

## **Republican Perspective**

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**by John Littig**

### **The Cultural Appropriation Warriors**

I guess the scourge of “cultural appropriation” has been around a while, but I first learned of it three years ago, and wrote about it in my June 25, 2014, column. Two fraternities had been disciplined by their respective universities. One for holding a Cinco de Mayo themed charitable fundraiser. The other for holding a Fiji Islander charitable fundraiser (grass skirts, coconut bras--like in that racist musical “South Pacific”). In the first case the event was canceled; in the other, fraternity leaders were required to undergo cultural sensitivity re-education.

Cultural appropriation is defined by Nadra Kareem Nittle, an expert in the field: “Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else’s culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture’s dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc.” Nittle goes on to say that it is worse if the source community is a minority group or when the thing appropriated is particularly sensitive (like a religious symbol).

There are other similar definitions, but key to their application is that there’s no actual rule book. Whether a particular act or event is or is not really cultural appropriation is up to the offended individual or community. Non-negotiable.

I actually was hoping sanity had prevailed and this issue had gone away. Alas, Michael Barone’s May 5, 2017, column on cultural appropriation brought me back to reality. So I rummaged around on line and quickly found writings by Nittle, Jenni Avins, Kovie Biakolo---cultural appropriation experts all. Google cultural appropriation and you’ll find those writers along with many others. Apparently there’s a cultural appropriation industry out there, taking offense, writing, lecturing, re-educating miscreants and, of course, making up the rules as they go along.

So my vain hope was that the stink about the Cinco de Mayo party and the South Pacific-style event had blown over. Barone brought me back to reality. The offense of cultural appropriation is now more offensive than ever.

Barone postulated that only the culturally pure should be able to partake of that culture. For example, that only Italian-Americans with proof of ancestry should be able to buy pizza in the school cafeteria, panini at Panera, or pasta at Olive Garden. He says “Fortunately, modern technology makes this possible. [Prospective purchasers] could display their ancestry.com profiles on their smartphones...” The non-qualified “would have to be politely but firmly informed that their ancestry bars them from partaking of cuisine their ancestors had no part in concocting.”

Of course Italian cuisine is just an example. The right to purchase and drink a Guinness, to listen to Chuck Berry's "Maybelline" or dance to Chubby Checker's twist, to wear a sari or a barong, to attend a Greek festival or an Oktoberfest, even to watch a movie such as "Hidden Figures" or "Coming to America." All would be subject to proof of membership in the matching culture.

Again, appropriating from my June 2014 column: "America, by its very nature, is a potpourri of cultural foods, music, behaviors, dress, and language. Borrowing from each other's cultures has been standard practice in our society. Unless it is done to mock or ridicule, where's the offense?"

The culture warriors believe cultural appropriation, a class one felony, wreaks havoc from sea to shining sea. Me? I think I'll put on my aloha shirt, have a gyro sandwich, drink a cerveza--- maybe even polka.