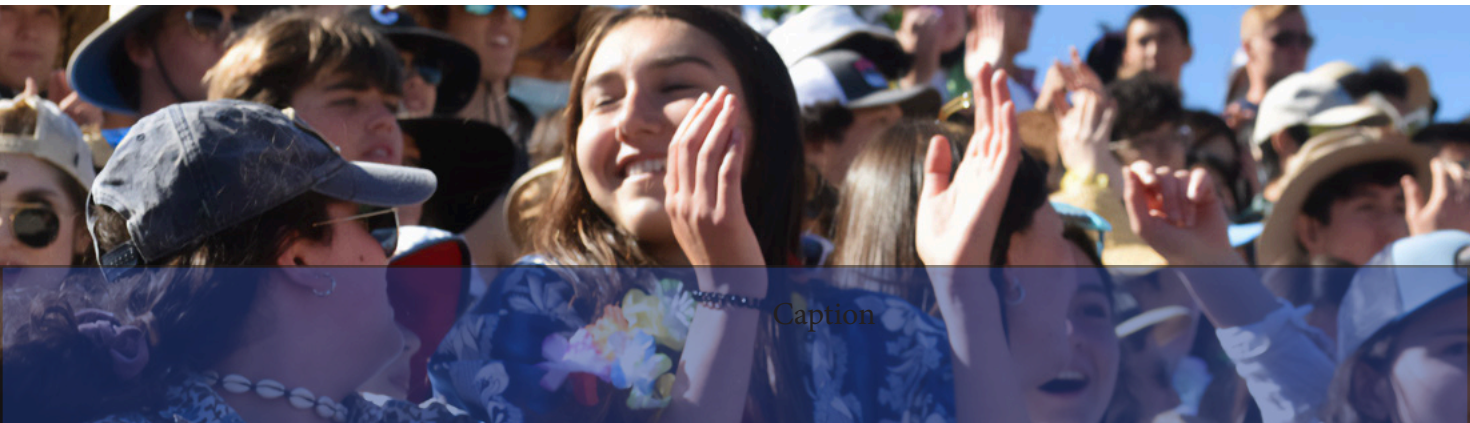


Rebrand reflections

ASB looks back on their decision to rebrand a culturally insensitive Spirit Week theme

Text by **ASH MEHTA**



Caption

For some, the colorful, fun Hawaiian beachwear-themed Spirit Day is nothing but that, colorful and fun. However, the “Thousand Island” theme has more sinister undertones of cultural appropriation for many students.

After years of debate and controversy around this theme, ASB finally decided to revise the decades-old tradition this past October.

“Generally, the theme is just not appropriate,” Junior Class President Ashley Hung said. “We decided that we really wanted to make the change this year.”

ASB made the decision this year to rebrand from “Hawaiian Day” to “Beach Day,” while still keeping the general Thousand Island theme.

“Beach Day” is actually what the original theme was intended to be, Hung said. It eventually morphed into a more Hawaiian theme, which introduced the culturally insensitive undercurrent.

“People ... are taking from the various Hawaiian cultures, but not actually appreciating them,” Hung said.

Hung concedes that there were some flaws with ASB’s execution of the theme change, such as what she believes was a lack of communication to students and a scarcity of Pacific Islanders in the discussion. However, she believes it was a positive step.

“Overall, I’m glad we brought up the general concern surrounding the

Thousand Island theme to the whole ASB, and had the discussions with all officers to come to a consensus,” said Junior Class President Ashley Hung.

According to Hung, ASB faced minimal hate for its decision, receiving support from students, parents, and administration alike.

“Everyone I talked to was in favor of the shift of the theme to something more appropriate,” she said. “I felt that

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— ASHLEY HUNG, Junior Class President

almost all Juniors received it well, and I felt that there was a difference in how people dressed up for that day compared to in previous years.”

Despite Hung’s assertion that most wanted the theme change, around 70% of the 91 students who responded to an opt-in digital Paly poll indicated they were apathetic about the rebrand, and only 16 students supported the decision.

“I do not think I have heard a single person complain about it who is actually a Pacific Islander,” stated one 11th-grader in response to the survey.

Another respondent, a senior, said they believed the theme change was crossing a line.

“We have to find a balance between being a safe environment and having fun,” stated the senior.

At the same time, much of the response was positive. One student suggested this change is a part of a wider shift in awareness of cultural insensitivity.

“Recently, we’ve been doing some reflection and introspection, which led many people to question ... if it was cultural appropriation or making fun of someone else’s culture,” stated one junior. “Even if you could argue that it wasn’t, there are many more options for a theme relating to it, like Beach Day.”

Student opinions were definitely a mixed bag, but among those who supported the theme alteration, some wondered how to stop themes like this from existing in the first place.

Hung said she believes listening to diverse points of view in ASB, and in the student body, is a first step. She even said ASB is considering forming a committee around cultural sensitivity and equality.

Hung also advocates that students use the ASB suggestion box on palyash.com.

“We want to hear as many people’s voices as we can and reach people because, in the end, we’re representing the student body,” she said.