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Professor Peterson

Int. Seminar 2: Fashion

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Research Question:

How is cultural appropriation integral to the fashion industry?

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My research topic will focus on the American fashion industry using cultural appropriation. I want to question why cultural appropriation is necessary for the American fashion industry rather than focus on its negatives. There is an ongoing debate about whether cultural appropriation is just or not because controversial looks can be a result of this phenomenon, but people often miss the point that it can be beneficial. I think cultural appropriation is an integral part of our inspirations. Many designers, in my opinion, either take ideas from other cultures through primary or secondary experiences. Travel, books, cultural techniques, fabrics, and other ideas act as the inspirations for most designers as they look to other countries for ideas before creating a piece or collection.

I expect to answer my research question through cultural appropriations' different integral aspects to the American fashion design industry. I will investigate how different designers have successfully used cultural appropriation in a positive way, taking inspiration from the world around them. I will focus on answering the question through cultural appropriations main benefits to the industry. I think that these benefits include building awareness about other cultures, learning about other cultures, creating change for certain cultures, and globalizing cultures.

I think that I will find a lot of research centering on the debates and controversies about cultural appropriation in fashion because it is a known topic of debate. Many people ridicule cultural appropriation so I am sure to find more research on the opposing side of my article, however, it will help prove my point to acknowledge this side of the argument and continue to build mine against it. I also think I will find sources that think cultural appropriation in fashion is beneficial and even necessary because there is always another side to a debate. I would hope to find sources that describe the opinions of those that live in a certain culture undergoing appropriation in fashion because it would add depth and validity to the paper if they agree that the appropriation helps their culture.

I anticipate supporting my argument with articles from the database because articles tend to give opinionated responses about the issue rather than a general description. Through research already, I have found articles that focus on specific cultures that have been appropriated in the fashion industry. I will research sources that can support the ideas that cultural appropriation in fashion is necessary through certain aspects like teaching about other cultures and so on. An article by Erin Kaplan said, "If clothes don't have the power to instigate change, they can at least herald it--not simply in hem lengths and silhouettes but in political movements and social attitudes. Nowhere is this truer than in black American fashion, itself a direct spiritual descendant of African fashion and, beginning with the Jazz Age and running through to hip-hop, the most consistent influence in fashion around the globe today." This idea alone supports a part of my argument that cultural appropriation in fashion is important rather than negative, and shows how it is necessary through creating social change.

Annotated Bibliography:

1. Erin, Aubry Kaplan. "Spring Fashion Issue; Suddenly, Africa; are the Prints and Beadwork and Bangles of the Spring Collections a Revelation, Or Cultural Appropriation?" *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 20, 2005. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/421963121?accountid=12261>.

This article centers on the African culture's influence on fashion. The author's main argument states that African fashion is appropriated, making it possible to focus on Africa and change through fashion. The main point that I take away from this article and will use towards my research question would be that cultural appropriation is necessary in fashion because it gives fashion an opportunity to bring attention to the certain culture, whether that is through learning about another culture, giving that culture spotlight, or in this case, instigating change.

2. Yost, Clementine. "Is Cultural Appropriation in Fashion Offensive? Part - II Kat Clinch Doesn't Think so." *University Wire*, Nov 02, 2013. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1447938488?accountid=12261>.

This article focuses on the opinion that cultural appropriation is not offensive and that it both creates and is a result of globalizing cultures. The author wrote, "These days, people don't even realise what culture is borrowed and what is just part of the eclectic mix that makes up a modern bohemian society." The evidence supports the benefits of cultural appropriation in the fashion industry, arguing against the idea that cultural appropriation is offensive.