October 14, 2014

As President of the ASU Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA) and a proud Sun Devil, I want to express a deep sense of sadness and disappointment toward my fellow Sun Devils who painted their bodies and faces black at the ASU UCLA Blackout game. I join the African American sisters and brothers in their outcry toward this act of cultural insensitivity.

Though it is not an excuse, many students may be unaware that painting one’s body in black is a callback to Blackface theatre. Blackface theatre was a racist tradition that portrayed African Americans in a negative light to shape and reinforce stereotypes about this cultural group. Thus, it is infuriatingly upsetting for a person who believes in the equal treatment of all human beings to see this type of racial aggression be brought into our ASU athletics tradition, even if unintended. This is not the type of learning environment that ASU fosters.

In my view, this is a sign of the disconnect and lack of awareness about culture in our time, which is perpetuated by national and local educational systems that can do more to bring multiculturalism to the forefront of our educational experience as students at all levels. In my view, the students who did this are only to be held responsible partially. We need to ask our local and national policymakers to raise awareness about the role that culture has played in our evolution as a nation. This includes our university administrators. These acts of aggressions should not be tolerated, but counteractive policymaking needs to be paired with outreach and awareness raising that creates the type of culturally inclusive environment we students believe in. We all need to do our part.

As GPSA, and I am sure our ASU USG Presidents would agree, we discourage these types of cultural aggressions toward any segment of society and ask students to take responsibility and our administrators to support our cultural growth as it is tied to our success in a growingly diverse world.

German Cadenas, MA
ASU GPSA President