

Sasaki

7004 Murray Ave. S.W., Apt. 401
Seattle, Washington 98136
September 12, 1973

Mr. Ben Nakagawa, President
Seattle Chapter of Japanese American Citizens League
4347 Thirteenth Avenue South
Seattle, Washington 98108

Dear Ben:

Enclosed are copies of material forwarded to me from New York by Miss Chiye Watansbe of Asian Americans for Fair Media at the request of Mr. Raymond Okamura of Berkeley, California. I have not seen Mr. Okamura's first letter of August 16th to G. & C. Merriam Co., but judging from the reply he received and his counter-reply, he has made a very commendable effort to have them correct a serious defect in the 1973 version of Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary's definition of the term "Jap".

By the use of specious arguments, Mr. Woolf, the Editorial Director, Dictionaries of G. & C. Merriam Co. has given the "brush-off" to Mr. Okamura's protest. As of September 7th, no reply to Mr. Okamura's counter-arguments contained in his letter of August 28th had been received. An isolated individual protest apparently has been proved ineffective as far as the G. & C. Merriam Co. is concerned.

It is important to note that, in the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary's definitions of other derogatory epithets, appropriate warnings to users of such terms have been attached. The definitions of "Kike" and "nigger" are followed by the phrase "usu. taken to be offensive". The definitions of "wop" and "gook" are followed by the phrase "usu. used disparagingly", and even the definition of "Chinaman" is followed by the phrase "often taken to be offensive". Only the term "Jap" is defined as an abbreviation for Japan or Japanese with not the slightest hint to the dictionary user that the word is highly offensive to the Japanese.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary is probably the most widely used dictionary in this country. The definition as it now stands in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary and also in Webster's Intermediate Dictionary could easily mislead many American businessmen into using the term "Jap" and seriously damage their chances of concluding important business agreements with Japanese companies. It will also mislead other Americans, including innocent students, into using the offensive epithet and thus needlessly create anti-American resentment among the Japanese.

I am, therefore, asking that you present this matter for consideration by the Seattle Chapter of the J.A.C.L. at its next meeting and that appropriate action be taken to request the National Office of the J.A.C.L. to take all necessary steps to get G. & C. Merriam Co. to correct its grossly misleading definition of the term "Jap" in its Webster's New Collegiate and Webster's Intermediate dictionaries and to have present copies of those dictionaries removed from retail stores until the defective definitions have been corrected.

While the latter proposal may seem unduly harsh to some, it should be remembered that responsible automobile manufacturers now routinely recall for correction all car models in which dangerous defects have later been discovered. The G. & C. Merriam Co. is now publishing widely trusted but seriously defective products which can only serve to poison Japanese American relations at every level and will do far more serious damage to America's long-term interests than the selling of defective American automobiles.

As an organization of loyal Americans whose members have been long-time victims of this kind of callous disregard by certain types of whites, the J.A.C.L. has no choice except to take strong and determined counter-measures.

Very sincerely yours,

Shosuke Sasaki.
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