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<center>Are Balenciaga's Sweatpants Culture Appropriation or Appreciation?</center>

In 2021, Balenciaga, a Spanish fashion franchise introduced a distinct pair of gray sweatpants with boxer briefs attached to the top of the waistband. The design was meant to showcase a more "authentic" piece of clothing, something inspired by existing street fashion.. Balenciaga planned a certain narrative, but the way it was received by the media was different. Discussions about whether this unusual piece reflected cultural appropriation or admiration were triggered by it. With one of the most common questions being, "Why does it seem like they are appropriating from young Black men?" started more general discussions on the fashion industry's need to consider cultural nuances while creating new pieces.

This research object helps to contextualize how fashion and cultural appropriation or appreciation are closely related. For example, the boxer sweatpants design demonstrates how designers are remaking clothing items that Black people have previously used, taking them out of the culture within which they are embedded and "translating" them into one style among others, ripe for appropriation by anyone outside that culture. Here, it is crucial to say that not a single well-known high-end fashion designer is a person of color, so this process of cultural translation is always problematic. While designers such as Balenciaga argue that they are building a new narrative of high-end Black style, that does not negate the fact that non-Black

people are copying Black culture designs to produce and profit from. My research will focus on identifying the differences between cultural appropriation and appreciation, fashion, Black culture, Black designers, and a closer examination of the Balenciaga boxer sweatpants specifically. This will enable me to put my research object into context and provide a clearer understanding to everyone that, even though this has happened repeatedly, it needs to stop.

The "idea of cultural appropriation is multifaceted and frequently controversial, referring to the act of individuals from one culture adopting or borrowing components of another, especially when the dominant culture appropriates parts of a minority or marginalized culture" (Young 1). This phenomenon is widespread in several domains, such as music, art, fashion, language, and rituals, particularly featuring the White appropriation of Black cultural forms.. "History has repeated itself with the advent of hip hop music, and white society continues to erase the cultural significance of the art form as it is thrusted further into mainstream culture. While hip hop is often understood to be a music and dance style, hip hop has influenced fashion, language, and attitude"(Balanda 7). While inspiration and cultural interchange have always been important parts of human history, problems occur when these components are removed from their native cultural context without due respect or understanding. A primary apprehension regarding cultural appropriation is the power dynamic that permeates these interactions. The commodification or aesthetic use of aspects of a minority culture by the dominant culture can reinforce inequities, promote prejudices, and lessen the value of the behaviors that have been appropriated. Complex cultural traditions are frequently reduced to mere fashion trends as a result, losing their historical and social context and losing their original significance. Because it enables the dominant culture to choose to highlight elements that seem fashionable or exotic while ignoring the struggles and history of the appropriated culture, cultural appropriation plays

a role in the erasing of the identity of the oppressed group. This may result in damaging misconceptions, misrepresentations, and a lack of respect for the diverse cultural fabric these elements are taken from.

Though culture appropriation highlights the importance of taking from one culture negatively, which benefits the individual who is not from that culture, culture appreciation focuses on the opposite. The positive recognition, comprehension, and appreciation of the numerous traditions, cultures, and practices that comprise different communities worldwide is known as cultural appreciation. Cultural appreciation emphasizes an authentic and respectful engagement with various cultural manifestations, in contrast to cultural appropriation, which is the stealing of components from a culture without knowledge or respect. As Jernigan argues,"Appropriation may seem harmless to a dominant culture, but it is not. Appropriating oppressed peoples' cultures maintains mistreatment of certain groups of minorities in the US and carries on a colonialism mindset"(Jernigan 4). It entails taking an open-minded stance to recognize the contributions that every culture makes to the global fabric of human experience while also learning from, honoring, and celebrating the distinctiveness of each one. Understanding other cultures is essential to fostering inclusivity and enlarging one's horizons. A more tolerant and polite society can result from appreciating and honoring the contributions of all civilizations. It is crucial to approach the appreciation of different cultures tactfully, steering clear of preconceptions and acknowledging the agency and autonomy of each culture. In the end, appreciating different cultures promotes a global society that celebrates diversity and strives for a more accepting and connected world.

Distinguishing cultural appropriation from cultural appreciation is highly important as it sets the tone to understand why Fashion plays such a large role in this debate of whether or not

something is being appreciated or exploited or even mocked . Style pays respect to customs, ideologies, and past events by allowing people to express their cultural identities via fashion. To inspire designers and produce works that honor the diversity of cultural history, fashion designers must respectfully acknowledge and incorporate various cultural influences. This process is known as cultural appreciation. This procedure makes the globe a more interconnected place by fostering inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding. When designers practice cultural appreciation, they typically work with artists and communities to learn about the meaning behind the materials they use. On the other hand, cultural appropriation in fashion occurs when designers appropriate aspects of a culture without due respect or understanding, which frequently results in the commercialization of traditional attire, hairstyles, or holy symbols. When these components are incorporated into fashion with tact, teamwork, and a sincere respect for the original culture makes all the difference. Cultural appropriation can result in the erasure of the cultural identity from which these aspects are acquired, the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, and cultural distortion. "Cultural Appreciation" gives too much weight to the designer's feelings—their good feelings, good intentions, or "appreciation" for another culture—and no weight at all to other feelings. Feelings that fall outside the cultural appreciation framework are rejected as hypersensitivity reactions or "hater" feelings unfairly directed toward the well-intentioned or at least not ill-intentioned designer. Conversely, "cultural appropriation" too quickly reduces the problem to one of utility. The definition provided in the Fashion Institute of Technology's 2017 Summer Institute program schedule is one of countless examples of the common understanding of the term: "Cultural appropriation is the use of elements of a culture by nonnatives of that culture"(Pham 68).

The debate about cultural appropriation or appreciation in fashion has increased in recent years because companies such as Prada, Balenciaga, Louis Vuitton, etc. have tried to be inclusive by showcasing a stance of "we see you". The fashion industry has seen many scandals including claims of cultural appropriation against designers. Examples include wearing traditional clothing, headdresses, or sacred symbols from Indigenous peoples without giving due credit or cooperation to the original community. Discussions concerning privilege, power relationships, and designers' obligations to be culturally sensitive are frequently included in the debate over cultural appropriation. Finding a balance between appreciating cultural influences, accepting diversity, and refraining from exploiting or misrepresenting underprivileged communities is the main difficulty.

To elaborate more clearly on how this ideal of Cultural Appropriation or Cultural Appreciation is heavily prevalent today in fashion, this project focuses on one particularly problematic recent example. Balenciaga released "Trompe-L'Oeil Sweatpants", a pair of sagging gray sweatpants with boxer briefs attached at the waistband. Launched in 2021, this fashion item was made to be a comfortable pair of pants on Balenciaga's end. This product was designed by Demna, a white Georgian fashion designer, who was appointed Balenciaga's creative director in 2019. Balenciaga has made clothing for the top 20% of wealthy individuals who can afford their $1000 plus price tag. That demographic is typically "75% white individuals, 10% Asian individuals, 10% Latino individuals, and the remaining 5% or less Black individuals" (Chumo 27). They cater to the top demographic of primarily white individuals by offering them advanced structural pieces, straddling the edge of fashion, and forecasting the future. Spanish couturier Cristóbal Balenciaga created the well-known luxury fashion label Balenciaga in 1919. With its avant-garde designs and creative approaches to style, the brand has carved out a special place for

itself in the fashion industry. The brand has come to represent pushing the envelope and questioning accepted wisdom throughout time. But Balenciaga hasn't been immune to controversy. One prominent example is the brand's tendency to transform commonplace, ordinary objects into haute couture pieces, frequently with outrageous price tags. This strategy has spurred discussions on the thin line that separates creativity from exploitation.. Critics claim that the brand occasionally crosses the line into absurdity by commodifying commonplace items at the expense of usefulness and accessibility. Balenciaga's daring and frequently contentious designs are a reflection of a wider discussion in the fashion industry over the relationship between art, commerce, and how luxury is defined in modern society.

Balenciaga has made a name for itself truly, in good and bad. More recently since the launch of "Trompe-L'Oeil Sweatpants" in 2021, there has been a question of whether this fashion house is truly what it was before. With a major increase in platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, they have been able to push out faster marketing and content of upcoming designs and runways. It allows for individuals who are not close friends or celebrities of the brand to feel included in seeing the new fashion of Balenciaga. When the "Trompe-L'Oeil Sweatpants" were launched they were not shown on a social media platform until after the runway show in the Fall/Winter of 2021. When news broke of this design, many criticized the brand and the designer of culture appropriating. This established the conversation of whether or not fashion houses such as Balenciaga can get away with cultural appropriation, specifically profiting off of the Black American community. Black influencer Devan M. Vilfard wrote,"There have literally been laws that make it illegal to have sagging pants yet fashion designers are profiting off of the same thing Black people were criminalized for. Despicable." Followed up by a Twitter stan account named @Blackgirldating, "just a reminder that there has been legislation to criminalize Black people for

sagging". Elaborates on how the launch of the Trompe-L'Oeil sweatpants are not a new design but a style that was made and created by Black individuals that Balenciaga is now attempting to profit off of (Li, Hypebeast).

This incident exposes Balenciaga's shortcomings. Highlighted by i24NEWS English in Chicago, Evita Duffy, a Black woman in fashion, addresses the sweatpants created by Balenciaga and how the media specifically African American men and women are talking about the disgust and appropriation of what this fashion house has done. Black culture has been elevated by the media, especially in terms of its appropriation and integration into the fashion business. Advertising campaigns, social media platforms, television, magazines, and other media have all served to highlight and promote Black culture's distinctive styles, influences, and trends. Black culture is becoming more widely accepted and appreciated by mainstream audiences as a result of the ascent of Black celebrities, influencers, and designers in the fashion industry. Furthermore, media sources have aggressively emphasized the contributions made by Black stylists, models, and designers, elevating their voices and abilities globally.In addition to diversifying the sector, the rise of Black culture in the fashion industry has also put traditional notions of beauty and representation to the test, opening the door for more inclusivity and different cultural representation in the industry. In my initial analysis of the discourse around this controversy, I have identified four primary critical perspectives that have been raised about the brand are cultural appropriation vs. appreciation, brand identity and evolution, representation and diversity, and consumer identity.

Though Balenciaga has been called out on this design, they are not the first and only one who has done this. In a sense, it is the saying, "The second foul gets called". Black culture has been one of the primary cultures that have been appropriated by non-Black designers who are

attempting to profit and put their own identity on Black culture. Long-standing and complicated, the appropriation of Black culture by the fashion industry has sparked crucial conversations about cultural sensitivity, respect, and the power structures in the world of style. The growth of fashion is inherently influenced by cultural exchange and inspiration, but issues arise when deeply ingrained Black cultural aspects are removed from their historical context, turned into commodities, and presented without the appropriate recognition or comprehension. Adopting traditional African and African-American hairstyles—"like braids, cornrows, or dreadlocks—without appreciating their cultural value is one of several prevalent kinds of appropriation. Baggy and sagging clothing is typically linked with African-American men and women, who use this style to stand out and reveal aspects of their identity, gang affiliation, and economic position" (Brown 10). These looks, which have strong roots in Black identity and history, are occasionally appropriated by mainstream fashion without giving due credit, which frequently results in the erasure of the cultural background, by non-Black designers.

Black urban areas gave rise to the sagging fashion trend, which has had a significant influence on Black culture and generated discussions and disputes outside of the fashion world. Sagging has developed into a cultural phenomenon with deep historical significance and social ramifications after being accepted at first as a means of self-expression and rebellion against conventional standards. Sagging, which challenges conventional dress standards and asserts individuality, is a symbol of defiance and solidarity for many in the Black community. But this tendency has also drawn criticism and stigma, as it is frequently mistakenly linked to criminality and delinquency. Racial profiling and discriminatory acts have resulted from the policing of sagging, especially by police enforcement and other authority figures, which has fueled unfavorable perceptions about Black people. Notwithstanding these obstacles, sagging continues

to be a powerful emblem of cultural identity and resistance in Black communities, underscoring the subtleties and complexity of the relationship between fashion and social and racial dynamics.

"The history of Black fashion not only includes the ensembles that have shaped Black culture for centuries but the lives and experiences of the designers who persevered against all odds from slavery to ongoing racial inequalities"(Brown 5). This brings into play how Black designers should have a sense of ownership over Black culture within fashion. The fashion industry's few Black designers make a substantial contribution to Black culture's positive depiction and empowerment. When designs are stolen from them and the community "in doing so, and without crediting the creators of the clothes nor paying them to use the designs, their appropriation of elements of Black culture simultaneously infringed on intellectual property rights of Black designers" (Cherid 360). Their distinct viewpoints, life experiences, and artistic interpretations frequently subvert ideals of beauty and inject a welcome genuineness into the world of fashion. To create a more inclusive narrative that represents the multiplicity of Black identities, Black designers actively seek to demolish prejudices. Black designers display the diversity of Black culture and add to a larger discussion on the importance of cultural representation in the fashion industry by fusing aspects inspired by their cultural history. Furthermore, these designers frequently act as role models for the upcoming generation of Black creatives, shattering stereotypes and providing opportunities. Beyond the catwalk, their impact reshapes the business to better reflect the multidimensional beauty inherent in Black culture and influences society's perspectives.

To ensure that designers appreciate and showcase cultural variety without contributing to the propagation of damaging stereotypes or the exploitation of vulnerable people, it is imperative that they strike a balance between admiration and appropriation because, "Black culture allows

for white people to enter into a world of unique customs that they can pick and choose from at their own discretion to benefit them however they want. Black culture is more than just hairstyles and hip-hop for Black people. It comes with your very existence being challenged daily and constantly places you in danger" (Lockhart 24). Designers must approach their work with a profound grasp of the cultural relevance of the sources of inspiration as well as a dedication to developing mutual respect and understanding in this dynamic relationship between fashion and culture. There needs to be a clear understanding that what Balenciaga has done is cultural appropriation. Yes, many fashion designers pay homage to Black culture through appreciation but appropriation is a pivotal aspect within fashion. Fashion may effectively prevent cultural appropriation by cultivating an industry-wide culture of mutual respect, cooperation, and consciousness.

First and foremost, education is essential; stakeholders and designers alike should place a high priority on becoming knowledgeable about the cultural significance of the components they use in their designs. Mitigating appropriation can also be accomplished by aggressively soliciting advice from Black designers with varied backgrounds and experiences to promote diversity and inclusion within the fashion industry. Working together with Black communities and craftspeople from the original culture is essential to ensuring authentic depiction and creating job possibilities. Furthermore, it can be beneficial to set rules and moral principles for the sector that deter the commercialization of traditional clothing or holy icons. In the end, fashion may prevent appropriation by fostering an atmosphere that is more thoughtful and culturally aware, where originality is valued without sacrificing the deference due to the sources and significance of the cultural aspects being used, "As far as the fashion industry is concerned, such interventions need to incorporate the following: foster public and professional environments that support Black

designers and provide them with resources and opportunities to exert agency as they (re)claim and showcase their cultural heritage" (Vézina 36). It needs to be encouraged that non-Black designers are turning to Black designers for guidance and opinions on whether what they want to produce is appreciating Black culture or appropriating it for cash benefit. Black culture is just as important as fashion, but Black culture is not a profit that can be made to fit the needs of non-Black individuals.

Balenciaga occupies a paradoxical yet pivotal position within the fabric of fashion's identity. The brand's controversial nature intertwines seamlessly with its indispensable role in shaping the fashion landscape. Its vast research ethos, which encompasses two unique analyses and particular frameworks that highlight the significance of black culture, is deeply ingrained in its heart. This detailed investigation dives into the depths of the fashion business, exposing the complex ways that black culture profoundly influences the spirit and character of the sector in ways that paradoxically celebrate while exploiting Black culture. In this paper, I will address the research questions that guide my own approach and identify the scholarly conversations that frame this research object. My first research question is: What cultural politics are involved when designers incorporate elements of black culture into their creations? My second research question is: What role do prominent black designers within the fashion industry play in shaping and redefining beauty standards, and how do their contributions impact the representation of blackness in the broader context of fashion, compared to a white European designer such as Balenciaga? In order to address this question, I will engage with sources regarding who really owns black culture in fashion and how black designers treat the realm of expressing themselves through identity differently than a non black designer who is profiting off of a cultural experience and reinforcing their own power within whiteness. My third research question is:

How does the Balenciaga design's appropriation of Black culture inhibit the creation of a more inclusive and diverse fashion landscape? This will involve surveying previous research in order to draw conclusions about ideology and fashion realities of Blackness and Whiteness in Balenciaga and surrounding companies that shape this identity, particularly those that are not as institutionally recognized or can only be expressed within the context of a Black culture.

Discourse Analysis

Research analyses are essential because they fill in the gaps between unprocessed data and important findings. Discourse analysis is an effective technique for examining the complex language and communication tactics used in the fashion business. Discourse analysis, as Harris noted, can be viewed from two related angles, one of which is the relationship between "culture" and languages (Harris 1). Adding to this, Hodges' analysis explores the conversation on how non-black fashion designers, through written and spoken words as well as visual components like ads and pictures, further their own goals in contrast to those of black designers (Hodges 571).

Discourse analysis allows scholars to uncover the power dynamics, cultural narratives, and underlying meanings that are present in fashion consumption and communication. This methodical approach investigates how aesthetic choices, societal conventions, and identities are shaped and reshaped by fashion discourses. It excels in analyzing how advertising, fashion media, and social media affect cultural trends, philosophies, and societal ideals. Scholars can obtain a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between language, imagery, and societal dynamics within the dynamic fashion landscape by analyzing the language and visual representations used in fashion discourse.

Comparative Analysis

Similar to discourse analysis, comparative analysis draws a clear distinction between cultural appropriation and black culture and provides a nuanced viewpoint that walks a tightrope between appropriation and appreciation. Haas provides clarification on the technical nuances of comparative analysis, emphasizing the difficulties associated with sampling methods, typologies, and source reliability (Haas 295). Comparative analysis is a useful tool in the field of fashion for analyzing the constantly changing terrain of styles, trends, and cultural influences.

Using this approach, it is possible to systematically analyze how diverse fashion elements—like styles, textiles, aesthetics, and consumer behaviors—differ among cultures, time periods, and brands. By use of this comparative method, academics are able to identify trends, follow the development of styles, and clarify the fundamental reasons for stylistic variances. In the domain of fashion, comparative research enables a thorough comprehension of the ways in which historical settings, cultural inclinations, and technological developments converge to form the fashion business.

As Pickvance points out, the main purpose of comparative analysis is to clarify and understand the causal processes that underlie the origin of an event, characteristic, or relationship. This is frequently achieved by contrasting differences in explanatory variables (Adiyia 1). This research approach is especially helpful in understanding the complex relationship between fashion trends and society changes, providing deep understanding of the fluid character of style and its wider cultural ramifications.

Critical Race Theory

As was previously said, many academics work to understand how critical race theory (CRT) influences our identities and experiences in a variety of spheres of life while simultaneously recognizing the negative criticisms that try to undermine it. As a result of the

shortcomings of conventional legal methods in resolving racial inequities, Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a theoretical framework that goes beyond analyzing individual instances of prejudice to address the institutional and structural aspects of racism. According to Minda (Minda 167), critical race theorists argue that racism is ingrained in institutions and society norms and emphasize the importance of racial consciousness in resolving the issue of color.

Colorblindness is contested by CRT, which also highlights how crucial it is to acknowledge race as a social construct with significant ramifications. As Delgado points out, CRT aims to reveal these covert factors in order to advance social justice by shedding light on how social and legal structures may unintentionally support racial inequality (Delgado 113).

The idea of "intersectionality," which was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw and is fundamental to CRT, recognizes that people may encounter different degrees of privilege and oppression as a result of intersecting characteristics like race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Gaining an understanding of intersectionality is necessary to comprehend the intricate interactions between these various forms of discrimination.

Critics of CRT warn against the essentialist and divisive viewpoints it may promote, while supporters claim that it offers a framework for recognizing and combating systemic racism. Though it has caused controversy, CRT continues to influence public and intellectual discourse by providing insights into the persistent problems associated with racial inequality. CRT has an impact on conversations about laws, education, and social institutions by advocating for a more equitable and inclusive society. It is also relevant in the field of fashion, which is my area of interest.

Whiteness

When people create their identities, race frequently has a significant influence on these identities. The concept of "whiteness," which refers to the social construct that defines people who are descended from European heritage, is explained by critical race theory. It transcends simple biological or genetic differences and symbolizes a complex network of privilege, power, and cultural supremacy ingrained in societal systems. Whiteness functions surreptitiously and frequently goes unopposed, setting the standard by which other racial identities are measured. Whiteness has traditionally shaped cultural norms, beauty standards, and institutional frameworks in many nations, including the US (Kennedy 360).

White people have had a significant and wide-ranging influence on fashion. The fashion industry has always limited the definition of style and beauty by upholding Eurocentric values. The prominence of whiteness in influencing and setting fashion trends is furthered by the overrepresentation of white models in fashion magazines, advertising campaigns, and catwalk shows. Negative stereotypes are perpetuated and non-White voices are further marginalized by the lack of diversity in the sector.

In order to address the widespread impact of whiteness in the fashion business, it is imperative to demolish institutional obstacles, promote inclusivity, and recognize the wide range of global styles. In addition to encouraging inclusive representation, brands and designers that are dedicated to diversity also confront established structures that maintain the norm of whiteness. As the business develops, it becomes more and more clear that a more diversified and equitable representation of beauty and style is necessary, one that takes into account the various cultures and viewpoints that exist around the world.

Post Colonialism/ Decolonialism

The fashion industry's application of post-colonialism and decolonization analytical frameworks challenges and critically examines the long-lasting effects of colonial histories. Emerging from the historical legacies of colonialism, post-colonial philosophy highlights the need to demolish Eurocentric narratives and power structures (Legg 113). This entails taking on the fashion industry's role in promoting colonial aesthetics, stereotypes, and cultural appropriation. A related idea called decolonialism goes beyond postcolonialism in that it actively works to dismantle institutional and structural vestiges of colonial ideologies (Legg 118). In the context of fashion, this means tackling problems like resource exploitation in the Global South for the benefit of the Global North, unequal power dynamics, and cultural appropriation.

Examining cultural portrayals is essential to decolonial and post-colonial fashion viewpoints. Stereotypes and the commodification of aspects of non-Western cultures have been reinforced by the fashion industry's tendency to elevate Western designs. Decolonial fashionistas push for the recognition and enjoyment of various cultural influences, emphasizing collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual respect. Decolonizing fashion is around promoting diversity in design, manufacturing, and representation. This means combining traditional craftsmanship with modern designs, honoring the contributions of designers from all ethnic origins, and promoting an inclusive and egalitarian fashion industry.

Culture Appropriation

The differentiation between problematic appropriation and appropriate engagement with cultural aspects is based on the interplay of three frameworks: appreciation, appropriation, and cultural sensitivity. "Cultural appropriation" in the context of fashion refers to the adoption or copying of elements of a culture—typically one that has been historically marginalized or oppressed—without the appropriate recognition, comprehension, or respect (Young 135). This

problem is common in the fashion business, where manufacturers and designers frequently take inspiration from many cultural traditions without giving them enough thought or taking into account their cultural value or context. This might generate ethical questions. (Matthes 343).

A fashion example of cultural appropriation is when traditional clothing, symbols, or motifs are used in a way that commercializes and diminishes its cultural value. These kinds of actions not only run the risk of obscuring the contributions made by minority cultures, but they also support prejudices and exploitation. Prioritizing cultural sensitivity, teamwork, and ethical behavior within the fashion business is essential to guaranteeing that other cultures are valued and appreciated in a way that recognizes their historical and social relevance.

Fashion can progress from cultural appropriation to authentic acceptance and celebration of various cultural influences by cultivating an atmosphere of cultural sensitivity and cooperation. This means interacting with cultural components in a way that honors their historical context and significance, encourages understanding amongst people, and encourages genuine communication as opposed to shallow exploitation. In the end, the fashion industry can respect the depth and complexity of global heritage while promoting a more inclusive and equitable portrayal of cultural variety by adopting these ideals.

Culture Appropriation of Black Culture

This paradigm sheds light on the significant effects that cultural appropriation has on Black people and communities by examining the relationship between it and the appropriation of Black culture. The fashion industry has always struggled with the widespread problem of deeply ingrained African and African-American traditions being appropriated without due recognition or comprehension. Black cultural elements—such as hairstyles like braids and cornrows—are

routinely appropriated and sold by mainstream fashion, frequently removing them from their original historical and cultural context (Johnson 191).

This effect lessens the rich cultural importance of certain traits while simultaneously maintaining unfavorable prejudices. Johnson demonstrates how there are similarities between celebrity appropriation and the practices of fashion brands such as Balenciaga, citing examples such as Iggy Azalea's hip hop appropriation (Johnson 191). By uprooting Black people's cultural legacy and perpetuating historical power disparities, these actions exacerbate the marginalization of Black people and communities (Hall 104).

In order to combat the cultural appropriation of Black culture in the fashion industry, diversity, cooperation, and cultural respect must be prioritized. By encouraging close cooperation, recognizing the sources of their inspiration, and aggressively advocating for the participation of Black voices in decision-making processes, brands and designers may play a critical role. Authenticity and diversity advancement in the fashion business depend on abandoning fads and adopting moral standards that respect and promote the richness of Black cultural history.

Black Culture

This section explores the complex aspects of Black cultural identity, which researchers are trying to fully comprehend. It follows the talks that came before it. Black culture is a dynamic and multifaceted fabric that encompasses a broad range of African American contributions, manifestations, and rituals. Black culture, which has its roots in centuries of tenacity, inventiveness, and flexibility, is present all over the world in a variety of forms, such as dance, music, art, fashion, and language. But as Runcie's observations about Black people's historical self-perception demonstrate, learning about Black culture can be difficult (Runcie 185).

Gallon's analysis of Black culture's relationship to the Civil Rights Movement and current racial equality movements highlights the culture's resilience, sense of community, and dedication to social justice (Gallon 67). This cultural ethos emphasizes a resolute commitment to eliminating systemic inequities and working toward a more fair society. It is intricately entwined with action and lobbying.

Black culture has left a lasting impact on the fashion industry by bringing its diverse influences and unique styles to the field. Black culture has had a lasting influence on fashion across eras and nations, with bright colors, striking patterns, and avant-garde styles. African traditional textiles and the development of streetwear are only two examples of how Black culture has continuously influenced and altered design trends. Furthermore, Black influencers, models, and designers have blazed a path for the fashion industry towards greater diversity by breaking down boundaries and sparking positive change.

In summary, comprehending and valuing Black culture in the context of fashion emphasizes the significance of diversity, representation, and cultural acknowledgment in creating a more dynamic and inclusive fashion scene, in addition to acknowledging Black culture's significant influence on the industry.

My first judgment is that the Balenciaga sweatpants are an example of colonial discourse carried on and are designed to resist the creations and prevailing ideology of the non-black fashion industry. There are still unanswered concerns about who owns black culture in fashion, even though the academic insights covered above provide an overview of the dynamic and diverse spectrum of fashion expressions resulting from the merger of cultural legacy with modern aesthetics.

I suggest using the "Racial Agenda" of the Balenciaga sweatpants as a created language to study the garments from the perspective of a non-black designer attempting to represent their own perception of the black experience. Comparing it to designs by black designers who do not have to create an artificial experience is one way to approach this. The act turns into a kind of resistance when it is used to appropriate and profit from the culture of another. Discursive and comparative studies will be used to reveal industry-specific ideologies.

In the end, the Balenciaga sweatpants present a singular research subject that goes beyond simple apparel and offers a chance to explore the intricate processes of racial appropriation in the fashion industry in greater detail.

Balenciaga's most recent sweatpants, the trompe-l'oeil, have caused controversy. i24NEWS English explores this controversy through a discourse analysis of a Facebook news video. This study undertakes an in-depth investigation of the visuals linked with the Balenciaga trompe-l'oeil sweatpants and looks at a series of Twitter comments made by Black American men and women that are allegedly addressed to the brand.The purpose of this study is to provide light on the phenomena of non-Black designers making money off of Black people, maybe through appropriation and undermining the legitimacy of Black culture. Expensive fashion labels have frequently faced criticism for taking inspiration from many cultures and interpreting it in their own ways. As a result, the purpose of this essay is to investigate the ownership issue in Black fashion. In how the Spanish fashion company Balenciaga has benefited from the contentious sagging trend that has resulted in people being criminalized in the US by taking cues from the Black American community. The conversation will also cover the subtle distinctions in awareness between Black and White designers, highlighting the significance of honoring rather than appropriating culture in the fashion

industry.

Although Black designers and artists play a major role in influencing fashion trends, there is still a problem with Black culture's aspects being commercialized without due credit or recognition. Fashion has a history of taking over iconic elements without appreciating their cultural value, including hairstyles, outfits, and accessories.Unquestionably, black culture has had a significant impact on the development and direction of the fashion industry. African American culture has always been at the forefront of fashion trends and style growth, from dance and music to language and art. The impact is seen in the fashion industry's vivid patterns, striking hues, and avant-garde designs. In addition to forging their own unique looks, black designers, stylists, and influencers have made significant contributions by rewriting the stories around mainstream fashion. Streetwear and other key trends, together with iconic characters like Dapper Dan, have cleared the path for a more inclusive portrayal of Black culture in fashion. The embrace of natural hair, a range of body shapes, and the blending of traditional African components with modern trends all highlight the significant impact of Black culture on fashion, breaking down barriers and enhancing the field with a rich tapestry of originality and authenticity. Concerns regarding exploitation arise when Black aesthetics are used as trends without true comprehension or representation. In order to ensure that Black culture is not only acknowledged but also embraced with integrity, giving due recognition to its origins and promoting an inclusive and respectful environment, the fashion industry must go beyond token efforts.

A complex interaction occurs in the fashion industry when Black and White designers work in different ways to incorporate Black culture into their designs. Black designers frequently add elements that resonate with their cultural history to their work, giving

it an authentic and deeply embedded perspective. They are inspired by Afrocentric fashion and traditional African patterns, while also honoring the diversity of the Black diaspora. Conversely, white designers must strike a careful balance while working with Black culture. Some people sincerely interact with and honor Black aesthetics, while others may purposefully or inadvertently appropriate parts, sparking debates about cultural appropriation. The secret is to promote cooperation, communication, and comprehension. Acknowledging the roots, working with Black creatives, and encouraging diversity in the field are all important components of respectful assimilation. This is shown in a Black American designer Telfar that has incorporated everything Black and problematic in the US. He has done it in a way that showcases his anger and frustration at what happens to Black men and women unlike Demna's culture appropriating designs for Balenciaga.

The Trompe-L'oeil

Balenciaga's Trompe-L'oeil sweatpants are not a particularly interesting or inventive design in the world of contemporary fashion, in my opinion. The phrase "deceive the eye" in French, which appears in their name, sums them up nicely. Known for its avant-garde aesthetic, Balenciaga has cleverly created a visually striking trompe-l'oeil illusion out of a conventional wardrobe staple. These sweatpants subvert preconceived preconceptions about clothing size and shape by deftly producing the optical illusion of a second pair of boxers wrapped around the waist.

The way Balenciaga portrayed its Trompe-L'oeil sweatpants in its ad campaign has generated important discussions about diversity and cultural awareness. Although the brand's website prominently displays a Black model using the Trompe-L'oeil sweatpants, White people are primarily featured wearing the same item in runway and other media campaigns.

Due to this discrepancy, the brand's dedication to true diversity has come under examination, and concerns have been expressed regarding the potential exploitation of Black aesthetics for niche market appeal. Although the use of a Black model in certain promotional materials recognizes the value of inclusivity, the different choices made in other situations underscore the industry's continuous struggle to fully embrace diversity. It highlights how important it is to have consistent representation and how fashion companies need to go beyond token gestures of diversity in order to portray a respectful message in an honest way.

Even though Designer Demna Gvasalia's perspective influences many of these choices, it's crucial to acknowledge his contribution to pushing the frontiers of fashion and sparking discussions within the industry. Gvasalia, who is well-known for shattering conventions and reinventing luxury fashion, gained considerable notoriety for her work with Vetements before joining Balenciaga in 2015. Balenciaga has transformed under his direction, bringing together aspects of streetwear and high fashion with avant-garde forms and inventive ideas. Gvasalia hasn't been without controversy, though. Due in large part to his investigation of subjects such as normcore and the appropriation of common objects into luxury works, critics have questioned the delicate line that separates creativity from exploitation. For example, the Trompe-L'oeil sweatpants have provoked conversations around cultural sensitivity and appropriation, underscoring Gvasalia's willingness to push boundaries even when doing so means negotiating contentious territory within the fashion business.

Although Balenciaga's Trompe-L'oeil sweatpants have attracted a lot of attention, they are not the only product that has faced charges of cultural appropriation. The backlash to these goods highlights how crucial it is that the fashion industry embraces moral design principles and spreads awareness in order to stop harmful stereotypes from being perpetuated and the

cultural integrity of persecuted groups from being undermined. The way Balenciaga reacts to instances of cultural appropriation and works to rectify them will be critical in determining the direction the brand takes and in fostering a more inclusive and varied fashion industry.

Overall, the Trompe-L'oeil sweatpants' design demonstrates the brand's ingenuity and desire to question conventional ideas about fashion. Because of its association with sagging, these sweatpants have provoked conversations about cultural appropriation beyond just their aesthetic appeal. This has led to a more thorough investigation of the relationship between high fashion and cultural sensitivity.

i24NEWS English Segment

The i24NEWS documentary explores the controversial topic of designer pants, sparking debate and raising questions about cultural appropriation. Examining the controversy around these trousers, the show explores more general issues about cultural sensitivity in the fashion industry. A wide range of opinions and societal issues are covered in the conversation that i24NEWS presents, with a focus on those expressed by the Black community. This thorough investigation highlights the complex nature of the problem at hand and the fashion industry's responsibility to respect and interact with elements of other cultures in a way that is suitable.

When Balenciaga's trompe-l'oeil sweatpants first appeared, there was a lot of criticism, especially in the US. Black lady Amalia Roy, a producer for i24NEWS, provides insights into the situation's relevance and the causes of the Black community's unhappiness. Amalia says, "What we are seeing is a well-known luxury brand making money off of a part of Black culture that has historically resulted in pain and unjust arrests, especially among Black males," highlighting how critical it is to include more Black voices in the discourse.

Evita Duffy, a co-founder of the Chicago Thinker, provides a different viewpoint to

Amalia's portrayal of the issues facing the Black community. The white woman Duffy seems to minimize the importance of the complaints made by Black people over Balenciaga's apparel. Her statement, "People in the woke left try to say that a pair of pants and hoop earrings are cultural appropriation when, in reality, they are appreciation," shows that she is unaware of the complex feelings that the Black community has for one another. Amalia shows obvious discomfort during the conversation and questions Duffy, highlighting that the real problem is not that Black culture is valued but rather the anguish and suffering caused by Black men's historical history. "It's about addressing the suffering and tragedies, including the fatalities that have happened as a result of Black males sagging, rather than celebrating Black culture. Amalia highlights the discrepancy between Balenciaga's marketing strategies and the harsh realities experienced by marginalized populations. "Balenciaga profits from these pants, even though many Black men cannot afford them," Amalia claims.

The interview's analysis highlights the varied perspectives on how the trompe l'oeil sweatpants are perceived. It also highlights a crucial question, though: why does the Black community's statement of worry over the garment turn into a conflict? There is an urgent need for real acknowledgment of the agony and suffering that Black people endure, as opposed to just discussing differing opinions. Instead than spiraling into bitter debates, the emphasis need to be on resolving these fundamental problems and encouraging communication that advances understanding amongst people. This calls for a real attempt to close the distance between divergent viewpoints and develop a more sympathetic understanding of the complexities of cultural sensitivity.

Twitter/Comments Discourse

Analyzing how Twitter functions as a forum for criticism, especially among African

American men and women, reveals a dynamic facet of online activism. Because of Twitter's democratic structure and its enormous reach and immediacy, it empowers marginalized voices—including those from the black community—to oppose instances of cultural appropriation, injustice, or unethical behavior. Black people use this platform all the time to tell their stories, bring attention to offensive or insulting topics, and hold people accountable for their behavior. By employing communal instruments like hashtags, trending subjects, and retweets, they galvanize public sentiment and bring attention to problems that are often disregarded. Twitter's succinct and instantaneous structure makes information easier to disseminate and builds a sense of community and purpose among social justice and cultural sensitivity campaigners.

Black men and women took to Twitter ahead of an i24NEWS English interview to demand that Balenciaga answer for the publication of the contentious pants. Black community activist and ardent Twitter user Devan M. Vilfrard expressed his concerns in a potent tweet that said, "There are laws against sagging pants, yet fashion designers profit from it." Vilfrard's remarks highlight the contrast between the terrible reality that African Americans endure and the attitudes that are common in European contexts—like Spain, home to Balenciaga—and the United States. Vilfrard emphasizes the paradox of a fashion business commercializing black authenticity by placing the sagging pants trend within its historical context and the corresponding effects on the black community.

Black Girl Dating, a Twitter account that supports black women, also addressed the matter, reminding followers that "legislation has criminalized sagging pants for black people." Her involvement highlights how serious the problem is and shows that even those who aren't usually involved in social justice conversations feel obligated to speak up when something

happens in their town. This demonstrates a common understanding of the negative effects of clothing choices that uphold historical injustices against the Black community and a group effort to address them.

Even though these two Black individuals skillfully express the problems with the pants, it's clear that not everyone sees them as such. As she remarked under the interview, Lori Nakaguchi—likely a frequent watcher of i24NEWS English—said, "I see a lot of black women using extensions, hair dye, and hairpieces to get a look that is not natural to their hair texture." "Cultural appropriation" is that? Lori's remark highlights a lack of knowledge on the reasons behind the haircuts that Black women may choose, which may be impacted by a distorted racial perspective. Her criticism of Black women for wearing hairstyles that are both protective and supported by science betrays an entitlement complex. This emphasizes how important it is to have educated conversations in order to raise knowledge and debunk myths about Black community customs.

Black Designer Telfar against Demna Balenciaga

In order to provide further context for this analysis, a closer look into Black designer Telfar Clemens' creations sheds light on his distinct aesthetic. Telfar Clemens's fashion designs have effectively included sagging, a purposeful and impactful style decision, which embodies his dedication to accessibility and inclusivity. Telfar's use of sagging reflects a sophisticated knowledge of its cultural relevance by questioning conventional wisdom and promoting individualism. On the other hand, when a white designer appropriates sagging without understanding its cultural context, it can exploit a trend that has its roots in Black people's experiences and reinforce negative stereotypes. Telfar's use of sagging encourages self-expression and empowerment, exhibiting a sincere understanding of its cultural

significance. On the other hand, appropriation frequently lacks this complexity and genuineness, running the risk of erasing cultural subtleties and adding to a misleading narrative that ignores the social and historical ramifications of sagging.

Especially as a Black queer guy, a moving comment accentuates Telfar's insightful investigation of sagging within his fashion house. This emphasizes how important it was for him to include sagging, demonstrating a strong bond with Black identity and memories. This comparison highlights the difference between White European designers like Demna at Balenciaga and Telfar's flimsy cultural appropriation of Black culture.

Complex and unpleasant difficulties arise in the fashion business from the practice of white designers using cultural appropriation to create a false feeling of black authenticity. Designers like Demna are part of a tendency that perpetuates negative stereotypes and downplays the distinctive contributions of Black communities by commercializing aspects of Black culture for profit. White designers run the risk of trivializing rich cultural expressions and maintaining racial inequalities when they appropriate symbols, styles, or traditions without first appreciating their historical and social contexts. Authenticity is crucial in design, and creating a fake sense of black authenticity denigrates black cultural history while also commodifying Black identities and experiences. This emphasizes how crucial it is for the fashion business to support sincere cooperation, intercultural understanding, and polite representation in order to promote diversity and steer clear of damaging notions.

The fashion industry is being scrutinized once more because it appears to be avoiding responsibility for cultural appropriation. Some fashion firms still plagiarize and commercialize aspects of other cultures, even though this has caused public criticism on multiple occasions. The problem goes beyond monitoring, pointing to a structural issue where profit frequently

trumps authenticity and cultural sensitivity. These businesses' capacity to handle controversy without suffering significant consequences feeds into an unsettling trend that keeps the industry's cycle of cultural appropriation going. It emphasizes how critical it is to raise awareness, educate the entire industry, and have fashion businesses take responsibility for their design decisions. The industry cannot go towards a future that is more inclusive and courteous unless it works together to address and resolve these problems.

This brand is communicating a message to the public that they might perceive as a non-issue within the fashion community. Balenciaga's recent clothing launch has been criticized for what is deemed racial appropriation, specifically in its interpretation of a street style associated with Black African American men and women. iNews24 English underscores the importance of holding any entity accountable that profits from the Black community through their clothing creations. The impact is heightened as a Black woman articulates why this particular clothing item demands attention and action. Twitter discourse analysis further sheds light on the public's reactions, particularly from black men and women, emphasizing that this item goes beyond being merely a garment—it symbolizes cultural appropriation. This points to an unsettling pattern within high-end luxury brands, indicating a lack of change in their designs. However, the media and the public are taking it upon themselves to address and halt this perpetuation of cultural appropriation, exposing a continuous trend in clothing, advertisements, and runways involving basic items.

The debate between cultural appropriation and appreciation presents two opposing viewpoints that need to be carefully considered. Cultural appreciation, on the one hand, stresses an authentic and courteous recognition of the many customs, fashions, and symbols that come from different civilizations. It entails embracing these components, promoting

intercultural understanding, and appreciating the advantages of cross-cultural interaction. On the other hand, cultural appropriation is the term used to describe the taking of aspects of another culture without appreciating or comprehending their worth; this frequently results in the commercialization and trivialization of holy or historically significant symbols.The key is to walk the thin line between respect and appropriation, making sure that cross-cultural exchanges are characterized by awareness, knowledge, and a sincere desire to respect and learn from other cultures. Fostering a more inclusive and respectful attitude to cultural influences in all domains, including fashion and beyond, requires an awareness of and comprehension of these two sides.

Overall this analysis offers a crucial area of research in the intricate world of fashion is the disparity between Black and White designers' respectful integration of Black culture. In order to celebrate authenticity and diversity, black designers frequently incorporate a true and nuanced grasp of their cultural history into their works. In contrast, certain white designers—like Demna and Balenciaga, for example—have come under fire for allegedly stealing aspects of Black culture, as evidenced by the Trompe-L'oeil sweatpants issue. It is imperative that the industry recognize and resolve these inequalities. Respectful integration requires sincere cooperation, thoughtful inspiration, and cultural sensitivity. Balenciaga is a major participant in the fashion industry and needs to be held responsible for the designs it creates, particularly when using Black culture raises questions about appropriation or exploitation. In order to transcend racial boundaries and promote a more respectful and rich flow of influences, the fashion industry as a whole needs to work toward a more inclusive, representative, and ethical approach to design. Fashion firms must be held responsible for cultural appropriation through a multipronged strategy that includes openness, education, and

industry-wide responsibility. First and foremost, customers are crucial to accountability because they actively participate in discussions on cultural sensitivity, abstain from purchasing products from companies that violate their rights, and use social media to spread the word. In response, brands must emphasize diversity in their design teams so that people with different experiences may contribute to the creative process.

It is critical to acknowledge and pay attention to members of marginalized communities who voice concerns about the commercial exploitation of their cultural identity. Even though the Black community is a well-known victim of this kind of abuse, it's important to acknowledge that other cultures have also dealt with comparable problems. Although they are frequently the most exploited, the Black group is not the only one to engage in this pattern of cultural appropriation. Therefore, in order to solve the larger problem of cultural exploitation in the fashion industry and beyond, I believe it is crucial to promote knowledge and respect for cultural identities across all cultures.

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