Monday and Wednesday March 23rd and 25th 2020: When respect for diversity is taken to crazy extremes

1. **Define “cultural appropriation” in your own words.**

Designates the use of traditions particular to a certain culture by another, said to be dominant. Today, it is used pejoratively; it implies a disrespectful dimension.

1. **Originally, what made the concept of “cultural appropriation” valid?**

The relation between colonised territories and colonizing countries (France, England)

Today, we generally consider that those dressing as Turks (Lord Byron) or Indians. The colonial spirit consisting in looking down on (mépriser) peoples that are deemed inferior, whether they be colonised or not.

Peoples avec un -s signifie les peuples

1. **Now, what, according to the journalist, takes cultural appropriation to “crazy extremes”**

The criticism is leveled on three grounds:

* a breach of free speech (we are supposedly not allowed to express ourselves as we want any longer)
* There is a double standard: (deux poids , deux mesures) : According to the journalist, we complain about a majority culture’s borrowing from a minority one but not the other way round.
* the question of cross-fertilization: What if art can’t get richer thanks to other cultures?

Vous pouvez aussi traduire cross-fertilization par **brassage** (des cultures)

Solution: Certainly not to censor everybody. Nobody boils down to their ethnic group; that’s why the journalist mentions the risk of “segregating” the blacks in a new way, by, somehow, considering them “off-limits”.

Rich /reach

1. **PERSONAL RESEARCH:**
	1. **What is the most classic and most agreed on case of cultural appropriation?**

Artefacts: oeuvres d’art

To loot: piller

Pieces of regional art in Asia or Africa, that had been looted during the colonial period. Many demand that such artefacts, often displayed in European Museums, be returned to the countries of origin.

Parthenon friezes are in London (British Museum)

Benin king statues are in Paris

“Blackface”: In the early 20th century and basically the first half of the 20th century, it was “fun” for white people to dress up as blacks, with black make up, with particularly caricatural features. The archetype of the black performing tasks such as clown, jester, or musician in a jazz band. Now, such disguise is considered “off limits” and downright racist.

* 1. **Recently or in the past two years, have you heard about a fierce controversy (in the domain of arts and entertainment)?**
* Yoga classes have recently been labeled “cultural appropriation”
* A choreographer, in Canada, was accused of “stealing” traditional native dances for his show.
* Dana Schultz, the one you mentioned, Elise, is a white artist who wanted to represent the horrors of racism in segregated America. She painted the scene of the open casket (un cercueil) of a black young man that had been murdered by a man after being accused of sexually harassing his white wife (who later withdrew her statement, her accusations). At the time, her mother had wanted the casket to remain open for everybody to see what her son had had to undergo (subir).

Dana Schutz was accused by some black artists of turning black suffering into a “spectacle”. Dana Schutz defended herself by insisting she had wanted to both denounce violence agianst black people and express the suffering of a mother like herself.

LET’S RECAP’: The three-tier concept of “cultural appropriation”:

Here is, according to the journalist, how cultural appropriation can spin out of control (partir en vrille):

1. Men, because they travel to other countries, end up borrowing from other peoples’ cultures (African Art, Orientalism, local cuisine, yoga, the yukulele, jazz, etc.)
2. Over the past decade, the Western man has been accused of looting (and having looted) the heritage of other, oppressed cultures (African artefacts looted during the colonial period) or of making fun of other people (blackface)
3. According to the journalist, the criticism of cultural appropriation is going overboard (“extremes”) and verges on censorship, as it reduces freedom of speech (cf. Dana Schutz’s “Open Casket”) and unfairly picks on Western borrowings from other cultures (and not the other way round).

Three-tier: à trois étages, à trois niveaux