

Following the recent shootings in Atlanta, Chancellor Schmidt released the following statement to the broader university community:

We mourn the victims of this crime and condemn not only this act of violence but also the pervasive discrimination that continues to harm our colleagues and students. This reminds us again how important it is that we stand together and recommit ourselves and our university to work for a more inclusive, equitable and anti-racist society, on campus and across our nation.

The faculty of the Department of Music & Theatre Arts wishes to further acknowledge the central role the Euro-American arts world has played in contributing to widely stereotypical and dehumanizing portrayals of Asian and Pacific Island peoples over its history of composition, musical performance, and theatrical embodiment. Investment in exoticist narratives has often typified musical expression of the “other” across styles, genres, and nations from Mozart’s Rondo Alla Turca (“Turkish March”), Debussy’s “Pagodes,” and Dvořák’s “New World Symphony” through Gilbert & Sullivan’s *Mikado*, Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*, Ravel’s *Bolero*, Copland’s *El Salón México*, and even full circle to popular works such as Dave Brubeck’s “Blue Rondo a la Turk” or “Koto Song” and beyond. A history of white actors performing “yellow face” in theatre, film, and television has implications that continue to perpetuate harmful narratives about AAPI people and cultures. As such, our institutions have been complicit in promoting unchallenged racist presentations and mindset. Educators have a unique platform and responsibility to contextualize the conversation with the art that we make and the history that we teach.

The Atlanta spa murders were not an isolated event. Anti-Asian violence, harassment, xenophobia, and racial scapegoating have spread exponentially since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Racism, especially during times of crisis, has a long history in the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the country’s first federal legislation preventing all members of a specific ethnic or national group from entering this country, and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II are just two historic examples. It continues today, including disrespectful and negative characterizations of the Asian community in opera, theater, film, and other genres. Many current music videos, for instance, regularly trade on these misrepresentations in popular culture, often showcasing them under the guise of inclusion. Ultimately, such reductions promote cultural ignorance and insensitivity toward everything from food and dress to spiritual beliefs.

Acquainting oneself with this history is only the first step toward fostering a more equitable atmosphere in our communities. Stay mindful and remain vigilant. Speak up. We encourage everyone to report troubling incidents you witness or experience to the proper authorities.