



美洲同源總會

Chinese American Citizens Alliance

~ National ~

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PRESS RELEASE

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Yellowface in 2014? Is It 2014 or 1914?

San Francisco, CA—Chinese American Citizens Alliance sees the current production of *The Mikado* in Seattle as continuing the stereotyping and harmful rhetoric toward Asian Americans, even to the point of using “yellow face” to simulate Asian participation when “black face” has long been eliminated from legitimate theatre. First produced in 1885 only 3 years after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, *The Mikado* was Gilbert and Sullivan’s most popular comic opera. It has been widely produced in film and play throughout the world, by professionals and amateurs from national theaters to high schools. But today in 2014 in its current format at the Bagley Wright Theater in Seattle, it is time to end its run and consign it to historical dustbin, along with other racially insensitive pulp.

Many critics today have singled out the “yellow face” aspect of having white actors play the 40 Asian characters in the play. However, *The Mikado* is not acceptable even if all the actors were replaced with Asians. Although the counter-critics point out that the play was never intended to satire the Japanese but to be a satire of English Victorian society, modernizations of the play to place it into an English setting have not prevented the consistent return (as in the Seattle production) to Japanese clothing and facial make-up. As one critic observed, however, when the Japanese features are stripped away from the play, the audience is left with characters that have silly names and the inexplicable premise of a political entity that makes flirting a crime subject to beheading or boiling in oil. It becomes an entertaining play because of the exotic Japanese caricatures of the society and its people. The actors of whatever color playing them today, perpetuate those caricatures.

When Gilbert and Sullivan were writing their material, it was not unacceptable to have white actors paint their faces black and shuffle onto the stage to entertain largely white audiences. But, what was seen as acceptable then does not justify its continuation today, whether black or yellow. What is truly disappointing about the Seattle reprise of *Mikado* is that anyone today, especially living in a region where Japanese Americans were rounded up during WWII and Chinese Americans were killed or driven out in the 1800s, should be so insensitive to dangers of stereotyping in public performances and to have not realized how offensive this play is before they started production. One would have thought that we Americans would have grown in the 130-plus years since Gilbert and Sullivan wrote the play.