

A note from the Director of *You Can't take It with You*:

Hello all,

As the semester comes to a close and we begin to gear up for auditions (by reading *You Can't Take It with You* and *Romeo and Juliet*), I would be remiss if I didn't send out a notice about the xenophobic and prejudiced writing of certain characters and stage directions in *You Can't Take It with You*.

The year before Kauffman and Hart wrote the Pulitzer Prize winning script, the Harlem Riots of 1935 broke out due to a conflict with a young Afro Puerto Rican boy and a 10-cent stolen knife. The characters of Rheba and Donald (part of the Sycamore family) were originally written to be black, due to (I believe) the history of this event. I also believe Kauffman and Hart created Donald and Rheba to further highlight the soul of the Sycamore home- where only support, creativity and non-judgement reign supreme. When the show was written in 1936, people living their dreams, befriending Russians, and having family that didn't look like the patriarch was shocking and perhaps an absurd thought- especially during the Depression Era in New York. However, that is what makes the Sycamores beautiful and why the play is successful.

That does not erase the fact that for this day and age, the stereotypical depictions can be uncomfortable and possibly hurtful. It is my goal (and also my belief) that the cast can be of many diverse backgrounds. It is possible that anyone can play *any* character (including Donald and Rheba). It is the *essence* of these characters that is so important. They all have immense heart.

Enjoy reading the play over break and remember: the prejudiced, outdated writing for certain characters is just that- ignorant and outdated. These issues have been noted and are being addressed. My idea for the Sycamore family is the same I have for our own community: inclusive, supportive, loving and positive. There is immense depth to this comedy! Have a great break and I am looking forward to jumping in with you all in January!

All the best,
Jim Bray