

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE HALLOWEEN COSTUMES

In preparation for the month of October and all the spooky Halloween activities that are celebrated within it, this month we are looking at Halloween costumes and cultural appropriation.

First, let us explore what [cultural appropriation](#) is defined as. Cultural appropriation is “the adoption of elements from a minority culture by members of the dominant culture in an inappropriate, exploitative, or unacknowledged manner, often stripping the element of its original meaning or significance.” Differing from cultural appreciation, which involves respectful engagement and mutual sharing. Key aspects include power dynamics, lack of understanding of the element's history or sacredness, stereotyping, and the potential for economic or social benefit for the appropriator at the expense of the original culture.

People buy and wear costumes that help them become something else, even if only for the evening. For some, it's a time of excitement in imagining a new reality. And for some others, it's painful. Costumes that take the form of caricature and adopt aspects of someone's cultural identity can be belittling. Insensitive. Obtuse. It's a form of cultural appropriation.

What is [Co-optation](#)? “Cultural co-optation is the act or process of using something from another culture in a way that is motivated by what is pleasing to you without considering the cultural significance, historical context and power differentials that are a part of the item or situation.”



continued

HALLOWEEN COSTUMES, CONT'D

What is important in choosing a costume? "It is important to consider the colonial and oppressive history that may be associated with certain costumes. The reality of lived oppression and injustice matter in cultural representations."

What is my position of power in this situation? Am I part of a colonizing or colonized group? Does this costume perpetuate stereotypes, particularly racial stereotypes? Does it center on a primitive image of a group of people? Is it based on deficit assumptions?

Does the costume include race-related hair or accessories (dreads/locs, afros, cornrows, a headdress)?

What's the historical context of this costume? Is there a history here that influences the way others around me might respond to what I'm wearing?

Does this costume represent a culture that is not my own?

Is this something I would choose on an average day? Are there negative aspects to the way of life this costume represents that I wouldn't want to live with every day?

See the next page for learning resources.



HALLOWEEN COSTUMES, CONT'D

Videos and Articles:

What is Cultural Appropriation?

<https://www.pbs.org/articles/lets-talk-about-halloween-costumes-and-cultural-appropriation/>
(9:38 video length)

Be culturally respectful as you celebrate Halloween

<https://attheu.utah.edu/facultystaff/be-culturally-respectful-as-you-celebrate-halloween/>
(2 minute read)

#IAmNotACostume

https://www.lspirg.org/costumes_ (15 minute read)

How to choose a culturally sensitive Halloween costumes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYQluA3wTvMhttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYQluA3wTvM> (1:26 video length)

Costume selection matters

<https://inclusion.msu.edu/news/costume-selection-matters.html> (10 minute read)

'WEEN DREAM IS AN ALL-VOLUNTEER 501(C)(3) NONPROFIT THAT GIVES FREE HALLOWEEN COSTUMES TO CHILDREN, or 'weensters, IN NEED ACROSS AMERICA.

[https://www.weendream.org/#:~:text='WEEN%20DREAM%20is%20an%20all-volunteer%20501\(c\)\(3\)%20nonprofit,gift%20of%20Halloween%20to%20kids%20in%20need](https://www.weendream.org/#:~:text='WEEN%20DREAM%20is%20an%20all-volunteer%20501(c)(3)%20nonprofit,gift%20of%20Halloween%20to%20kids%20in%20need)
(1 minute read)

Is My Halloween Costume Cultural Appropriation? - Your Civil Rights Guide

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x5gfb8hXv0https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x5gfb8hXv0>

Pittsburgh Fall Festivals 2025 Guide

<https://www.visitpittsburgh.com/blog/fall-fairs-festivals-and-events/> (15 minute read)

