



Halloween is not an excuse to culturally appropriate



Kenia Ortiz

@Kenia_Ortiz-

Editor's Note: All opinion section content reflects the views of the individual author only and does not represent a stance taken by The Collegian or its editorial board.

Halloween is my favorite holiday — going to haunted houses and dressing up as a favorite Disney princess. However, as I've grown older, I've realized that a lot of the costumes I saw growing up should not have been costumes in the first place.

People take advantage of Halloween to culturally appropriate another person's culture — whether they know it or not — through their choices of costumes.

Cultural appropriation is when traits of one culture are used by another culture, usually a dominant one, and those elements uphold stereotypes. Popular examples of cultural appropriation would be dressing in a Native American headdress, wearing kimonos to dress as a geisha or painting

one's face as a calavera (sugar skull).

It's disrespectful to dress in another community's cultural wear because you find it trendy.

There is nothing trendy about taking something that is sacred or significant to someone's culture because you think it'll look cute on your Instagram or Snapchat story.

Posters from Ohio University's "We're a Culture, Not a Costume" campaign can be found all over residence halls at Colorado State University. While it's a step in the right direction, students and community members need to be reminded every year that it is not OK to use someone's culture.

To a number of Native American tribes, a headdress, also known as a feathered war bonnet, is an honor. Feathered war bonnets were mainly used by the Plains tribes.

Headdresses were worn by respected elders and warriors — when warriors showed bravery, they would earn a feather. Chiefs also had to earn their feathers.

At times, the first feather earned by a warrior was when he was seen as an adult in

the tribe. Receiving a feather was not so simple; he had to prepare himself to receive it, and it often required days of fasting and meditation. Once the warrior collected enough feathers, a headdress would be made.

"There is nothing trendy about taking something that is sacred or significant to someone's culture because you think it'll look cute on your Instagram or Snapchat story."

How do you think these warriors would feel seeing a college student prancing around in something so sacred, while drunk and playing beer pong?

A kimono is a traditional Japanese garment, which is usually associated with geishas. Geishas are traditional and high-class female entertainers that have mastered various arts. Geishas undergo lengthy training and are highly respected — so to "dress"

like them is disrespectful.

I have seen people put flowers and chopsticks in their hair and draw on thick eyeliner to give the illusion that their eyes are smaller. The Asian community has been mocked for their eye shape/size in movies and through jokes with the slanted-eye gesture. Trying to make your eyes smaller is dismissing the oppression that Asian individuals have faced and objectifying them by using their culture and physical appearances as a costume.

On Dia de los Muertos, a Mexican holiday, a calavera is used to remember deceased loved ones and to help overcome the fear of death and to continue to celebrate life. Calaveras are decorated with flowers and bright colors, which is what makes them so appealing to those looking for a costume.

For those of you who are going to start complaining that you are being kept from dressing as a skeleton, let me tell you one thing: calaveras and skeletons are different. Calaveras are decorated skulls used in a popular and sacred Mexican tradition, while skeletons are just the bones under our skin. Skeletons are meant to

be scary and represent death, while calaveras are meant to be beautiful and sacred.

Many will argue that they've heard this narrative repeated for years, that this column is nothing new and that they're tired of being told the same thing every Halloween. I encourage those who think like this to take a step back and try to understand — it's being repeated because people are still tokenizing minority cultures.

Halloween is a time to have fun and dress up as something scary or as a favorite TV/movie character. It's not a time to disrespect someone's culture, which includes beloved characters such as Mulan and Pocahontas. They are individuals whose stories hold significance and represent the values and history of another community. Feel free to dress up as Elsa, Ariel, Cinderella or Snow White instead.

If you or someone you know is thinking of stealing someone's culture for a Halloween costume, do the right thing and call them out — cultural appropriation is racism.

Kenia Ortiz can be reached at letters@collegian.com.

What young voters on the Left and the Right can agree on today.

Campus news, by students, for you