

March 12, 2024

Hello,

Thank you for your time and attention to these letters from our 4th grade students. We have spent a great deal of our school year learning about different North American indigenous cultures, both through a historical lens and through issues that are present for these cultures today.

Class research brought to light the issue about which they are writing to you. The teachers have helped the students edit for structure and punctuation, but the views expressed are their own. We hope you read these letters with openness for their sincerity and care, and if you choose to respond, will do so with the same sincerity and care.

Take care,
Toni
4th Grade Homeroom
Keys School

Dear Advisory Committee,

My name is Ethan and I am a fourth grader at Keys School. Throughout this week, my class and I have been working on letters to different districts about problems with things with the Indigenous People and whether it should be kept or not. Also We have been learning about how the U.S. government named geographic features derogatory names.

I hope you take this letter into consideration and seriously consider this even though I am just a nine year old since this letter is written by a kid who wants the future to be a kind and inclusive place. The U.S. still contains hundreds and thousands or even more geographic features that are or connect to racial or sexual slurs, or the name of people who killed or enslaved Native Americans and Black people. For example, a geographic feature that is named something racist to Native Americans is Dead Indian Creek, Which is mean and a little racist because naming a place after a dead Native American basically says that it is good that they are dead. Another reason that this is racist to Native Americans is because it's where Columbus thought he landed in India so he called the Native Americans "Indians" but they're not Indians.

So in conclusion, I'm saying that how would a lot of people feel if you named a place the N word? It'd be on the headlines of every news station and it'd be at the front of every Black person's mind so that's the same with the Indigenous people.

Sincerely,

Ethan 

Dear Advisory Committee

My name is Amy. I am a fourth grader at Keys Lower School. I am learning about place names that are racist to Indigenous People. I am writing this letter because I would like you to change the racist and offensive place names. Some places named after notable people, like Black Elk Peak in South Dakota, named after the Lakota spiritual leader, are great, but some places are named after people who killed and enslaved the Indigenous, like Mt. Sheridan, Yellowstone National Park, Named after General Philip H. Sheridan, who killed Indigenous people, is not great. You should also get rid of names that are racist to the Indigenous people, like names with “Dead Indian”, “Injun” and “Redskin”. You wouldn’t like it if someone called something because of the color of your skin. There are more than 600 places named sq— , a sexual and racist slur against Native American women. There are also 147 geographic names including the name “Savage”. This is unjust. Please change these names immediately.

Sincerely, Amy

Dear Advisory Committee,

My name is Aria and I'm a 4th grader at Keys School . I am learning about place names that some people agree with and disagree with. I think you should change the name "Kit Carson River" (Colorado) because it's disturbing to a lot of people and especially to the Indigenous people because of the words in it. First, in the 19th century Frontiersmen started a war between the Navajo Indians and the Frontiersmen's goal was to destroy the Navajos crops and villages and they even killed around 300 Navajo tribe members. Next, even though this happened in the 19th century you might think the Navajo Indians would forget about it and just ignore it, but it could still affect them because their homes may have now moved in a completely different place and they might not like the name "Kit Carson River" because the Frontiersman who killed almost 300 Navajo Indians had named this mountain.

Sincerely, Aria

LETTER TO ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dear Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names,

I'm Grace, a 4th grader at Keys school. I'm writing to you on behalf of a serious matter that is insulting and disrespectful to certain people.

There are a handful of racist and offensive names we don't want in this world. The US still contains THOUSANDS of geographic features bearing racial or sexual slurs or the names of people who killed, expelled and/or enslaved Indigenous nations and black people. (Hayden valley and Scott bluffs of Yellowstone, Mount Evans of Colorado, ETC.)

Also, there are tons of derogatory names which should be renamed immediately, because they are very disparaging to indigenous people, like Dead Indian Creek, Oregon.

Everyone plays a part in this world, and you have the power to convince people to change these awful place names. This subject is pretty dreadful, and no one should have to mention it if we made better choices in the past. But this is the present day, so right now we can change the future. Let's start by respecting the indigenous people.

Sincerely,

Grace 

s

Ford [REDACTED]
Keys School
2890 Middlefield Rd.
Palo Alto, CA
94306

To Whom It May Concern,

Hello, my name is Ford [REDACTED] I am a fourth grader from Keys school. I think you should pay more attention to place names that have racial or gender-related slurs and other offensive terms.

There have been hundreds of places that use words offensive to African Americans, Asians and Indigenous Women like "Jim Crow", "Chinaman" and "sq**w".

These words can be very rude to other cultures. Indigenous People and others have fought to rename offensive titles and mascots. But Unfortunately, some of the offensive titles and mascots came back after a few years. There are still many other offensive places that haven't been renamed yet. Mascots for professional sports have become less racist, but there are still teams with racist terms. There are many highschools in Pennsylvania and other districts that have names including r*dskins, chiefs and other such things.

How would you feel if someone was trying to imitate you and your culture in a totally wrong way? The Indigenous People fought and stayed strong even when everyone put them down. Change is happening and this is fortunate for all the cultures that have been put down. Still, there are many places that have words or pictures considered racist to many cultures. The U. S. still contains thousands of geographic features bearing racial or sexual slurs or the names of figures who killed, expelled and enslaved Indigenous People and black people. The wrong times have passed and I think the community should change insulting place names into more appropriate names for every culture.

Sincerely,

Ford [REDACTED]

Chloe [REDACTED]

Keys School

2890 Middlefield,Rd

Palo Alto,CA 94306

To Whom It May Concern,

I am Chloe [REDACTED], and I am a fourth grader who goes to Keys School. I am writing to you about the fact that there are some very offensive and racist place names that are disrespectful to Indigenous communities.

Names like "Dead Indian" and "Red Skin" should not exist because they are racist. "Dead Indian" is mocking the Indigenous ancestors and current citizens. It says that they are gone but they are not, the Indigenous are still here and thriving. "Red Skin" discriminates against Indigenous by their skin color or paints that they might use. This is something that should not exist because they are racist slurs that target indigenous communities.

How would you feel if someone gave a place a name that criticized your ancestry and identity?

There are about forty-two geographic places named "Dead Indian". Over one-hundred-fifty geographic locations named "savage" or "savage point" and finally, more than six-hundred places named "sq**w".

Is it not wrong to name places after people who harmed, killed or masqueraded Indigenous Nations? You are giving a monument to people who did wrong things. Instead of giving a monument to people who committed genocide, you could give a monument to the Indigenous communities. These places are saying that the Indigenous culture doesn't matter. All of these terms are unjust and they discourage Indigenous Communities from wanting to work with us. These names are a reminder of the dark past where hunting the Indigenous people was encouraged.

It is not just the Indigenous people that are hurt by place names. Some names hurt African Americans, in fact, there are over five-hundred-fifty places with offensive names like "Uncle Tom" and "Jim Crow". There are also thirty places named "Chinaman" and many many more. Why do these names exist if they are hurtful to so many people?

In conclusion, I think that you should work with the Indigenous Nations and other cultures to make respectful names that celebrate everyone.

Thank you for reading this letter. I really appreciate it.

Sincerely,

Chloe [REDACTED]

Myles [REDACTED]
Keys School
2890 Middlefield Road
Palo Alto, CA
94306

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to you because I think that the U.S. Board on Geographic Names should change place names that are racist and offensive to Indigenous People. These names have been hurting Indigenous and black people, as well as many other different races. Imagine you were an African-American person visiting Jim Crow Island in Missouri. How would you feel? What would you do? What kind of message does this send to the African-Americans?

Place names are often named after important people. Sometimes they can evoke deep memories inside a person. Because these place names are so powerful, they can also be racist or offensive, and hurt someone's feelings. The U.S. still contains thousands of names bearing racist words, or the names of people who enslaved and killed Indigenous and black people. Technically while we name a place after such people, we are agreeing with them. For example, when we named Mount Evans in Colorado after John Evans, who enslaved black people, we confirm his decisions and say they are correct.

In 2015, Vocativ conducted a comprehensive survey that found over 1,500 places in the U.S. named with racist words, the vast majority of which are conducted by the U.S. Board on Geographic names. There are more than 560 names with words offensive to African Americans, more than 30 places with the word "Chinaman", and more than 600 places with words offensive to African-American women. The Wall Street Journal identified over 100 place names on public land that honor people that enslaved and killed Indigenous or African-American people. Recently, many different place names with the names of such people have been changed. For example, in Nevada, Jeff Davis Peak was named after a man who defended slavery. The Board renamed it to Doso Doyabi. This is what we need the most. You just can't keep on naming places with words offending Indigenous or African-American people. It is a deep wound cut in history, and now it's up to us to fix that.

Many people say that renaming places like this is "canceling history". In my opinion, if you don't "cancel history", Indigenous and African-American people will be reminded of the horrible things that happened to their ancestors. This has to be worse than "canceling history". Of course, renaming these places won't undo the harm done to Indigenous and black people. It certainly won't undo slavery and the take-over of their land. But it is an important step nonetheless; the first step we can take, an effective start. Think about what has happened. We lured the Indigenous to the missions, then separated them from their loved ones. We forced them to do our

work. Do they really deserve to be reminded of these things that our nation did? Do we really have to deepen the wound that almost made them forget their culture? Doesn't it seem just simply crazy that there are places named after people that enslaved and killed people? That we still support and agree to these decisions? Just think about it. How do we continue to honor these people?

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names is the official naming/renaming authority for the United States. They can rename mountains, rivers, streams, creeks, buttes, and many other different geographic features. They can't rename wilderness areas, national parks, forests, monuments, or other land units. Also geographic features on Indigenous reservations (unless proposed by a tribe), currently unnamed features in designated wilderness, administrative buildings, cities and counties, streets and highways, and structures on private property. We should begin the process of renaming immediately.

Thank you for taking your time to read this letter. I really appreciate it.

Sincerely,
Myles

David [REDACTED]

Keys School

2890 Middlefield Rd.

Palo Alto

To Whom It May Concern ,

I believe strongly that any one would find the 621 places that have the word N**** in them to be racist. I am coming from a history of non racist people but if other people heard that and they had heard that before then they would be furious. There are also a handful of places that have the word sq— in them and every Indigenous Woman would find that very offensive. What if a child saw that and asked their parents what that meant? The parents wouldn't want to tell them because they do not want to scare their kids. Do you want that? You would hurt so many kids. The staggering amount of places that contain the word (Chinaman) and the bells in Gilroy. What good do they do? If you are going to talk about the missions, then you should at least tell people what happened there and not just the Spaniards' side of the history. Tell what happened to them and what they had to go through. You need to put how they were treated like animals and separated them from their family and they were forced to forget their culture. The Indigenous People had to follow the Spaniards' culture and pray to their god and they did everything like they were slaves. They were wiped if they tried to continue their traditions. The mission bells are just lies and they tell you how great the missions were and they gave them a great place and that they learned and thrived, but they didn't!

They died and they didn't say anything because then they would get very severe punishment and they would be put in front of everyone and then they would be whipped and they would be humiliated. But no you don't know anyone about that. All you say is that the white people did all of the great things.

The bells in Gilroy are expensive and they don't do anything good. They also take a lot of money and that money could be used to feed the public and what you want to do is make a bell that does not even tell people what truly happened. They could be vandalized and then you just wasted a ton of money! That was a lot of money that just went down the drain! And if you had any common sense then you would take them all down and I know that would cost a lot of money and you wouldn't have to pay to take it down if you didn't put it up in the first place! But if you were the one who was part of putting that up then you have to change! When you put the bells up then it would be ruined, and over time it would get very dirty and then you just put a dirty, very expensive piece of metal that should be in a museum with the actual information and not just saying stuff that didn't even happen!

I shouldn't even have to talk about this to the people who have family who were in the missions then that is like a slap in the face! Then, when the Indigenous People wanted to take it down, you said no, then they got rightfully mad. You said we will not take them down and they are so mad and feel like they are very disrespected.

I hope you actually consider what I'm saying and take it into consideration.

Sincerely,

David [REDACTED]

Thomas [REDACTED]

Keys School

2890 Middlefield,Rd

Palo Alto, CA 94306

To Whom It May Concern,

You should change place names with racist origins. Here are some reasons why: One, they encourage people to jeer at Indigenous and black people and some people don't know that it is racist. They say it and post it to spread interest but they are just spreading hatefulness. That is a huge problem. If they say the proper name the people will spread that name of with respect and inclusiveness. This is a sign of peace and will change people's life in a positive way. This reason is that if you do a good deed to the Indigenous People, you can extend courtesy and promote civility

Why name after people that conduct genocide? Please don't name the places after a murderer like John Evans. Although he is important historically, he or she is still a killer. If you do, people will honor the name of evil people. This is an example of using a improper name and using it to name a geological feature. Another reason to change names is it will boost Indigenous People and they are an important part of our country because they were the first people to live here. There are hundreds of names that aren't named properly, but even just a few could change everything for the people that live there.

Improperly named places have the effect of people protesting to change it, I think if you change it than people that live here can devote the efforts to other things and you can make a big change to help their life. Offensive names cause hurt. Here are just a few horrible names for natural features, towns & parks. These include redskin and chinaman. Their life is so important because they are also American citizens and they were here even before and their life could affect your life in many different ways including when they are in the government. If the change doesn't happen then the legacy of the U.S will be of the people that killed or enslaved the indigenous people.

The Indigenous People were never credited with what they did with the land and tending it. They are under represented. The land called North America might be a disaster if not for the Indigenous People caring for it. Now we are just saying they did nothing by naming natural features that the Indigenous cared for it for a long time. Instead we name it after things that are racially offensive to the people there. That is a huge problem.

The names are offensive to the indigenous people because they are just making fun of them or using a stereotype about them. You don't want to do that. It is like before Civil Rights for the minorities but they are still being mistreated. The reasons are so stacked that you can't not change it unless you don't realize the extent of the cause.

Nations have been cruel to many underrepresented people. You can't just be mean by leaving things that peoples' culture is denied. That is serious offense and can't be healed

completely. There are possibility to heal past wounds slightly..The Spanish started the trend with treating Indigenous People.It has gotten worse, but now it is getting better.The trend continues better by changing place names.

The names shall change to what the Indigenous People want and they get to choose.This is an ideal solution to what has caused great havoc and countless arguments.The solutions will not be able to fix everything but it is necessary to give the Indigenous People to have just and fair rights in today's society.It is important to make sure that they are treated fairly.The Indigenous People could also suggest names that are English too!They don't just know their native language(though it is important and they can suggest that too) they know English and they are citizens.It will make tons of other people upset because they can relate.This is for life justice.

This should be a further understanding of how this works, but you should figure out by now that I have a strong opinion of this issue. I need to make sure that this issue will be resolved. It is up to you to ask the Indigenous People and help the committee understand this way.

Thanks for taking your time to read this letter.

Sincerely,

Thomas 