



# Is It 'Hood Fashion' Until Someone White Wears It?

In the early days, Black culture was often viewed as 'ghetto,' racist, and 'too much.' For many years, it has been preyed upon and misunderstood. Magazines featuring artists like Lil' Kim, Aaliyah, Foxy Brown, and more have showcased our revolutionary style. But when does it stop being labeled as 'hood' and finally get recognized as contemporary? In the early 2010s, Black culture significantly influenced people's styles. Celebrities like the Kardashians, Lana Del Rey, Ariana Grande, and Christina Aguilera all drew inspiration from Black culture. At times, this is frustrating; the Black community constantly faces criticism for embracing our natural roots, while others are inspired by us and take the credit. Yet, news outlets praise non-Black individuals for appropriating our culture, often celebrating them in blogs and other media. In 2015, Zendaya stepped onto the red carpet at the Oscars with her beautiful locs. It was a moment I loved. She showcased the beauty of Black culture by wearing her hair in a protective hairstyle locs. What started as empowering and uplifting for the Black community, however, soon took a toll on Zendaya. E!'s co-host Giuliana Rancic, better known as the 'Fashion Police,' criticized Zendaya heavily, stating she thought the actress's locs "smelled like patchouli oil and weed." Rancic's comment didn't just insult Zendaya, it degraded the Black community as a whole.

The continued assumption that a historically significant hairstyle is automatically linked to drug use and 'horrific smells' is rooted in centuries of degrading and racist portrayals of Black people. Comments like these reinforce the idea that Black culture is often mocked and looked down upon. Yet, when non-Black people adapt elements of our culture, they are praised, credited with 'starting new trendy looks,' and celebrated for their 'innovation.' However, Zendaya didn't let Rancic's comment get to her. Instead, she took to social media to call out the ignorance behind such assumptions. Zendaya stated, "There is a fine line between what is cultural appropriation and what is appreciation." Her response sparked an important conversation about the double standards Black people face when it comes to cultural expression, showing that Black culture is often only appreciated when it's marketed and worn by non-Black individuals. While celebrities like the Kardashians, Ariana Grande, and others are often praised for appropriating Black culture, Black individuals are continuously criticized for embracing their own culture, facing backlash and discrimination. This goes to show how it's only deemed acceptable when a non-Black person in the media wears our culture, emphasizing the inconsistency of 'who is wearing it and why.' The criticism Zendaya faced for wearing a protective hairstyle highlights how Black individuals are often discouraged from proudly showcasing their Blackness in mainstream spaces. When will this stop? When will embracing black culture not be a crime when an actual person of color does it?

**By Jeanelle Tweneboah**