

X4

Week 3 Discussion: How does cultural or national background influence color choices?

We could also ask, in relation to the above question: apart from the artist's use of color, do you think that each viewer's cultural or national background influence the way that they view or create a work of art?

Please reply to one or two other student's post as well.

P.S. Critical thinking here. Try to be contentious and play 'the devil's advocate,' even if you don't agree with the stance. Possibly, taking an oppositional opinion, to challenge your own thinking.

In Spain we have a saying 'para gustos, colores' which, literally translates to 'for tastes, colors' - meaning to each its own. As the saying well puts it, I always felt that colors were a very personal choice for each individual - what colors they like and what colors they dislike. However, of the past 3 weeks, I have come to learn what a big influence culture and national background have on how each person perceives colors and how they might be influenced to pick one color over another.

When taking two of the primary colors, red and blue and compare each color to different cultures we get a range of emotions/symbolism for each color depending on the culture:

Red, in western countries, mostly symbolizes excitement, energy, passion, love, action and danger. In Asian cultures, red symbolizes good luck, celebration, happiness and long life (in India the bride is dressed in red as opposed to the white gowns brides use in western countries). In eastern Europe countries and Russia, red is strongly associated with communism.

Blue, for the most part has many positive associations worldwide - it symbolizes trust, loyalty wisdom and heaven. A national background difference I have noticed is that in English (England and U.S.A) the term 'feeling blue' is used to convey the feeling of sadness or depression - this term is not used for example in Spain (if you say this to someone in Spain they might think you are feeling like a smurf!). Another cultural/national difference is for example in Greece or Turkey (probably other surrounding countries too) they have the symbolic blue eye - which is a symbol to ward off evil.

Overall I think that not only personal, cultural and national background influences the color choices of the designer - although as Beginner very well puts in his video and book, when designing a piece for a client the personal color choice of the designer should not matter, only the target audience. Not only that, but this personal, cultural and national background also influences the way the viewers/audience of the piece of the design assimilate the piece. It is therefore extremely important to consider that target audience and the cultural and national backgrounds in order to get across the appropriate message you intend to deliver.

Hi Laura, It's always so interesting to see how different languages deal with colors. I had no idea that Spanish didn't have a similar understanding of 'feeling blue'. I agree with you that it is quite important to consider the target audience, and I would add that maybe there should be some consideration of whether or not color associations have changed for that target audience over time since these things, just like language, are constantly changing with culture and society.

Good day, Laura.

I completely agree. Understanding the target audience and doing the preliminary research prior to putting pen to paper is a necessity. Like nationalities, colors have different meanings based on location and demographic.

Based on my experience, while you still get vibrancy in color, different color palettes envision different genres of music. A warm color palette of natural hues will always represent country music to me. Likewise, bright and neon colors, always represent the flash of popular dance music.

So understanding the target audience helps to point to appropriate color palettes.

Thank you for bringing up this point.

Take care.

Dan S.

As designers, when choosing colors, its important for us to consider the audience as well as the aesthetic of the design. Different colors can mean different things to different people. Our color preference is often influenced by our culture, background, religion, and personal preference, making it very difficult to pick a color for someone. I definitely agree with this thinking. Working mainly with colors in interiors spaces you learn that color really is subjective. One person may love a bright yellow and have it painted in their kitchen because they spend a lot of time in their cooking and love the energy it brings to a room. Another person may get a headache from a yellow that

bright and prefer more muted colors in their home or prefer a crisp, clean white in their kitchen.

I think personal preference can take precedence over religious and cultural preferences when choosing colors. I know a few brides from the States that purposely did not wear white on their wedding because they thought it was too traditional. Or people that refused to wear black to a loved ones funeral because they wanted it to be a time of celebration instead of a time of mourning. One of my favorites things about color is just how subjective it is. I love hearing what certain colors mean to people and why they have that connection to that specific color.

Hi Arianna,

I agree! Color is definitely subjective. Do you remember the dress which divided the whole internet? Some saw it one color while some saw it another?

Hi Arianna,

I agree! When I was thinking about this topic, I also considered how cultural associations with color can lead people to break tradition because they want to do something new, or have a different association with a life event. It is definitely very subjective.

Hi Arianna! I completely agree with your post. I think that personal preference does trump anything else at this point. Like you mentioned, more and more people are even going outside of their cultural norms in terms of color traditions. When it comes to designing, I still think it is necessary to learn what each color means in your intended audience, but also balance that with what looks best and what is most eye catching.

Also interesting point Yvann brought up! Everyone either saw that dress one way or another, which is super interesting in showing how each person processes color differently.

A lot more people get to travel to other countries since transportation became more accessible. We get to view the diversity being reflected in many areas especially colors.

If an Indian bride comes to you for a custom wedding dress, you will learn that red is their go-to color. If you are a hat designer, you won't sell a white fashion hat to a Chinese person. Because a white hat means death in a family.

Brand logo is a good example when it comes to color choices. In the States, most of the tech companies would go with blue. Color blue represents calm just like the sky and ocean. It is also the safest choice since it has many positive associations in many cultures. So no matter where you're from, you will get it. But when we look at the logos of Chinese tech companies especially e-commerce business, most of them are red. Red means happy and festive in China so it triggers people to enjoy shopping more. Red for an e-commerce website would be too aggressive and intense for most people in the States.

All designers have their own style, but so does everyone else. A bit extra knowledge about our client's culture and national background will help us start a communication smoother.

You bring up a good point about traveling to other countries becoming more accessible. This gives us a greater awareness of different cultures and how they use color.

It's interesting you bring up blue -- and other colors that are "safer" choices. I'm curious if there are any other colors that are more universal/safer and have interpretations that are similar regardless of cultural background? I'm thinking green maybe, since life forms and plants are green.

Although cultural and national backgrounds do influence color choices, I think there are other factors that also have a strong influence on color choices. The city, home, and even the people you grow up with all play a role in how you perceive color. Speaking from personal experience, my mother has always loved the ocean and her favorite color is blue. I grew up around various shades of blue both in the home and in her artwork (my mother is an artist and painter). Because of this, I view blue as a joyful and comforting color. In contrast, one of my aunts dislikes blue and her home is filled with warm shades of orange and red. Her son's home has the same warm tones but they are balanced by his wife's choice of white walls and green plants. As people

move and meet new people their color preferences change. While cultural and national backgrounds do play a role, they are only one of a variety of factors that determine how a person perceives color.

When creating something for a client it is important to be aware of cultural and national perceptions of colors. As others have stated, it is crucial to know who your target audience is and to cater your color choices to that audience. You do not want to offend someone because of the colors you choose. This can be especially difficult when you have a large target audience spanning various countries.

I think that cultural and national influence play only a small role when choosing colors for your own personal projects. Personal preferences and experiences play the main role.

I strongly agree with your last point. There are many variations in individual's tastes even if they're from the same country.

Amelia, you make some excellent points and my impression was very similar... but I can't get past the idea that your aunt dislikes blue. I don't think I've known anyone to dislike blue!

I was shocked when I learned that! Blue is such a lovely color.

Hi Amelia! I also agree that your upbringing can influence your color decisions and what your eye is attracted to. I think how you feel about your upbringing can also have a factor, or things you associate certain colors with. For example, if you grew up in a loving home surrounded by the color brown you might love brown -- but someone who had a harder childhood surrounded by brown walls and furniture might find that saddening. I do think it really comes from the individuals eye and association!

Amelia,

You and I think a lot alike, except you said it better. Color can be as much about nature versus nurture as anything else.

When I was younger, I had an aunt who loved Victorian colors and natural woods. Those earthy tones always seem to center me and keep me a little bit more focused. Even now, as I look at my home office space, it's colored with beiges, browns, and warm golden tones.

I can directly relate my color choices to the memories of my aunt and spending time with her while she was still with us.

Like you, my mother is in love with various shades of blue. While her home is decorated with muted blues, my father interjected his influence and included neutral palettes and greens.

As a result, my own color choices are pulled from the influences of my youth and the positive meanings that they invoke.

Thank you for making this observation, as I think I might have missed it.

Take care.

Dan S.

Cultural and national background influence color choices in many ways. I think a good way to understand ones views on color, based on their national origin, would be to start with national flags. I am from France and our flag is blue, white and red. The white represent royalty and the red and blue are the colors of the city of Paris. In other culture, like in China, white would be for mourning. The Chinese Flag is red and yellow. Red is for prosperity and both red and yellow are happy colors.

I currently work for Louis Vuitton and most of our Chinese clients are looking for red wallets and red purses for those reasons. On the other hand, few French women carry red purses and would instead go for a more neutral color like a dark blue, black, brown, or beige. Louis Vuitton bags are not works of art (they're beautifully designed) but I think the color choice made by clients based on their background is very interesting and is something that designer need to be well aware of when designing a product for a wide variety of client.

Is the reaction to color something personal, or is it shaped by the culture around us? In today's fast paced world, where people from different cultures connect with each other daily, the cultural influence upon color perceptions can still be supported.

In researching this topic, I found it interesting that certain color associations are complete opposites in western and eastern cultures. For example, the traditional blue for boys and pink for girls is overwhelming in our western culture, from nurseries, gender reveal parties, clothing etc. In China however, blue is considered a feminine color.

A similar example of this extreme are the colors black and white. White is the color of purity and peace in most Western cultures – the most popular color for brides to wear. White in Eastern colors symbolizes death and is used at funerals to represent mourning and unhappiness. Black in Eastern cultures represents wealth, health and prosperity, whereas in Western culture it is the color of mourning.

Trying to remain aware of the different symbolism can be difficult, especially from a marketing perspective. To form a different argument, it can also be supported that the initial reaction to a color may be more universal across cultures than originally thought. For example, blue and green in one study tended to be "liked" among different cultures. Red despite having different meanings (in China it is the color of weddings, in South Africa it is the color of mourning). These two events represent two completely different emotions, but each evokes a strong emotional response.

Just as in any design decision, there are many considerations to take into account – cultural influence being one. The personal preference of a color can be as simple as an individual choice, or also shaped by other factors such as gender and age.

I agree with your point Alison - remaining aware of the different cultural symbolisms can be very difficult! I also think from a marketing perspective it is quite crucial to have a good research done when designing and applying color - wouldn't want to transmit a completely wrong message!

It's fascinating how a color can represent completely opposite meanings. I'd love to understand the history of color better to see if

that was an organic differentiation or if those meanings may have been established in contrast (i.e., western countering eastern influence).

Everyone's responses are so thoughtful - what an interesting topic!

What caught my attention is that the question asks about individuals, which garners an entirely different response from me than if we're talking about a group. :)

With respect to a group, I agree with all of the comments below about how different countries and cultures value colors. We make generalizations about what color means to them based on historical, documented information. That's certainly how branding is created, right? Based on what we know about the general population and what they respond to.

In talking about individuals, I definitely believe that cultural or national background influence the way they view or create a work of art, but based more on their relationship with those things. For example, my counter-culture husband may prefer certain colors because they are less mainstream (basic!). However, I am a total sucker for colors of the year. In that sense, we are drawn to art for different reasons... I look for an aesthetic that resonates with my visual sensibilities and he is more fascinated by what may be less appealing to the masses. Someone whose identity is closely tied to their nationality may employ those colors with pride while someone who struggles with their national identity may resist the colors commonly associated with their country.

It's one of the many things I love about art – how intentional and meaningful its creation is, but how we all have individual responses based on our unique experiences.

Cultural and national background can certainly inform the color choices an artist uses or the way that a viewer interprets artwork, however I don't believe that it is necessarily the most important factor in color choices. Certainly, there are some cultures that have strong cultural associations with color (e.g. red representing good luck in China) but this is not always the case. In Trinidad, a single color can have a variety of associations because we have such a multicultural history. For instance, white can be associated with weddings or christenings, but can also be associated with mourning for those who practice Hinduism, or can also be associated with certain festive elements

of carnival. This makes it rather ambiguous when it comes to associating that color with our culture.

That being said, some color combinations can be so strong that subconsciously people can't help but associate it with their cultural or national background. National flags for instance, consist of color combinations that tend to be strongly ingrained in people's minds, given their level of cultural/national importance. This makes it more likely for a person to associate that particular combination with their nationality or culture.

While color can be associated with cultural backgrounds, I think it is more likely that certain symbols or motifs would be stronger associated with a culture than the color itself. When color is used in that context of culturally recognizable patterns or styles, it is easier to identify stronger cultural influences, or associate artwork with particular cultures, rather than associating it with the color alone.

I also think that personal and emotional associations with color are more salient than cultural influences. A person may hate the color yellow regardless of its positive connotations in their culture, and that is more likely to inform their interaction with the color than their cultural background.

I like that you brought up the use of different symbols and patterns in addition to colors. Combining the two elements can create a stronger cultural and national connotation.

Each person has their own color preferences, these tend to change depending on our age, as we read in the article 'Responding to Color' in week 2. For example, a few of my friends have always had strong tendencies in the colors they like and those have not changed since they were kids. I also think there are some people who are more flexible in their color preferences, they may not be as opinionated or maybe they aren't as affected by the colors they have in their home or workplace.

People have many different tastes and colors that they gravitate towards. However, I think many of these preferences are heavily influenced by culture, whether we realize it or not. Traditions that have specific colors associated with them leads people to associate those colors with certain emotions and memories. Culture could also impact which color combinations are seen as 'tasteful' (which also changes over time, as trends come and go), what is seen as 'classy' or 'professional' in one country could be completely different in another, for example. Culture and national identity play a strong role in opinions of and associations with certain colors but like others have

said, I also think personal preference is very important (possibly more important). The friend who I mentioned earlier would paint her home in a huge range of bright colors and would like the brightness and energy created. Whereas I would probably find those surroundings to be stressful if it were my home.

Since the target audience is the most important consideration when choosing colors for a design, this topic is very important to ensure that your work doesn't have an unintended reaction.

As many have stated already, I think that color choices are strongly influenced by cultural/national backgrounds as well as personal preferences. After doing some further research on color, I found that color decisions and associations stem more from just your physical origin. This can also stem from your cultural background and religious beliefs. For example, when Christian Americans like myself think of a funeral, the very first color in mind is black. We wear black because we are in mourning. When we compare this to a celebration such as a wedding, the first color that comes to mind is white. This color is the primary wedding association to represent purity and symbolize a celebration.

However, these color associations are far different in other countries such as Japan or China. When someone passes in these countries/cultures, white is used instead of black. And in India, most Indian brides wear red instead of white.

Another example, are the colors red and green together. For me, my mind immediately goes to something as simple as Christmas. However, for a Buddhist Monk, this association would be far different. In the Buddhist tradition, the color red symbolizes sacred things or places and the Buddha Amitabha (pure land). While green, represents youth, harmony, or balance. In modern day, many companies use the colors red and green to remind their viewers "Christmas is coming, time to get your shop on!". While in other countries, this would not have the same connotations. It's important to know and understand the target audience when choosing color.

I also think that personal preference strongly influences color decision making, and what our own eyes are attracted to. Personally, my favorite color is yellow. If I were walking around an airport and saw a grey sign next to a yellow ad, my eye would go to the yellow ad first. However, if someone

absolutely hates the color yellow, they might not even bother looking up or glancing at the signage.

So, while I think one's culture does influence color decisions, and it should -- especially when working with a company on an ad for example, you want to know your target audience -- it is still possible to do all the research necessary and still not achieve the target you want due to personal preferences. If someone who celebrates Christmas is looking for a gift for a family member, but they hate Christmas, their eye might go to an advertisement more subtle with less use of red's and green's in the color palette.

With all the discussions around nationalities and color, and color meaning or mood, I think my two takeaways are:

- Know your audience - whether you are working for a client or creating your personal art, knowing your audience will help you define the appropriate color palettes. Ask questions. Do research. But overall, uncover what color means to the audience.
- Color is as much personal preference as it is anything else. Our backgrounds, heritage and even color influences of our home life dictate what we anchor to. A child who is disciplined and put in a room decorated with green won't see green the same way as a person who is into nature and sees the same green as growth and renewal.

That it's for this week. Have a good week everyone.

Take care.

Dan S.

I would say yes! I want to echo what people seem to agree on above — that a viewer's cultural/national background influences the way they view and interpret colors. Different colors have different meanings in different cultures. Many people have brought up examples, and I've experienced this personally too: as someone of Chinese descent, I remember never being allowed to wear anything white in my hair, because it signified death of a close family member. As a kid, I remember thinking it was a strange rule because other kids in my

school classes never had a second thought about wearing a white headband or hat or hair-tie.

And thus, because art is created within a cultural context, it interacts differently with different cultures. One example comes to mind from this week's readings — when Krause was discussing the use of brown and black color palettes, he mentions that it could be a fashion faux pas in some audiences, but it can also be reminiscent of the golden age of woodblock printing in Japan. Without this cultural context, one might miss the nostalgia and aesthetic style.

This reminds me of an interesting study I read by Jules Davidoff. He found that people in the Himba tribe were easily able to distinguish between shades of green but couldn't easily distinguish between blue and green. Since they have no word for the word "blue" in their language but many words for different types of "green", this seems to reflect in how they see. Language is cultural; therefore, it pushes the argument even farther. Culture may impact more than our interpretation of color but what we can see in the first place! While there is no conclusive relationship between which comes first, it is interesting to consider. ([Links to an external site.](https://www.businessinsider.com.au/what-is-blue-and-how-do-we-see-color-2015-2))<https://www.businessinsider.com.au/what-is-blue-and-how-do-we-see-color-2015-2> ([Links to an external site.](https://www.businessinsider.com.au/what-is-blue-and-how-do-we-see-color-2015-2))

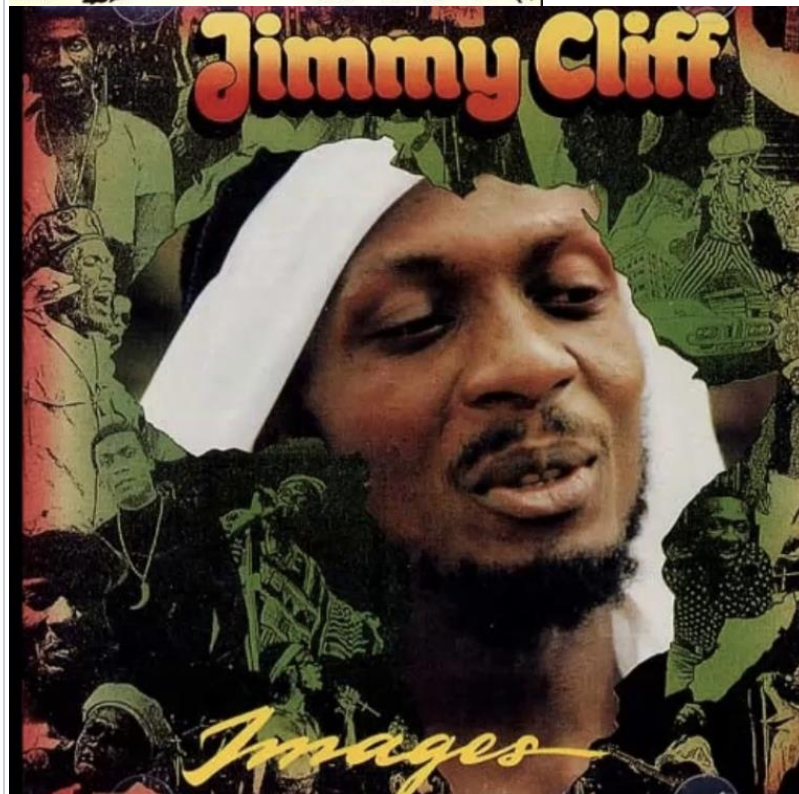
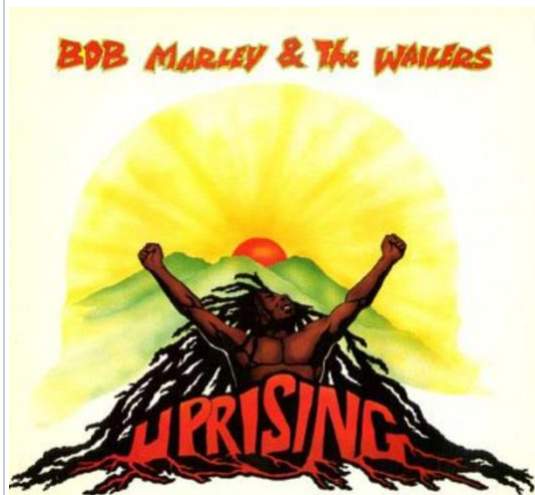
I really enjoyed reading your response. You gave some wonderful examples and I especially enjoyed the last paragraph about the Himba tribe and the way they see blue and green.

I do think in certain cultures it most certainly does influence works of art. I . can't say that for all cultures it is true. Mainly because I personally don't know every culture on this planet. So I can only speak to some cultures that I do, or do not, feel that the culture or national background influences art being created in a particular place.

The first place/culture that comes to mind for me in regards to art being directly influenced by its culture and nationality is Jamaica. So if we look at a few examples and genres of art that's come out of Jamaica you often see the pride for their island by using their flag colors; red, green and gold. Designs incorporating these colors are prevalent in fashion, painting, album art ect. And here in the states if you saw the colors used together in the signage for say a Jamaican restaurant. Those 3 colors used together read Jamaica. Say the restaurant was called "The Spot" (I made that up...I've never seen a Jamaican restaurant called "The Spot") and the 3 colors were used in their

signage I don't think it would even necessarily have to even say Jamaica on the sign to be recognized as a Jamaican restaurant . If you were to be across the street looking at that sign I'm pretty sure a very high percentage of people would know that they were looking at a Jamaican restaurant.

Here are a few examples:.

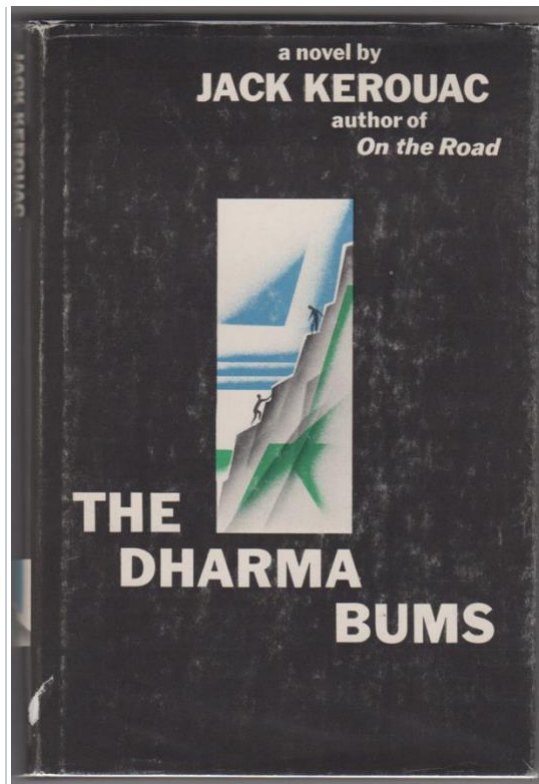




Now this might be a personal opinion but I don't think that American art is all that influenced color wise by our culture. Studying art and American fashion and observing many, many other varieties art growing up in the US, I don't believe that our culture is influential on color choices by artists. Sure there are some America centric color choices by some artists. I suppose this could be due to the wide variety of landscapes, attributes and distant cultures that settled in different areas of the US. States across the country are so different from one another. NYC is a melting pot and extremely different than the Pacific North West or New Orleans. There might be a city or state culture that will put out art that is specific to that place but if we are talking about the color influence of a nation I don't believe that America has a major influence on artists color choices.

Here are a few examples:

Kerouac from Massachusetts



Andy and Gaga/NYC



Texas Gallery and Marfa Sculpture

