

JACL

Midwest Office

Japanese American Citizens League
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Paul Whitehead
Chief of Police
Lawrence Police Department
4455 McCoy Street
Lawrence, IN 46226

Dear Chief Whitehead:

We recently learned about the incident in which one of your officers used the term “Jackie Chan” rather than John Doe in referring to an unidentified Asian man who was reported missing and later found lying in the grass near an intersection.

We are pleased that you regarded this incident as “racially insensitive” although we regard the incident as purely racist and potentially harmful in delaying a proper identification of the individual. We are pleased that you will take steps to address this issue.

In addition, the police report referred to the individual as an “oriental” male, which is also derogatory. The term has a long history of derisive use toward Asian Americans dating to the turn of the last century. The term was used to define a race and culture that purportedly could not be trusted and threatened white European dominance in American culture. The term was used to perpetuate stereotypes about Asians in the Western mind where “Orientals” seemed to wear an inscrutable mask that was unresponsive, unvaried in physical features and where no discernable difference was thought to exist among the various Asian groups. The term took on a meaning that de-personalized Asians and relegated them to a subhuman level.

I am enclosing a brochure on Asian racial slurs produced by our organization, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States.

Sincerely,

William Yoshino
Midwest Director
Japanese American Citizens League