

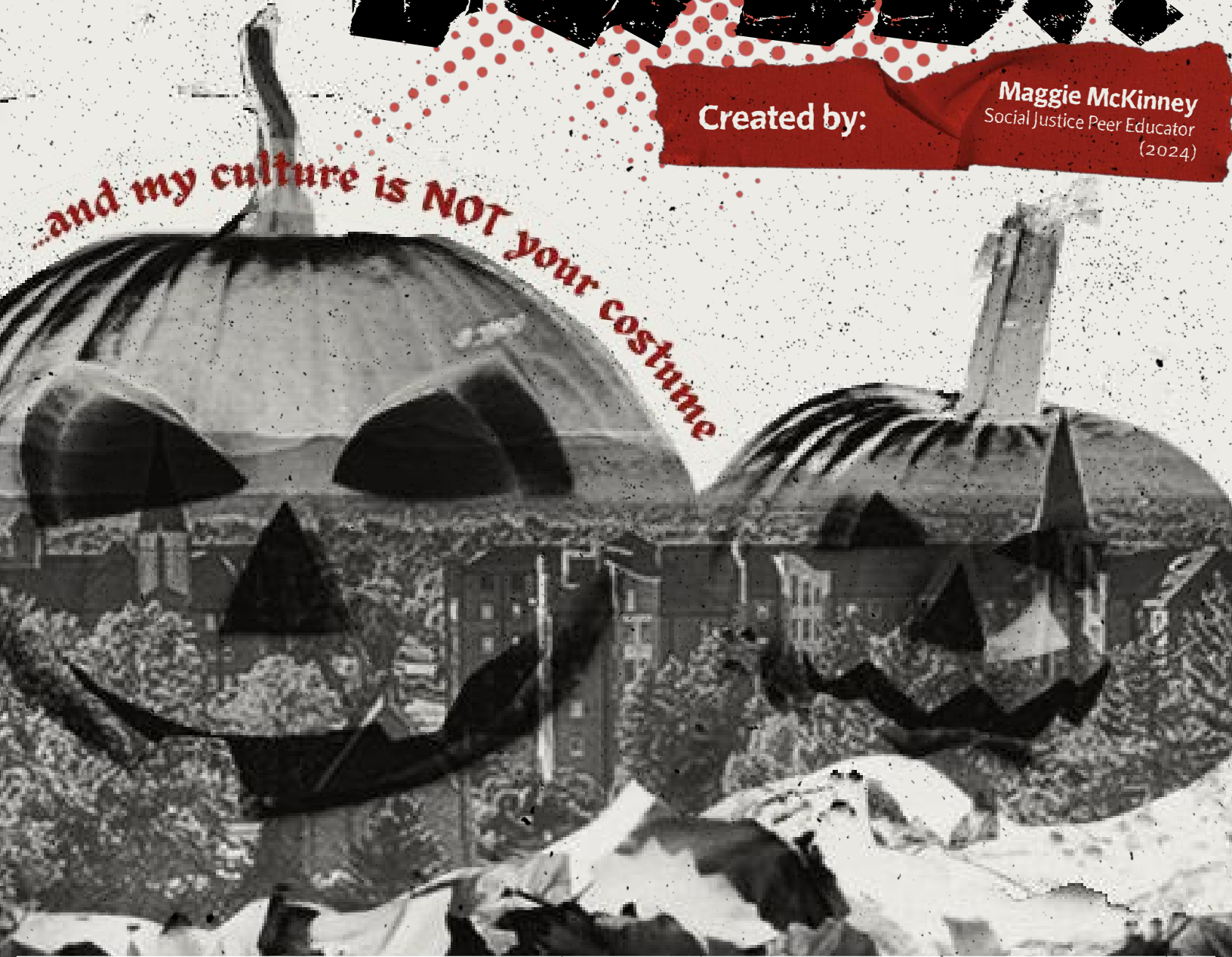
it's

NOT HALLOWEEN

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...and my culture is NOT your costume



Social Justice Education
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



4D Experience
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Definitions

Culture:

Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

Cultural Appropriation:

- Acts of appropriation and their implications are not determined by the intent or awareness of those engaged in such acts but are instead shaped by, and in turn shape, the social, economic, and political contexts in which they occur
- Involves the use of one culture's elements by a group or individual who does not belong to that culture. The adoption of these elements from another culture typically occur without the consent of the people who belong to the minoritized culture, who have been seen as "lesser" from the dominant population. The use of appropriated cultural elements is often not the culture's intended use

Cultural Exploitation:

Aspects of marginalized/colonized cultures that are taken and used by a dominant/colonizing culture in such a way as to serve the interests of the dominant (examples include but are not limited to monetary means, enforcing stereotypes, and/or failing to give credit to and recognize the original culture, history, and experience)

Cultural Appreciation:

Understanding histories of oppression and marginalization surrounding the particular object/practice/tradition and gauging the appropriateness of your actions in relation to this history

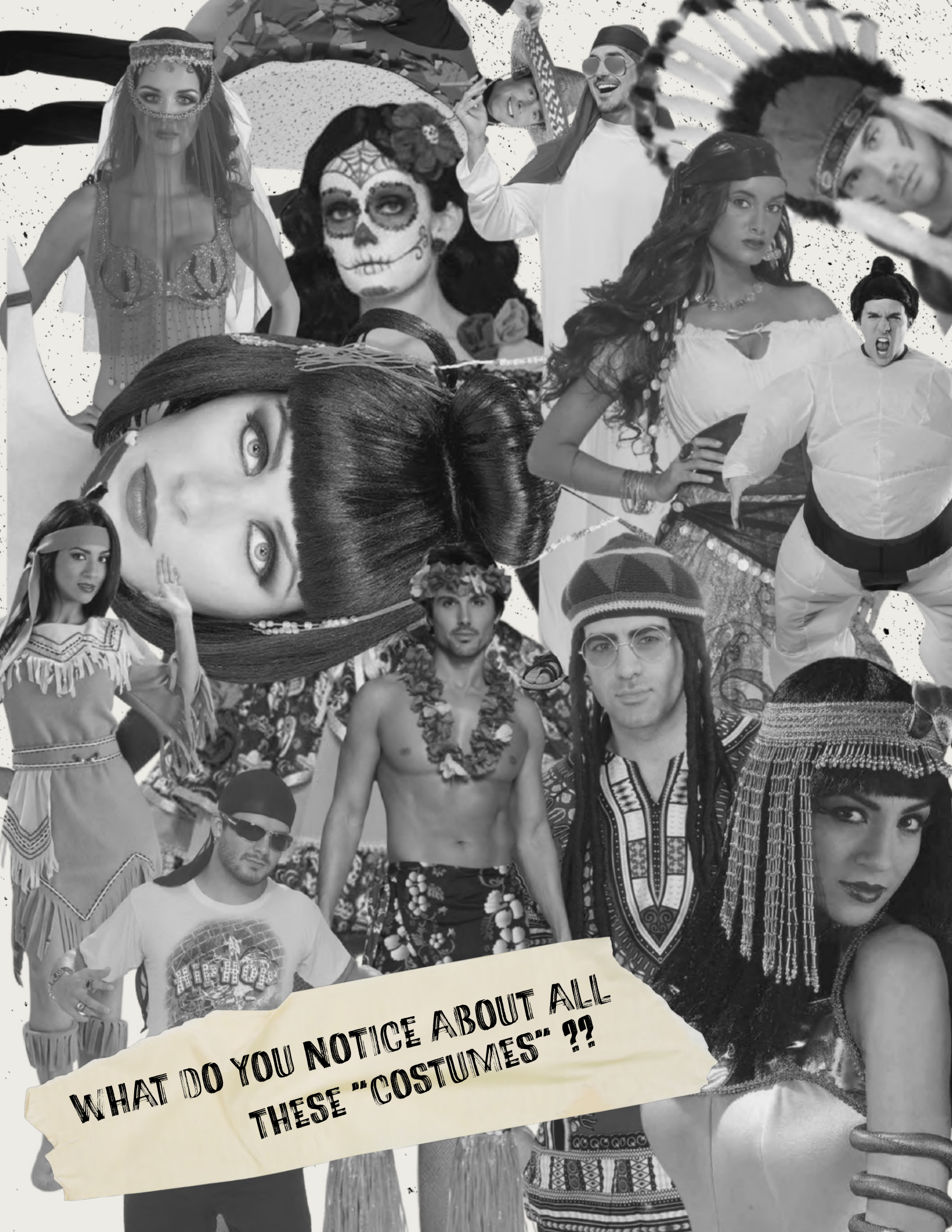


it's about power

Cultural appropriation is deeply harmful because of the power imbalance between the group stealing cultural elements or artifacts and the group to whom the culture belongs.

Dominant groups are able to appropriate culture from systemically oppressed groups because they hold systemic and institutional power over them. Although the term "cultural appropriation" has garnered increased attention in recent years, the practice is ancient. From colonization to minstrel shows, to exploitative museum exhibits and the theft of Black hair styles in white fashion spaces, cultural appropriation has old and deep roots in American society.

Ways that cultural appropriation can cause harm: (1) It trivializes violent historical oppression, (2) Dominant groups get to enjoy a culture without unlearning and attending to prejudice against its people, (3) Dominant groups get to take credit for and profit off of the labor of minoritized groups and individuals, (4) It perpetuates oppressive stereotypes and caricatures, (5) The debates around cultural appropriation prioritize the feelings of privileged groups over the oppression minoritized groups face at the expense of cultural appropriation



WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT ALL THESE "COSTUMES" ??



**American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN)
cultures are NOT costumes**



Japanese culture is NOT a costume



**Mexican and Chicano cultures
are NOT costumes**



**Arabic, Muslim, and Middle Eastern cultures
are NOT costumes**



Black and African diaspora cultures are NOT costumes





Romani, Roma, and other Traveler groups and cultures are NOT costumes



Indigenous Hawaiian culture is NOT a costume



Egyptian culture is NOT a costume

History, tradition, hope, community, stories, pride, family, food, language, song, dance, beliefs, customs, religion, joy, struggle, resistance, and spirit can all be part of a culture.
But it is NOT a costume.

Is this still appropriation?

Appropriation goes beyond ethnoracial identity. "Trying on" any minoritized identity that you do not hold as a costume or joke is offensive as it makes light of the personal experience, systemic inequity, and often violent history that identity holders face.

Common costumes that appropriate non-ethnoracial identities are "prisoner" costumes that often make caricatures of and/or sexualize incarcerated folx; ableist and agiest depictions of the elderly; "psycho ward patients" that make fun of those struggling with mental health; costumes based solely on fatness and fatphobic stereotypes; and houseless individuals.



HALLOWEEN COSTUME CHECKLIST



BE INFORMED ABOUT WHAT IS APPROPRIATE.



AVOID DRESSING UP AS A DIFFERENT RACE, OR ETHNICITY



DO NOT USE RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL OBJECTS OR CULTURAL SYMBOLS



BE THOUGHTFUL OF OTHERS



DO NOT PERPETUATE HARMFUL STEREOTYPES



STAY AWAY FROM CONTROVERSIAL FIGURES



BE MINDFUL OF YOUR IMPACT ON OTHERS, EVEN IF YOU INTEND WELL



BE CREATIVE AND HAVE FUN!

Key Takeaway:

Don't dress up as a social or cultural identity you don't hold--period. If you're hesitant about a choice or are unsure if your actions could constitute cultural appropriation, it probably is, so make another choice! The first step is thinking critically through these decisions.

For More Information

Video: PBS - What is
Cultural Appropriation?



We're a Culture, Not a Costume:
DU Student Leader Toolkit





SJE wishes you a

**HAPPY
HALLOWEEN**

SOCIAL JUSTICE IS
EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY.



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