

# "Illegal Alien" Costume

## A Sample Deconstruction by the Media Literacy Project



**1. Whose message is this? Who created or paid for it? Why?**

[Zoogster Costumes](#), one of the largest online costume retailers created this costume to make money during the Halloween costume-hunting season.

**2. Who is the “target audience”? What is their age, ethnicity, class, profession, interests, etc.? What words, images or sounds suggest this?**

The target audience is most likely young adults who are party goers for Halloween weekend.

**3. What is the “text” of the message? (What we actually see and/or hear: written or spoken words, photos, drawings, logos, design, music, sounds, etc.)**

The text is a photograph of a person wearing an outer space alien mask and an orange jumpsuit with the words “illegal alien” stamped across the front. In the person’s hand we see a large green rectangular piece of paper with the words “green card” written in bold.

**4. What is the “subtext” of the message? (What do you think is the hidden or unstated meaning?)**

Making fun of immigrants is acceptable, immigrants wear orange jumpsuits because they are criminals, getting a green card is as easy as buying a Halloween costume, it’s okay to wear offensive costumes on Halloween.

**5. What kind of lifestyle is presented? Is it glamorized? How?**

The life style presented is of someone who does not fully understand the realities of immigrants, immigrant policies, and immigration history in the U.S. and who wants to appear trendy and witty at Halloween get-togethers.

**6. What values are expressed?**

The idea that human beings can be categorized as legal or illegal.

**7. What “tools of persuasion” are used?**

- Timing. This costume was introduced during Halloween season when many retailers sell costumes and often try to grab a consumer’s attention by selling the most controversial costume. Currently, immigration policy is being reformed and many people consider it a hot-button issue. The timely costume caused controversy and allowed for fear of the immigration issue to be profitable.

- Fear. This costume plays on perceived stereotypes of immigrants currently being perpetuated in the media. The use of an orange jumpsuit perpetuates the idea that immigrant people are inherently criminal and that they come with beliefs, values, and ideas that are different and harmful to U.S. society. The costume insinuates that immigrants are not human beings, and are more like alien beings. As such, this costume plays on the terror and fear that the Halloween tradition is based on.

- Symbols. The use of the orange jumpsuit is a reference to prison outfits, the green card symbolizes immigrant status, and the alien mask symbolizes un-humanness.

### **8. What positive messages are presented? What negative messages are presented?**

A positive message is that Halloween is fun and can be a chance to be something you're not. A negative message is that an entire community can be poked fun at and dehumanized further on a holiday meant for children.

### **9. What groups of people does this message empower? What groups does it disempower? How does this serve the media maker's interests?**

This empowers people who perceive themselves and their families as non-immigrants. The immigrant community is disempowered for the many reasons explained in Answers 4 to 7.

### **10. What part of the story is not being told? How and where could you get more information about the untold stories?**

An untold story is the reality that a climate of anti-immigrant feelings is being cultivated on "shock" radio and T.V. This climate is negatively affecting the health of communities where a majority of immigrants or perceived immigrants live. Currently, many people believe the misinformation being spread which includes the notion that immigrant communities are the main reason the U.S. has taken an economic downturn and has a large rate of unemployment. The use of the words "illegal alien" provides U.S. society a quick way of dismissing the realities of immigrants by labeling them as simply "Criminals" (which explains the use of the orange jumpsuit). The reason for the unemployment rate and the current state of the economy is much more complex than simply lumping a whole community as the problem and using dehumanizing techniques such as this costume to prove their illegality.

Another untold story is that there is a 40% increase in hate crimes rising against Latinos and Latino immigrants across the country.

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