**RACE IN COSPLAY**

When I wake up on the day of a convention, photoshoot or appearance and you look in the mirror who I you see? Do I see an African American cosplayer, do I just see a cosplayer or, do I see a man who on any given day is cosplaying someone of a different race? The correct answer is all 3, race always have and always will be one of the prominent subjects in cosplay and in non-post racial society it will continue to be. I have had to honor and dismay of being and seeing first hand both sides of this subject. Rewind about 5 years, I just read “Truth: Red, White & Black” by Kyle Baker and Robert Morales and this book spoke to me in such a way that I had to bring the character Isaiah Bradley to life. As a cosplayer we are blessed if once in our lives a character speaks to the essence of who we are at our core and this book did just that. I arrive at San Diego Comic Con with pride in what I was doing and being the first Isaiah Bradley. I even met Kyle Baker his creator and his expression showed nothing but approval in my execution of it. I was shown on the Marvel Comics website in my costume and was bombarded with negative comments calling me everything from Captain N-Word and so on. But, in the mist of this something happened the internet came to my defense with historical content of who I was cosplaying and why did race and hate come into such a positive thing like a Black Captain America. A white female decides that she loves The Walking Dead and wanted to cosplay Michonne which is great BUT she did it in blackface which began a social media uproar and in her case backlash. Her reasoning was that she wanted to be true to the character but without knowing or ignoring the history behind this action the execution of this character was done in poor taste. The excuse of “why don’t ppl get upset when someone paint their face red to be and alien” is a sorry excuse because the truth is they don’t exist and there isn’t a negative history behind this. Now let’s look at a female cosplayer that wanted to cosplay Storm from the X-Men the internet loved it she had the tiara, contacts and the hair to the exact book specs and she was white! The reason I have this one last is to make a point, it’s possible that we can cosplay without insulting or undermining ones race or ethnic background. I have many Anime friends who encounter this in one form or another (**Carrie I have very little experience in the anime world unlike you so please feel free to insert your opinions or stories here**) be it in execution or just being someone who isn’t Asian cosplaying someone who is. This I feel is the root of the race cosplay dilemma when we totally associate cosplay as race specific we all lose as a community and even more as people. Yes we need more people of color (and by color I mean not just African American) in comics, anime and movies but until that day why not embrace to diversity that we have in our community without disrespecting or cosplaying in a negative way the race of the source material. How many times have you seen or heard in a blog or website “oh that is a great Asian Superman” or “you cosplay a pretty black Wonder Woman”. As I step back and view the cosplay world in with a fresh new set of eyes I began to notice a trend that these cosplay faux pas if you will are made the majority of the time by those who don’t know or don’t care to acknowledge history. History of the character, history of that race or even history of cosplay are overlooked when we see these problems of race rear its ugly head. Is everything about racial insensitivity in cosplay? Not by a long shot, sometimes it’s a simple misunderstanding or someone’s basic need to want to offend intentionally. What’s needed is an open honest dialogue about race in cosplay and how we can honor with offending and acknowledge without diminishing. Hopefully this can be the first salvo in what hopefully is the battle for the heart, soul, understanding and respect that’s sometimes lacking in cosplay.