

WE'RE A CULTURE. NOT A COSTUME



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THIS IS NOT WHO I AM, AND THIS IS NOT OKAY.



Tips for selecting a Halloween costume

1. If the costume or costume accessories' descriptions contain the words "Geisha," "Indian," "Hip Hop," "Ghetto," "Fortune Teller," "Gangsta," "Tribal," "Amigo," "White Trash," or "Illegal Alien."

RETHINK IT.

2. If the costume would require you to purchase accessories or makeup to make you look like another race. **RETHINK IT.**

Despite the fact that blackface has been offensive since it originated in minstrel shows in the 19th century, some misguided Americans continue covering their face with paint or shoe polish to mimic African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians every year, particularly at Halloween. It's been nearly a century since D.W. Griffith promoted white supremacy and blackface characters in his film The Birth of a Nation. Can we finally give up on blackface in 2012?

3. If you have to ask yourself, "Is this costume racist or offensive?" It probably is. **RETHINK IT.**

Consider the following questions:

A. Does your costume relate to someone's cultural heritage?

B. Does your costume depict a particular race of people?

If your costume meets A, or B, or Both, maybe you should rethink it.

If your costume doesn't meet these qualifications, congrats, your costume is probably NOT offensive/racist.

Interestingly enough, there ARE Halloween costume ideas that aren't based on the degradation and fetishization of entire real and not made-up ethnic and cultural groups.

You can be a vampire! A zombie! A werewolf! A ghost! A cat! A banana! Angry Birds! The possibilities are endless.

Basically, just be a decent human being this Halloween. Be creative!

Frankly, in addition to being horribly offensive, costumes built on racial stereotypes are tacky and not very clever.

We bet you could do better.

How to tell a friend their costume may be offensive

1. Don't make it personal.

Try starting a general conversation with your friend about a well-publicized racist Halloween costume—not theirs—and comments you have read from people who have been offended by the costume. This "sexy illegal alien costume," which was hopefully not your friend's choice, would make for a pretty good jumping-off point to talk about two common issues in Halloween costumes: (1) visual jokes which imply that certain groups of people are not fully human, and (2) "sexy" costumes which tend to objectify racial minorities.

2. Realize that they will probably take it personally anyway.

It's likely that your trick-or-treat buddy is going to be pretty attached to their Halloween costume idea, especially if they already shelled out for their outfit. A person's investment in their chosen Halloween costume goes far beyond the price-tag. Nobody likes to be called out on their racism, ever. But on Halloween, when a person's unintentional racism is nevertheless put proudly on display—when it becomes their very identity for an evening—the possibility that your friend might react defensively is pretty high. At this point, it might be to helpful to point out that members of the group that stand to be offended by your friend's costume have to live with their marginalized identities 24/7. Your friend may think you're trying to ruin their Halloween fun. But really, racist stereotypes ruin a lot of people's fun every day of their lives, and delicately making that clear may convince your friend that changing up the costume isn't too much of a sacrifice. Alternately, perhaps you can suggest how they might convert their costume elements into a less offensive final product?

3. Ask your friend if they have any reservations about wearing the costume in public.

Just straight up ask them if their worried about anyone from any particular group seeing their costume. Sometimes, offensive costume wearers don't even consider the possibility that a person from the minority group they've dressed as will actually see them. Sometimes, the simple realization that the people a racist costume is meant to lampoon actually exist— and will likely be at your Halloween party—is enough to make a costume-wearer reconsider.

4. On the other hand, perhaps your friend likes the costume because it is racist.

Some people do wear costumes because they find the absurd stereotypes hilarious . . . on an "ironic" level. The theory—I assume—is, "Oh! Look at that horribly racist costume targeted at women from the Middle East! I will wear it to point out how awful the costume industry has become!" Here, it is probably enough to point out that even though your friend does not intend to be racist, that strangers won't be aware of her intentions just by looking at them.

About the Bias Response Group

Skidmore is determined to foster a safe and inclusive campus climate that is free from discrimination and harassment. The Bias Response Group is always open to students with concerns about bias incidents and hate crimes.

It is imperative that students take responsibility for their community and report bias incidents they may encounter. Information about Skidmore's bias incidents and hate crime policies and procedures is available online at:

<http://cms.skidmore.edu/bias/>

"Skidmore defines a **bias incident** as an act of bigotry, harassment, or intimidation involving a member of the Skidmore community that a reasonable person would conclude is directed at a member or group within the Skidmore community based on race, color, ethnicity, nationality, economic background, age, physical and mental health or ability, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity or expression, marital status, veteran status, or religious practice. A bias incident can occur whether the act is intentional or unintentional. Speech or expression that is consistent with the principles of academic freedom does not constitute a bias incident."

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