



Sealaska Heritage Institute

Cultural Appropriation

By

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Cultural appropriation has been defined as the flow of tangible and intangible cultural elements from Indigenous societies into western societies or predominantly western societies.

Tangible objects include art objects, medicines, and human remains.

Intangible objects include music, oral traditions, and spirituality.

Cultural appropriation is also viewed as a violation of the intellectual property rights of the originating culture.

A key factor in cultural appropriation relates to the power relationships between the expropriated and the expropriator.

The imbalance of power between a minority culture and members of the dominant culture is more often a byproduct of colonialism and oppression.

Cultural appropriation has historically been done without regard to Native values or what Native people think about it.

SHI adopted goals to promote cross-cultural understanding and to integrate Native culture, language and arts into schools

With these goals, SHI initiated efforts to educate non-Natives and the public about our culture, history, and arts and offered classes for teachers to give them the necessary knowledge to provide culturally-based education.

Significantly, these goals and SHI subsequent actions signaled a shift from the historical colonialism that plagued our lives.

These goals implied an ideal of symmetrical power between the Native and non-Native society.

The goals also reflected an Indigenous society asserting a right to teach non-Natives about Native culture and art and for educators to integrate this knowledge into their class instruction.

This transformation was also imperative, as Native artists and rural communities are dependent on the sale of arts. Rural villages are economically depressed and the sale of arts provides a stream of income not available otherwise.

SHI also held workshops for teachers to help them understand Tlingit law and the traditional practices to protect our *at.óowu* or sacred art and the place of art in our contemporary lives.

We had one teacher who had taken an SHI art class for teachers who did not want to incorporate formline instruction into his class because it felt like appropriation.

We assured the teacher that it was not cultural appropriation. We were instead teaching him the skills to integrate Native art into his classes.

Overall, this teacher and our community in general have demonstrated great sensitivity in seeking to overcome the historical legacy of cultural appropriation.

SHI has implemented measures to teach the public and teachers about our culture and about existing law that protects Native art.

We have adopted policies and procedures that seeks to protect ownership of our sacred art and cultural practices and that outline what can be used by the public.

We believe that these initiatives, which can be viewed on SHI's website, can deter cultural appropriation.

Indigenous Peoples throughout the world are asserting that recognition and protection of our cultural heritage and properties are fundamental to our cultural survival in the face of past and ongoing cultural oppression and colonization.

We believe that cultural diversity enriches our society, state, and nation and that NWC arts and culture provides untold sustainable social and economic benefits not only to Natives, but to the region and state as well.