

From: Shiner, Mark

Sent: 7/7/2011 5:35:26 PM

To: TTAB EFiling

CC:

Subject: U.S. TRADEMARK APPLICATION NO. 77952263 - THE SLANTS - N/A -
Request for Reconsideration Denied - Return to TTAB - Message 5 of 29

Attachment Information:

Count: 6

Files: bigwowo-19.jpg, bigwowo-20.jpg, benef-1.jpg, benef-2.jpg, benef-3.jpg, benef-4.jpg



AND says:

May 6, 2011 at 5:53 am

“And here’s the funny part, I do have slanted eyes!”

Hey man, maybe your eyes aren’t slanted, maybe everyone else just has round as hell eyes.



bigWOWO says:

May 7, 2011 at 7:25 am

(I just posted this on [Ben’s blog](#).)

By the way, someone e-mailed me yesterday about the AALDEF post that Simon linked on bigWOWO.

Simon wrote:

*“If you’re curious for some more history of why I deliberately chose the term “slant” and why we’re getting widespread support from the API community, try this blog from the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. **You’re probably familiar with them since they have done more in API rights than anyone out there on broad level:***

<http://aaldef.org/blog/my-slant-on-the-slants-and-other-asian-american-words.html>”

My reader pointed out that even though Simon seemed to imply that he had AALDEF’s support, the page Simon linked clearly says that that is not necessarily the case:

“The views expressed in this blog do not necessarily represent the views or policies of AALDEF.”

I’ve spoken to other bloggers about this. The support is not widespread. It’s just that most people who disagree with the name would rather not say anything. I’m

...most people are angry to that the same...
basically the same way-- I support Simon's right to do whatever he wants; I just happen to be sharing my opinion on your blog and mine.

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Ben Efsaneyim

..experiencing America as an Asian man.

Monday, April 25, 2011

Chinkies and Gooks and Slants Oh My!

Owning Silliness.

The [You Offend Me You Offend My Family](#) blog recently posted an article written by musician Simon Tam, the bassist for the all Asian-American group [The Slants](#). According to the article, the band is engaged in a struggle with the U.S Trademark and Patent Office over their attempt to trademark the band's name. Their application has been denied on the grounds that because the term "slants" has been used historically as a means of denigration of Asian people, it runs counter to the patent office's policy of not permitting disparaging terms to be used.

The article then goes on to explain that the band "deliberately chose this outdated, generational term to inject pride into Asian American culture", and that they have received substantial support from the Asian-American community. The article continues.....

"This is what angers me the most: the US Trademark Office decided that anonymous wiki sources mattered more than the voice of Asian Americans. Why does a government agency that has no connection with APA's have the right to dictate what is appropriate for our community? Why don't we have the right to decide for ourselves?.....The role of government shouldn't include deciding what a group can define themselves as. That right should belong to the community itself."

I couldn't help but notice the irony in the above quote. It might well be true that a government agency shouldn't have the right to determine how a group defines itself, but at the same time Tam doesn't really offer any good reason why he thinks *he* does. The fact that a few random bloggers and activists support him is irrelevant.

The worst thing about this idea of "owning" a derogatory slur as a means of empowerment or to inject pride into Asian-American culture (what does that even mean?!!), is that it seems to be a case of simple imitation. The reasoning seems to be that blacks have done it with the N-word so we should too! Pride and all that, don't you know! Of course, the reality would appear to be far more complex than this.

Black people owning the N-word came about after decades of civil rights work, protesting government authorities, facing dogs, watercannon, and lynch mobs, with

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preventing government surveillance, using eugenics, indoctrination, and other means, with the effect of building a community of empowered individuals. The by-product of all this activism was that the N-word became hazardous for white people to use because there weren't any more laws preventing African-Americans from refusing to accept the term from them. In this way, the N-word has changed from a socially valid descriptor into a socially unacceptable slur. Therefore, for black people to use the term it is both a reminder to white society of its past brutality (and the struggle to overcome it), and it truly is owning the word because non-blacks use the word at their own peril.

The situation of the Asian minority in 21st century America is different. Words like "chink" and "gook" can be, *and are*, used casually in American society, and racial mockery of Asian people is the norm. In fact, it is considered so normal to conceive of Asians in mocking and derogatory ways, that American popular culture (and the celebrities it manufactures) routinely and confidently propagates these negative attitudes. American children grow up in school environments where racial baiting and harassment of Asians is casual and acceptable. There are absolutely no negative social or political repercussions that result from using anti-Asian epithets or expressing anti-Asian attitudes. There is no social stigma attached to expressing racism towards Asian people and adopting such slurs does nothing to change that.

With this in mind it would seem obvious that striving to apply a derogatory epithet as an appropriate self-definition in an environment where few positive alternatives are used, does, in fact, reinforce and provide impetus to the practice of dehumanizing Asian people through derogatory epithets. If *everybody* can use them without restriction, then how are these epithets being "owned"? Furthermore, how does applying a demeaning epithet to oneself convince a society - that is quite comfortable using them - that it is actually wrong to use them?

In short, there is no logical basis to presume that Asians applying derogatory epithets to themselves, in any way promotes cultural pride or social empowerment. All it does is legitimize their use as a means to dehumanize us. Tam's article calls for the Asian-American community to show support for what he terms their "plight" - I urge readers to not support this silly campaign.

Posted by Ben Efsaneyim at 11:49 PM 

Labels: [Anti-Asian Epithets](#), [Asian activism](#), [Asian Consciousness](#), [Asian Male Empowerment](#), [Asian role models](#)

6 comments:



James said...

This is the most well-thought post on the subject! Whites and blacks are racist to Asians and they think nothing of it because there are no repercussions. Which is partly our fault as Asians. We certainly don't need to encourage it.

April 26, 2011 7:30 AM



bigWOWO said...

Good post. I agree.

About Me

Ben Efsaneyim

[View my complete profile](#)

Asian Men's Voices....

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4 hours ago

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An Open Letter to the Asian American Graduates of the Class of 2011 Aspiring to be Artists
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Chinatown's New Generation
18 hours ago

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new music: illusions of oasis by azure
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AALDEF
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1 day ago

bigWOWO
Second Generation Chinese Restaurant Managers
1 day ago

The Minority Militant

I think lots of times, people just grab for the low hanging gimmick. We live in desperate times, and people desperately look for something that helps them stand out. It's sad but true. The antidote is stronger culture, which hopefully people are actively creating.

April 26, 2011 1:52 PM

Ben Efsaneyim said...

James

That's exactly the issue - it is a fault that we downplay the seriousness of racial epithets.

BWW

That's a great point about stronger culture. As Asian men, it also comes down to being willing draw a line in the sand and uphold our dignity as Asians and men. We are individuals with names and personalities - something that mainstream American culture likes to deny - by adopting these kinds of slurs, we are reinforcing this.

April 28, 2011 12:30 AM

Simon Tam said...

Ben,

You offer some interesting statements yet you don't back those up either. You also make several assumptions about me and my band's work without doing any additional research. That's fine, that happens from time to time...I didn't come to your blog site to start a war or anything. You're entitled to your opinions, just like I'm entitled to mine but I wanted to clarify a few points that you freely make without understanding of the bigger issue.

First, you state that I don't offer any good reasons why I think I should have the right to protect our name and define ourselves by calling ourselves "The Slants." In the context of the post that I was asked to write by YOYOMF, it wouldn't make sense. There are a number of reasons:

1) We're seeking trademark for "The Slants" to be used by an Asian American live music group. I believe that APIs have the right to use a self-referential term in a positive manner.

2) We're not alone in this. The "Slant" film festival, a long running API festival in Houston has been using their name for over a decade without any issues from Asian Americans. There's also an API theatre group, TV show, magazine, multiple documentaries, comedians, and artists that all use the term "slant" in a positive manner. In a recent survey in a NW Asian newspaper, over 95% of respondents said that the term "Slants" was not offensive in the manner which we are using the name.

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shit
1 day ago

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not just my parents'
language anymore
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The PNOY Apparel Company - "Know History" Filipino Clothing

3) We're using the name "The Slants" to refer to our band, not a community, not a race. The word slant in of itself isn't offensive at all. In fact, the New Oxford American Dictionary removed any connotations referring to persons of Asian descent in the 2010 edition of their dictionary (changed from their 2005 edition) because "slant" was not found to commonly used in an offensive manner at all. In fact, the term "slant" in relation to "slanted eyes" comes from a medical science, the Palpebral Slant, a feature shared by many races (not just Asians).

You also mention that "The fact that a few random bloggers and activists support him is irrelevant."

The fact is that we have widespread support for the band, not just from a "few bloggers." In fact, the truth is that only a few bloggers have issue with the name. The Slants perform for audiences of over a half a million APIs every year and are involved with the largest API gatherings in the nation, all of whom promote the band with pride. We've been featured in nearly ever API media resource out there - from Asian Week, the Asian Reporter, Pacific Citizen (the magazine for the Japanese American Citizens League), Hyphen, AngryAsianMan.com, and many more. We're supported by over two dozen regional and national API organizations. Our case is supported by nearly every API legal organization, including the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, who is at the forefront of every major API rights issue.

May 5, 2011 10:25 PM

Simon Tam said...

While the situation is that occasionally people use the term "chink" or "gook" in a casual manner, it is not the same for "slant" I'm not even arguing that it is ok to use the term "slant" in a derogatory manner. The truth is that you can use ANY term in a hateful manner, words only have as much power as you give to them. When extremely well respected lexicologist and editor of the American Dictionary recently stated: "The contemporary musical band that calls itself The Slants has selected a name that corresponds to the twenty-first century usage of the term slant as a racial and/or ethnic term of positive self-reference. Like all ethnic and racial epithets, there may be contexts in which slant forms a part of a more general disparaging context of deprecation; one may, after all, say "filthy Swede," "disgusting lesbian," or "lying American dog." But such uses do not make Swede or American intrinsically disparaging or objectionable to Swedes, lesbians, or Americans."

He continues to argue that "Moreover, the evidence of the history of entries in New Oxford American Dictionary supports the contention that the empirical data

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