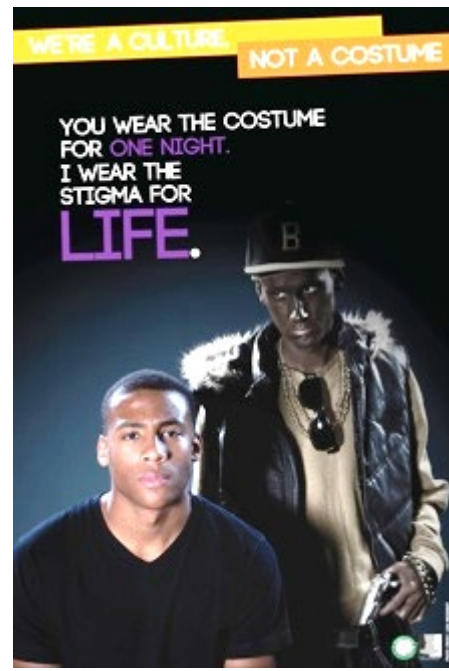
Ad campaign, Ohio University's STARS program, 2011



# 2011

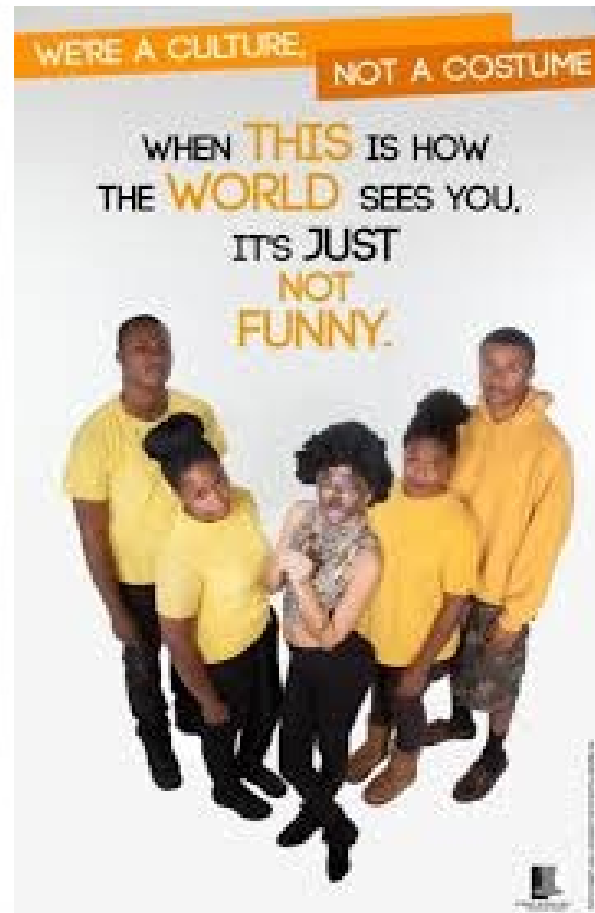


2012





# 2013



# 2014



# 2015







# Whitewashing

Characters that were written BIPOC, but cast with white actors.

# *The Last Airbender, 2010*

M. Night Shamalan's disastrous film adaptation. Writing for *They* *Greyhound*, Nadage Beausejour and Marina Sounanthanam criticized *The Last Airbender* for a lot of things, but mostly for the white-washing of Asian and Native American Characters.

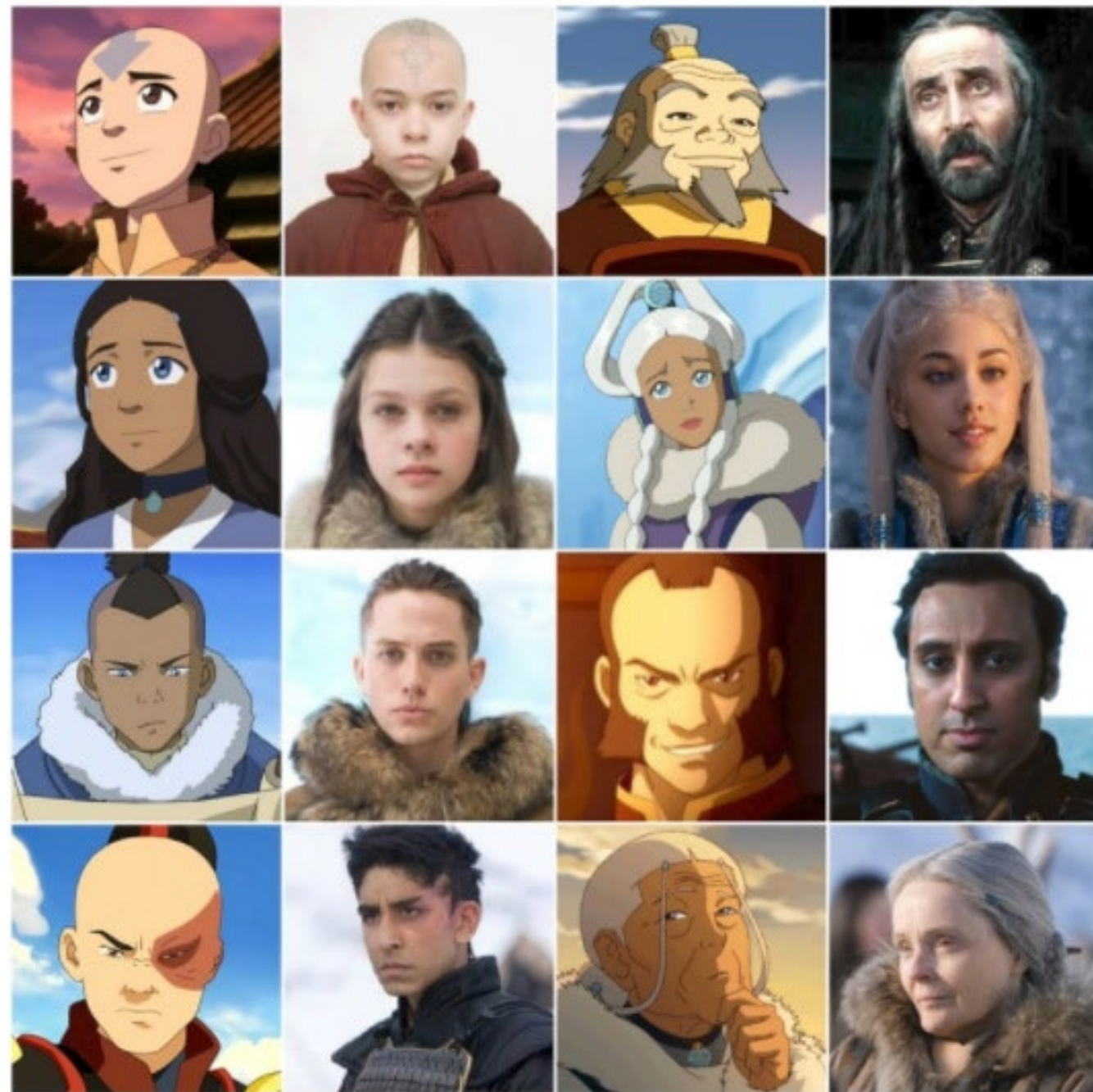
“The first crime Shyamalan committed was casting WHITE actors for the roles of the originally Asian and Native American characters. Considering the director HIMSELF is a person of color the reason as to why he decided to choose non-minority actors of the accurate race is very inscrutable. He decided not to choose actors of color to represent in the media.

The original animation promotes a minority in America that is rarely seen in media itself. But the thing that stands out is that the minority **are** the main characters in the series. And not the sidekick, the nerds, the geeks, the punk goth, the science olympians or mathletes, or even the “kung-fu” sidekick. They’re not the side, they’re in the center. And that’s what makes this animation unique. But what Shyamalan has done is erased that opportunity for minority Asians to feel like for once, they aren’t just on the sidelines and are insignificant to the story.

It's also a shame that the only time we see minority actors are for the bad guys, the Firebenders and a couple of Asian side actors during a short scene with a village.

Although the *Avatar* animation series never mentions anything about being “Asian,” it’s obvious that there are cultural influences from the far east, with the uses of Chinese and Japanese characters, and ancient Asian type architecture for example.

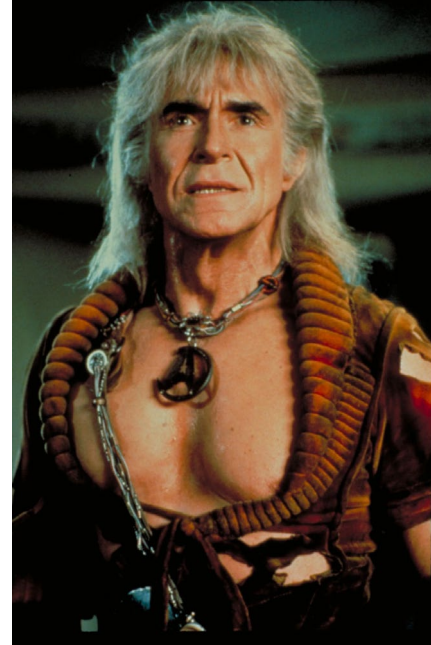
There's also no credit towards Native Americans and Polynesians and their large influence towards the animation. With different types of attire for the Water Tribes and their customs as well as their residence which include igloos."





# Star Trek: Benedict Cumberbatch, 2013

In 1967, *Star Trek* introduced a new character named Khan Noonien Singh, who, according to the *Star Trek* wiki, is “a genetically engineered superhuman from India who once controlled more than a quarter of the Earth during the Eugenics Wars of the 1990s.” “This unusually named character — with a Muslim surname as his first name and a Sikh surname — was identified by a historian during the episode as “probably” a Sikh man from northern India: He is shown in a watercolor painting in a white Sikh-styled turban on the episode “Space Seed”. Portrayed by Mexican actor Ricardo Montalban, as well as the 1982 film *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. Fast Forward to the *Star Trek* reboot films by JJ Abrams where Khan is a white man. Khan was portrayed by English actor Benedict Cumberbatch in the 2013 installment *Star Trek: Into Darkness*. Marissa Sammy wrote for *RacerBending.com* said, “It’s disappointing and demoralizing that with the commercial power of *Star Trek* in his hands, JJ Abrams chose not to honour the original spirit of the show or the symbolic heft of the Khan character, but to wield the whitewash brush for....what?”



# *Aloha*, 2015: Emma Stone

Captain Allison Ng is supposed to be a bi-racial character of Hawaiian, Chinese, and Swedish ancestry. Emma Stone is nothing of the sort. The director Cameron Crowe publicly apologized as did Emma Stone. By way of comparison, here's a photo of Kimberly Rose K'iulani Wolter, a mixed-race Hawaiian native, who is an actor, director, producer, and writer.

Here's an article she authored on *Aloha* and what it means to be a "hapa" a bi-racial Hawaiian.

<https://charactermedia.com/will-the-real-hapa-please-stand-up/>



Kimberly Rose K'iulani Wolter



Emma Stone as Cpt. Ng



# *Pan*, 2015: Mara Rooney

Director Joe Wright defended his decision to cast a Caucasian actress as Tiger Lily because “J.M. Barrie is not specific in the book as to where the “native tribe” comes from, and so I decided they would be an indigenous people of the world...I met actresses from China, India, Japan, Russia, Africa and Iran. But it was Rooney who felt the most like a warrior princess. .... She’s the best and smartest warrior in the film. That felt more important to me rather than placating other concerns.



1907 Illustration of Tiger Lily  
by Oliver Hereford  
from *Peter and Wendy*.



Mara Rooney as Tiger Lily in *Pan*.



Tiger Lily and her diverse tribe in *Pan*

# Doctor Strange, 2016: Tilda Swinton

The Ancient One is supposed to be a Tibetan monk in the comic books. Emma Stone warned Tilda not to accept this role, but she did it anyway.





# *Ghost in the Shell*, 2017: Scarlett Johansson

Major Mira Killian is Japanese in the original anime, where she was named Motoko Kusanagi. ScarJo famously said in an interview that she would never play a character of another race.



# “Elizabeth, Michael, and Marlon”

## *Urban Myths*, 2017

Joseph Feinnes was cast as Michael Jackson for this episode that was set immediately after 9-11, 2001 in which Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Jackson and Marlon Brando supposedly were trying to flee New York City together in a car. It was never aired due to the backlash the casting decision caused.



Joseph Feinnes



Michael Jackson



Joseph Feinnes as Michael Jackson



# Conclusion

These days Film and TV have no excuse for casting white actors in non-white roles. And although we have seen casting practices becoming more diverse in the last twenty years, white-washing characters is still a problem. In theatre, directors continue to have the final say in terms of play selection, casting, and concept. White actors still have the privilege of auditioning for roles of any ethnicity, while non-white actors still struggle to be cast in roles that aren't specifically written as non-white. Theatre producers and directors and Film and TV casting directors must do a better job to cast "outside the box" of traditionally white (and male) roles.

In my opinion there is a vast difference between the positive goal of being true to the playwright's intent and/or telling the story the director envisions, and the negative, disrespectful consequences of purposeful or inadvertent cultural misappropriation of which theatre has historically been guilty. In order to dismantle the systemic racism inherent in casting practices, casting directors must refuse to audition white actors for non-white roles, white actors must refuse to perform roles that have been white-washed, and designers must refuse to put "blackface" type makeups on white actors.