

‘Brown skin is not a costume’: Disney takes heat for ‘Moana’ Halloween costume

By [Travis M. Andrews](#) September 20

Over the weekend, Disney did something it often does: It released a new [Halloween costume on its online store](#).

But, unlike its Buzz Lightyear spacesuit, Elsa princess gown or Mickey Mouse bodysuit, this costume depicted actual skin — brown skin covered in tribal tattoos, to be specific.

The costume is that of Maui, a demigod in Polynesian mythology who has been animated and voiced by Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson as a character in Disney’s upcoming “Moana.” Although Disney has featured brown-skinned people in its films before — “Pocahontas” comes to mind — it has not released a costume in which said brown skin itself is depicted as part of the outfit.

The costume’s description reads, “Your little one will set off on adventures in this Maui Costume featuring the demigod’s signature tattoos, rope necklace and island-style skirt. Plus, padded arms and legs for mighty stature!”

Accompanying the description is a photograph of a young boy, who has brown skin, wearing the costume.

Take a look:

Predictably, almost immediately outrage spread across social media from people decrying the idea of skin color being used as a costume.

“As a Poly I support our folk involved in #MOANA. But this? NO. Our Brown Skin/Ink’s NOT a costume,” one user [tweeted](#).

“Many people are Rightfully upset about this new piece of #Moana merch. Cultures are NOT costumes,” [tweeted](#) another.

“Hey heads up, I’ve seen that Moana costume, and I seriously don’t want to see it again. It sickens me, please don’t ask me to talk about it,” [tweeted](#) a third. “This might be the creepiest thing Disney has ever done. ‘Wear another culture’s skin!’” yet another person [tweeted](#).

One user compared the costume to the suit made from literal human skin in “Silence of the Lambs.”

“We are not a costume,” tweeted one user.

Some users claimed that those offended by the costume were overreacting, since it was based on a cartoon.

“People are seriously complaining about the Maui costume from Moana?! It’s a costume!! Find something else to complain about,” tweeted one user.

As of early Tuesday morning, neither Disney nor Dwayne Johnson had commented on the costume.

Though “Moana” isn’t set to hit theaters until the Thanksgiving rush, it has already inspired debate — some lauding the film and some damning it.

The movie follows the titular character, a young Pacific Islander princess, as she seeks a fabled island. Throughout her adventures, she meets characters — some pulled from actual Polynesian mythology — such as Maui.

The movie garnered praise for not just telling the stories of an underrepresented people in Hollywood, Pacific Islanders, but for featuring voice actors of color to play the animated people of color. Johnson, whose mother is of Samoan descent, voices Maui. Newcomer Auli’i Cravalho, a Hawaiian native, voices Moana.

As The Washington Post’s Michael Cavanaugh wrote, “When the Disney film ‘Moana’ lands this November, it will feel fresh to many moviegoers for an unusual reason: It is a mainstream Hollywood animated film that casts featured voice actors of color who represent the culture being depicted.”

But quickly after the film’s first trailer was released, some prominent Polynesians claimed the depiction of Maui was offensive to the culture’s mythology.

As The Post reported, “The common thrust of the criticisms is that the character is not conveyed to be strong or serious, and most complaints center on Maui’s physical appearance. On June 22, Jenny Salesa, a member of New Zealand’s parliament, posted a meme to her Facebook page that compared the attractiveness of three Polynesian actors (including Dwayne ‘The Rock’ Johnson, who voices Maui) to the ‘half pig half hippo’ caricature of Maui in ‘Moana.’ ”

Whether these conversations will help or hurt ticket sales remains to be seen, of course. The movie is set to hit theaters Nov. 23.

Travis M. Andrews is a reporter for The Washington Post's Morning Mix. Previously he was an editor for Southern Living and a pop culture and tech contributor for Mashable.  Follow @travismandrews