

JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE
HOUSTON CHAPTER

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Honorable Carl K. Thibodeaux
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REF: Jap Lane

The Honorable Judge Carl Thibodeaux,

We learned from your interview with the Pacific Citizen that rather than change the name of Jap Lane to Kishi Lane, the Court has decided to rename FM 1135 to Kishi Road. This action will not satisfy anyone. In an effort to avoid a confrontation in Orange County over Jap Lane, I asked the Orange County Historical Society if they could take the initiative in renaming Jap Lane to Kishi Lane to honor the original pioneer, Kichimatsu Kishi. If this could have been accomplished, it would not have been necessary to mention how offensive the word "Jap" is to Japanese Americans.

Our family called the road in Orange County that has the name Jap Lane the "Old Farm Road". The site of my grandfather's original homestead was on that road. The history of the Kishi Colony is on our website under family histories. <http://www.jacl-houston.org/> A picture of the original homestead is included. We were not aware of the name "Jap Lane" until the 1960s when the road sign suddenly appeared.

I am sure no disrespect was meant when the name, "Jap Road" was initially adopted. My grandfather was a respected and well-liked member of the community. However, the word, "Jap" took on a different meaning during World War II. 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent were relocated from the West Coast and put into concentration camps. In 1983, a federal commission determined that one of the primary causes for the Japanese American internment was race prejudice. "Jap" meant the enemy. Jap became a derogatory word and is still used today to insult people of Japanese ancestry.

Open prejudice against me ended after my childhood but that is not the same for all Japanese Americans. During the 1980s, Japan's auto industry was

blamed for unemployment among U.S. autoworkers. This sentiment led to increased anti-Asian violence, including the 1982 beating death of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, killed by two autoworkers that had expressed hostility against the Japanese. In 1994, the office of the Sacramento chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League was firebombed by Richard Campos, a member of the Aryan Liberation Front, an extremist group. Therefore, my desire to rename Jap Lane is not just for my personal or family interest but for all Japanese Americans who find the word, "Jap" a demeaning and derogatory word. The word has been and is still being used as an expression of contempt and hate.

This is not the first time the Jap Lane has been an issue. Over ten years ago there was an effort to rename Jap Road and Jap Lane. Then, as well as again in December 2003, the focus was on Jap Road. However, the reason for changing the road names is the same.

We ask that you reconsider the resolution to name FM 1135 to Kishi Road. It will cause some inconvenience to the residents to change their address but it would be a positive change if Jap Lane were changed to Kishi Lane. If I can help your constituents understand that "Jap" is a derogatory word that is hurtful to Japanese Americans, I will come to Orange to explain why this is so.

Sincerely,

George Hirasaki
President
Houston Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League

cc Orange County Historical Society
National Japanese American Citizens League