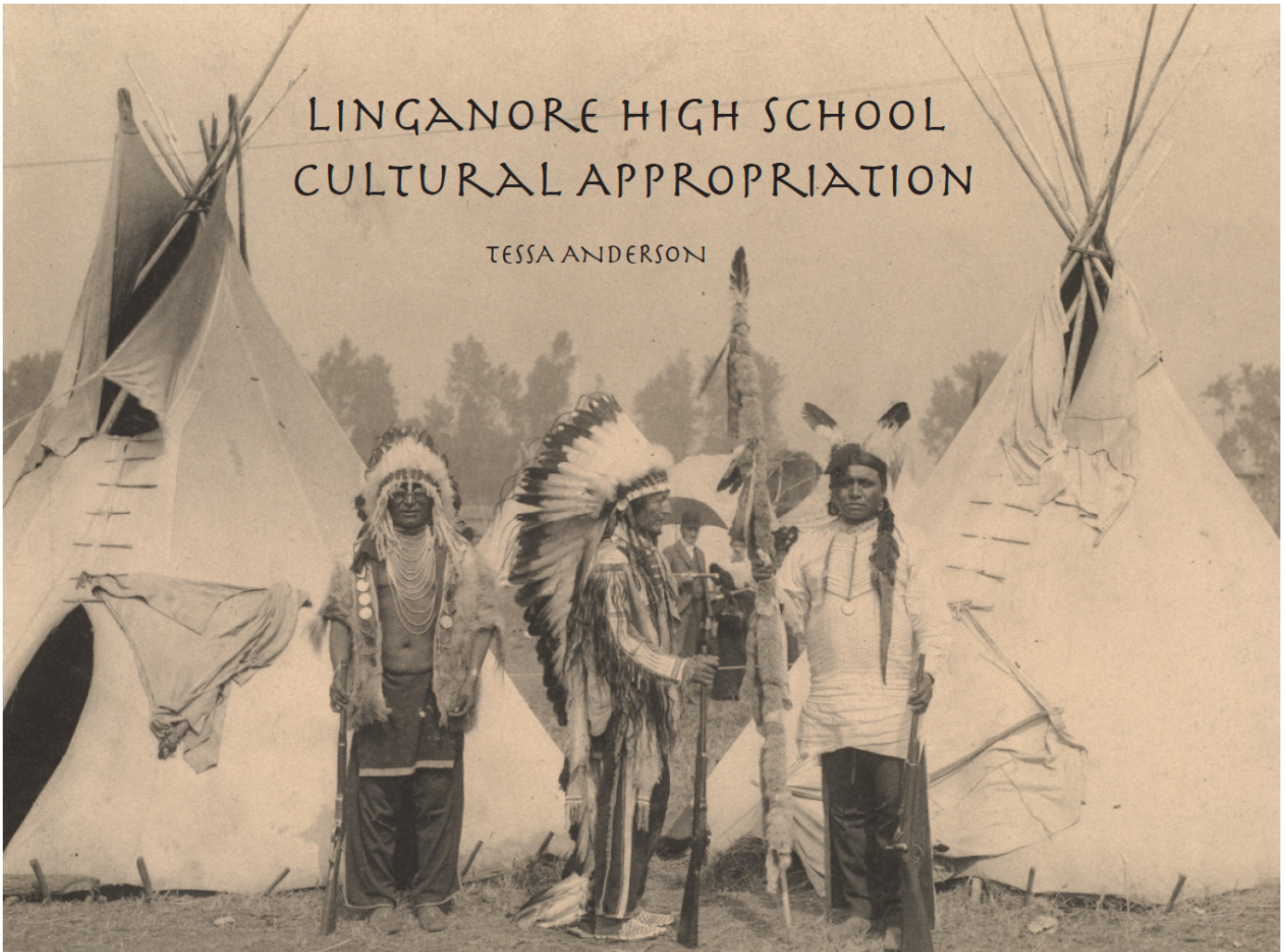


LINGANORE HIGH SCHOOL CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

TESSA ANDERSON



The Linganore Community

As any student of history knows well, the past has a tendency to repeat itself. As writer and philosopher George Santayana wisely noted, “Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it” (Santayana, 1905, p. 284). There is a personal experience from my own life I would like to offer in support of this idea. In the fall of 2016, a paramount tradition was about to be seized from a highly spirited high school. Situated in northern Maryland, Linganore High School takes pride in its school, especially when it comes to its athletics. Since Linganore’s founding in 1962, the high school has always had an abundance of school spirit. This past fall, it was brought to the attention of the administration that the spirit in which Linganore once indulged is now perceived as shameful due to concerns over cultural appropriation. That is, lack of knowledge the Linganore community has regarding Native American culture has led to this inappropriate mockery of the culture.

Dating back to the 1980s, cultural appropriation at Linganore High School began a trend that would continue until the present day. Linganore High

School’s mascot is the Linganore Lancer, a Native American, and the student body embraces this mascot to the fullest extent. Since the inception of Linganore High School, cheerleaders painted their faces like Indians and wore Indian headdresses in support of their school and mascot. This immense spirit of Linganore led the Student Government Association to begin fundraising efforts in 1985. The extra money from the fundraiser was invested in the purchase of a new mascot uniform referred to as ‘Louie the Lancer’. This costume is culturally inappropriate and is extremely offensive to Native Americans across the country. The purchase of ‘Louie’ was only the beginning of what became an ongoing theme at Linganore High School. The mascot was a giant head, and when worn on the body of a student, resembled a bobble head version of a Native American chief. ‘Louie the Lancer’ was a headliner at football games until 2001, but gradually disappeared thereafter. I questioned Mrs. Larson, Junior Advisor and Class Counselor at Linganore, about Louie, the infamous mascot. When I mentioned the forgotten mascot’s name, she said, “Oh! We still have Louie. He’s upstairs in storage.”

As Louie enjoys a necessary retirement, his beginnings spawned another tradition with similar offenses, which is now causing controversy and bringing unwanted attention and negative news stories to the otherwise nondescript little town.

Following 2001, a new insult sprouted from the ashes of 'Louie the Lancer', and so the Linganore headdress was born. Over time, different Linganore students would wear native headdresses to pep rallies, athletic events, and, of course, football games. The student body began electing a graduating senior to wear the Native American chief headdress at Linganore's athletic events. The chief was supported by a group of seniors who would paint a single letter across their chests in school colors. When the painted seniors then stood in a line facing the student section, the letters would reveal a catchy phrase for that night's game. The "tribe" would usually pick a theme for the game, and the student body would dress accordingly. These themes included: America out, red out, camouflage out, and many others. The role of the "chief" and his mini tribe was to get the audience loud and excited for the game, often by chanting "I believe that we will win" and "first down."

The Banning of the Headdress

For the entirety of my high school career, my friends and I were effectively blind to the offenses taking place. I was so wrapped up in the moment, the school spirit, the excitement of it all, and yes, the fun, that I didn't realize what was truly going on around me or that I was an active participant. It took the arrival of an outsider to enlighten me.

At the start of my senior year, Linganore High School hired a new principal named Nancy Doll. Our new principal brought some new, and frankly, unwanted ideas with her--the most controversial of which was the questioning of the use of the infamous headdress at sporting events. To the student body and to the town, questioning this practice seemed to be the beginning of the end. The thought of not being able to experience the anticipation and excitement of the Friday night football games brought a wave of depression to the seniors and controversy to the town. Everything turned into complete chaos. As seniors, we were particularly distraught at the thought of this tradition, something for which we had eagerly awaited for 3 years, being taken away from us. For every Linganore senior, sitting in the front of the student section at football games and painting up is monumental. Not having a "tribe" for our senior year seemed, at the time, unthinkable and unacceptable to many of us as it was something every

underclassman looked forward to for their graduating year. The "tribe" held many meetings with Mrs. Doll, pleading our case and begging her to allow the seniors to wear the headdress. Eventually, Mrs. Doll conceded and granted permission for my class to wear the headdress, but this would be the last year. She would banish the headdress the following year due, of course, to understandable concerns over cultural appropriation. On August 31, 2018, Principal Nancy Doll announced her decision. The chief headdress worn by the tribe would become an abandoned Linganore tradition like that of the disreputable 'Louie the Lancer'. It was deemed offensive to several students and Native Americans.



At first, I was upset that the headdress tradition was coming to a close. But, the more I looked into cultural appropriation, the more I understood Principal Doll's perspective and why the tradition was wrong. This past fall, the headdress was officially banned from all athletic events. The initial reaction was an outburst of emotions from both sides of the issue. Students took positions both supporting and opposing the use of the headdress. Petitions began circulating, begging for signatures to either eternally ban the headdress or to preserve the ongoing tradition. Alumni, faculty, and even parents held surprisingly strong opinions on the matter and took sides by signing the petitions in support of their positions. According to Fox News, "Petitions from both sides of the issue have each accumulated over 1,500 signatures. The petition to bring the headdress back has gathered over 2,100 signatures, with most coming from community members and alumni" (Fox news, 2017, para. 3). The Linganore community was outraged.

Seniors from the 2018 graduating class have spoken up regarding the ban. When asked about the issue, many say that the headdress was not intended to be offensive. This may be true, but the headdress is culturally inappropriate. Linganore High School has taken the Native American headdress and claimed it as their own. As a body, we may find unity in school

spirit, but the headdress is not a part of our own culture, and its use is offensive to cultures in which the headdress is significant. Borrowing from another culture may be deemed appropriation when it reflects a culture poorly or when a product of the culture is used inappropriately. In Linganore's case, the headdress is deemed cultural appropriation because the sacred Native headdress is being worn by those who don't understand the Native culture or what the headdress truly means to Native Americans.

What really enabled me to come to terms with the situation was gaining knowledge of Native American culture. As a Linganore alumni, I was biased against the suppression of our tradition. Gaining a deeper understanding of Native culture and the sacrality of the headdress, though, gave me a greater appreciation of their perspective of the controversy over the utilization of the headdress.



Native American Culture

In Native American culture, the headdress was designed for and designated to the chief of the tribe. These Native headdresses are a bouquet of feathers. Each of the feathers carries a specific meaning and is a culmination of a body of work, often accumulated through battle, and are held as sacred by Native Americans. Receiving an eagle feather is considered extremely holy. Feathers are hard to come by and are only accumulated through extreme acts of bravery. This concept may be lost on a culture that hands out trophies, ribbons, and awards for mere participation in an event. While feathered headdresses were not worn by every tribe, most used them as a reflection of rank and as a part of many rituals. Adorned with honorable feathers for each act of courage, the Indian headdress holds great merit and is considered a badge of honor. Each individual feather has a spiritual significance; elements from animals such as fur, leather, and feathers are considered elements that possess life. An Indian headdress carries elements from other living beings, and it is believed that the power of these animals will

be transferred to the Great Spirit through those who wear the piece.

When you consider the headdress and what it represents in its authentic contexts, it is important to realize that we are talking about a culture that has been dispossessed and disempowered. Entire Native American cultures have been completely wiped out in what amounts to genocide. These cultures have experienced a history of violence and atrocities against them, by the very people who are now stealing and defaming a sacred piece of their heritage for no better reason than it gives them pleasure. So when Natives see their culture being misrepresented in an unflattering setting, they are, of course, deeply offended.

Juan Boston, vice chairman of the board of directors at the Baltimore American Indian Center, told the Frederick News-Post: "We see feathers as gifts from the Creator. I'm 58, and in my life, I have received one eagle feather. When you see some people wearing one jumping around like a monkey yelling like an idiot, it is disrespectful to our culture. It's like if someone were to wear an Army general's uniform and parade around jumping and yelling making a mockery of it. The outcry would be incredible" (Fox News, 2017, para. 7). Boston's opinion on the matter and similar viewpoints have opened my eyes and helped me to realize how Linganore's lack of knowledge and respect regarding Native American culture has caused us to look past the true meaning of the native headdress. We stole a sacred element from a culture, with absolutely no understanding or regard for its meaning, and tried to assimilate it into our own culture. The Linganore Lancers are not the only ones to be held accountable for cultural appropriation. This issue has been seen worldwide with some greater offenses. The Washington Football Team, for example, was called "The Washington Redskins" for many years until activist work successfully pushed for the team to change its name. Thus, Linganore's decision to eliminate the headdress aligns with other trends toward acknowledging cultural appropriation and attempting to correct these offensive depictions.

Declaring Cultural Appropriation

Throughout history, it has been commonplace for one culture to take aspects from another and adopt them as their own. It may happen unintentionally, even going unrecognized, and it can even be beneficial to take aspects from another culture.



Picasso borrowed from African art and created amazing artwork. People learning about another culture through their art is appropriate, but when is borrowing from another culture deemed appreciation versus appropriation? In *Love, Hate and Culture Wars*, Olufunmilayo B. Arewa, a Professor of Law at UCI, discusses the borrowing from a culture out of admiration: “Explorations in the cultural sphere must be undertaken with attention to context. Some uses of cultural elements can be carried out to denigrate, as was often the case with nineteenth- and twentieth-century minstrelsy. Affinity and love of something that we may not know about can be a motivating force that draws us to observe and try to replicate” (2017, p. 3). Making use of ideas is quite valuable; borrowing from a culture out of respect for their way of life and their traditions is not always a bad thing. But when is borrowing from a culture deemed cultural appropriation?

Cultural appropriation arises when someone takes from a less dominant culture and presents it in an undesirable or offensive manner. Stealing from a culture in an offensive manner comes from a place of ignorance rather than knowledge of the culture. Consent is invaluable. Cultural appropriation relies highly on context. Someone may borrow from a culture for personal gain and

love, like Picasso, but some may also borrow from a culture out of hate, which is when it falls under cultural appropriation. After Olufunmilayo B. Arewa discusses borrowing out of affinity of the culture in *Love, Hate and Culture Wars*, she then discusses borrowing from a culture out of hate, “The lines between borrowing and appropriation are shifting and may at times be unclear. Appropriation may be evident in varied acts, including demeaning depictions of a culture that typically becomes prominent in the United States yearly at Halloween with blackface and other troubling reminders of past hatred” (2017, p. 7). As it is often unclear where the line is between instances of borrowing from a culture in respectful and informed ways and appropriating, great care must be taken when engaging with other cultures.

Thus, it’s important to acknowledge the access we have to other cultures and how easy it is to borrow from a culture and flaunt it to the world in an unintentionally negative manner. It’s also vital to gain knowledge and familiarity with the contexts of cultural uses and their significance for both insiders and outsiders. If we are to engage in cultural appreciation and avoid the pitfalls of cultural appropriation, great care must be taken.

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