

These past couple of days, it was brought to my attention that the Greek fraternity, Phi Gamma Delta (otherwise known as "FIJI"), at the University of California, Irvine was conducting an annual philanthropy event called "Fiji Islander." I decided to look into what the Fraternity stood for and if it had any ties to Fiji or Fiji Islanders since pictures posted on their Facebook page and other social media outlets of their "FIJI Islander" event in the past had attendees wearing our traditional "*Liku Vau*" (skirts) along with the "*vesa*" (made out of vau) worn around their arms and ankles. I wrote several posts on Facebook about my disapproval of their use of the name "Fiji Islander" in their event and their appropriation of Fijian culture.

The President of Phi Gamma Delta at UCI made an inadequate attempt to address my concerns through email while justifying the actions of their fraternity and the use of the nickname "FIJI." "FIJI has been the official nickname of our fraternity since 1894; our Greek letters Phi Gamma Delta are sacred to us so a nickname was necessary for the sake of simplicity and convenience. FIJI Islander has also been adopted internationally as the traditional name of our annual philanthropic effort. The theme helps us raise awareness for the philanthropy" (Phi Gamma Delta UCI President)

I replied to his email stating that Fijians have been around way longer than 1894, the history of our existence as Fijians traces back to at least 1500 B.C (back when Greeks were only found in Greece). The fraternity requires a nickname to preserve the sacredness of their Greek name which warranted the use of tacitly infringing upon another groups identity. I made it clear to him that Fijian is who I am. It is my identity. It is part and parcel of who I am. I do not use it as a nickname. I own it with every ounce of dignity and the fact that their organization uses it in such a manner is inappropriate and incredibly boorish. It's bad enough that "Fiji" is the name of the organization but to make a mockery of Fijians by including "Islander" and have stereotypical props and caricatures in their event announcements and the actual events itself leaves much to be desired about this whole ordeal.

Some Fijians have also raised similar concerns in the past regarding Phi Gamma Delta's appropriation of Fijian culture and lack of reverence for Pacific Islander culture in general. A current PhD student in the University of Hawaii, Tagi Qolouvaki, also wrote a letter to the editor while she was an undergraduate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln expressing her discontent regarding Phi Gamma Delta at her University. She recalled seeing "guys running around in coconut bras and grass skirts, and there were ads in the university paper for a luau party using language like, 'oonga-boonga,'" mocking and denigrating Pacific Island culture for their personal amusement. This also highlights the lack of knowledge of the differentiation between Pacific Island cultures and the fact that most western countries think that we are the same in terms of our cultural practices and traditional protocols (notwithstanding slight similarities and common diaspora).

A couple of us UCI students staged a peaceful protest outside the UCI Anteater Recreation Center on Thursday (05/15/14) where the buses for the FIJI Islander event were boarding the attendees. We held up a sign saying "This is not Fiji, this is racist," and a couple of the attendees responded with inappropriate gestures by waving their middle fingers at us and one of them mocked us by saying "Oh you guys are doing this because you're Fijian, right?" This displays utter contempt and

shows the lack of respect they have for Fijians and also showcases their lack of cultural knowledge of the Fijian people.

I drafted a set of ultimatums that I sent the President of the Fraternity, Justin Huang, about their event (besides the obvious renaming of their Fraternity) and they were:

1. TAKE OFF THE NAME FIJI ISLANDER FROM YOUR EVENT. 2. STOP USING COCONUT TREES AND OTHER STEREOTYPICAL DISPLAYS OF FIJI ISLANDERS AND ISLANDERS IN GENERAL 3. DO SOME EXTENSIVE RESEARCH BEFORE YOU CONDUCT THESE SORTS OF EVENTS, ESPECIALLY WHEN DOING IT UNDER THE BANNER OF FIJI ISLANDER 4. TELL MEMBERS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION TO STOP WEARING OUR TRADITIONAL/CULTURAL ATTIRE, THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND ITS CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE. None of these requests were taken into consideration nor was it enforced by the president. Members of the Fraternity still came dressed in *Liku Vau* and *Vesa* and other stereotypical Pacific Islander attire (coconut bras) to the Fiji Islander event.

Furthermore, echoing the demands from the Fijian community, We demand the renaming of the fraternity. We want a formal apology issued on behalf of Phi Gamma Delta to the Fijian people for their appropriation of our culture and the use of stereotypical displays about Fijians and Pacific Islanders. The label "Fiji Islander" should cease from any activities pertaining to the events hosted by the fraternity. Future Greek events should be regulated by the cross cultural center (if there hasn't been already an agreement in place) in order to stop the use of culturally insensitive themes and promote a safe, race sensitive environment. Moreover, there should be required ethnic studies classes at UCI to develop more culturally informed students. Lastly, we demand the expulsion of Phi Gamma Delta until all of these terms are met.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/save-gasaiwai/phi-gamma-delta-appropriation-of-fijian-culture-please-share/797035360320210>