





“The 2015 ADCOLOR® FUTURES Hackathon provided a platform for the FUTURES to share their perspectives on the roles of identity, culture and representation in media and communications while developing approaches to help solve the ongoing issue of cultural appropriation in these industries. The FUTURES started a conversation about cultural appropriation, and had the opportunity to put [their] skills to the test to show the ADCOLOR community exactly why they are the future.”

–Kayla Robinson
2015 FUTURE



HACK- ATHON

On September 17, 2015, 30 FUTURES came together for the first time to tackle the issue of cultural appropriation. This was no small feat. Six teams were paired up with two seasoned industry professionals as coaches and were tasked with developing and presenting a platform that engages the communication industry to help address the ongoing issue of cultural appropriation. The teams used their diverse experiences to turn innovative ideas into solutions.

Oh, and they had six hours to do this.

Cultural Appropriation: What Is It?

Cultural appropriation is a sociological concept that views the adoption or use of elements of one culture by members of a different culture as a largely negative phenomenon. Generally, an assumption that the cultural group being borrowed from is disenfranchised by, excluded from, or opportunistically profited by the cultural group doing the borrowing is a prerequisite to the concept. This view of cultural borrowing is controversial, both in academic circles and in general society.

Why Is It Relevant?

We see cultural appropriation in media, entertainment and advertising.



Theft And Artistry: Coldplay, Beyoncé In India Spark Discussion On Appropriation, NPR, 2016



How Washington's Football Team Creates A Hostile Environment For Native American Students, Huffington Post, 2014



Cultural Appropriation Is Already an Issue at New York Fashion Week, Teen Vogue, 2016

Dear Coldplay & Beyonce: India Is Not An Orientalist Fantasy

“Indian culture,” Nitasha Tamar Sharma, professor at Northwestern University, said, “is presented with the same old stereotypes and 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 a problem.”

How Washington’s Football Team Creates A Hostile Environment For Native American Students

“When you have kids in schools who are getting harassed, who are feeling a lack of self-worth because they themselves have become a mascot for someone else, I think that’s really what the point is all about. We need to stop having this debate over which Native people are offended because it’s a ridiculous debate,”

said Erik Stegman, Center of American Progress.

Cultural Appropriation Is Already An Issue At New York Fashion Week

Cultural appropriation has cropped up at New York Fashion Week — the makeup look at Creatures of the Wind was described by the show’s lead artist as inspired by “Hispanic” women, specifically referencing “cholas.” The term “chola” has a lot of variations, but stereotypes typically reference Mexican-American women (and often, mestizas, women whose backgrounds are mixed) who wear baggy clothes and overdrawn eyebrows. It’s also commonly used to refer to lower-class Latino immigrants who typically live near the Mexican border. The term has been reclaimed by a number of communities, but when those who aren’t Latino use it, it’s almost always in a derogatory way.

INSIGHTS

Taking a look at cultural appropriation gives us an opportunity to understand the topic and develop an approach to connecting with and celebrating people from different cultures without appropriating them.

We just scratched the surface on this topic, but we were able to walk away with the following approaches to tackle cultural appropriation:

Appropriation to Appreciation

We need to shift from cultural appropriation to cultural appreciation by seeking culture, and not assuming it. When people in creative industries make rapid assumptions that are misguided, inaccurate and culturally biased, it marginalizes an entire group of people.

1

Education

Being proactive and avoiding the possibility of misrepresenting a culture is the best course for brands, advertisers and creators. **Stereotypes are a shortcut.** People need to do research ahead of time to make sure they are appreciating, not appropriating, to avoid backlash.

The FUTURES suggested several tools from a roadshow to an online hub where industry professionals can develop better relationships,

2

Partnership

When we include diverse voices, we can tell a more authentic story.

By 2050, the U.S. population will be 47% white, 28% Hispanic, 13% black, and 8% Asian American.*

Companies need to hire more diverse candidates that better reflect the various faces and lifestyles out there. They can add insights, spot possible issues, and share perspectives the majority may not have considered.

Of the 582,000 Americans employed in advertising and communications in 2014, less than half are women, 6.6% are African American, 5.7% are Asian and 10.5% are Hispanic.**

Teams need to seek out cultural experts and influencers in order to get a rich understanding before they act.

Focus groups are also a great tool to learn and gather feedback on a smaller scale before going live with something that may cause a stir.

3

Tough Love

Tactfully calling out brands that do appropriate culture can be one way to start a conversation, and stop it from happening again. Brands can use their misstep as an opportunity to learn and share their educational process with their audience, taking a possible PR disaster and turning it into a journey of redemption and shared growth.

[*http://adage.com/article/hispanic-marketing/tipping-point-majority-minority-2044/297911/](http://adage.com/article/hispanic-marketing/tipping-point-majority-minority-2044/297911/)

[**http://adage.com/article/agency-viewpoint/advertising-industry-diverse-leadership-thrive/297998/](http://adage.com/article/agency-viewpoint/advertising-industry-diverse-leadership-thrive/297998/)

Closing

In one day, 30 bright young professionals started a conversation on how to tackle an issue that affects our industry while showcasing their talents, skills and passions. What they accomplished in the room lives beyond their final presentation. It showed us what we can create when diverse minds collaborate to “hack” an issue that deeply affects them, with the freedom to tackle an issue in their own way. For ADCOLOR and the industry, our work confirms that opportunities to give talent a platform are needed to empower young leaders to evolve our industries. The FUTURES reminded us that messages are powerful and we have a social responsibility to curate the right messages.

What was accomplished was just a start.

There is so much more to come.

Thank You!

On behalf of ADCOLOR and the 2015 FUTURES class, we want to thank Apple® for being our 2015 Hackathon sponsor!

“I think the FUTURES Hackathon model is genius. Original, emerging thinkers working together to tackle a huge problem — in a not-huge amount of time. Honestly, I couldn’t believe how well the FUTURES worked together and how impressive the results were. The campaigns were so strategic, lively, and maybe most importantly, fresh. This is absolutely where you will find (and how you should nurture!) the future of creativity.”

–Khira Jordan,
CAMPAIGN WRITER AT APPLE
AND 2015 HACATHON COACH



