

# JACL

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release

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### **JACL RESPONDS TO TOBY KEITH INCIDENT**

At a recent appearance at the Nobel Peace Prize after party in Oslo, Toby Keith made a racist gesture while on stage during a performance of "Rapper's Delight." His behavior has drawn criticism from the Asian American community, yet Mr. Keith still has not acknowledged the offensive nature of his gesture nor issued an apology. As the nation's oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization, the Japanese American Citizens League joins other organizations in condemning Mr. Keith's actions, and demands that he acknowledge and apologize for his racist behavior.

When he pulled back his eyes to symbolize "yellow," Mr. Keith reduced Asians to a demeaning caricature that has long been used to alienate an entire race. Though the gesture lasted no more than a second, it evoked powerful and painful emotions in the Asian American community, a reminder of schoolyard taunts and childhood bullying. It was an immature and insensitive action that only served to humiliate Asian Americans through racial mockery.

Mr. Keith's silence following the Asian American community's response to this incident suggests that he does not take our community's concerns seriously. By not issuing an apology even one week after the event, Mr. Keith has clearly chosen to compound his indifference towards the Asian American community. This type of attitude underlies a pervasive stereotype of Asian Americans, where physical differences imply a foreignness that hinders an acceptance of being considered as true "Americans."

As an American country singer at an international venue, Mr. Keith was representing our American ideals and values. He embarrassed himself and offended the Asian American community by his crude behavior. Mr. Keith's failure of contrition defies a simple maxim; that when you offend, you should apologize. A true gentleman has manners, a quality that seems to elude Mr. Keith.

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