

For Immediate Release

Contact: Jason McCarty
202.466.7767

NCAI Condemns Grammy Performance By OutKast

Tex G. Hall, president of the National Congress of American Indians, said he was “profoundly outraged and appalled” at the racism that was displayed during the performance of the R&B music group Outkast during the 46th GRAMMY Awards show.

Andre Benjamin of Outkast performed the hit “Hey Ya” to an “Indian” theme. Using a giant smoking teepee as a background, Mr. Benjamin performed his song as several scantily-clad women in “Indian” themed costumes gyrated on stage.

“I watched in shock as this Nation’s native cultures and religions were painfully caricatured by this performance,” Hall said. “Perhaps most disturbing was the use of faux Indian headdresses by band performers. Our peoples’ headdresses are very sacred, and it is a rare privilege to wear one. Such blatant mockery of these sacred traditions is sacrilegious and deeply offensive.”

In letters to the National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences, Arista Records, CBS Television, and Outkast, NCAI held all parties to the performance responsible for the events that transpired during the GRAMMY Awards show.

“It should have been clear to all involved that—notwithstanding its intent—this act was degrading, insulting, and racist,” Hall said. “There are over four million American Indians and Alaska Natives in this country—four million people shamed by such barefaced abuse of their cultures and the cultures of our ancestors.”

Hall said a multitude of products, labels, and mascots demonstrate daily that the private religious traditions and cultural heritage of Native American people are commodities that can be bought and sold.

“The message you send to the American public—and worse, to American Indian and Alaska Native youth—by broadcasting this display is that we do not deserve respect,” Hall said.

He said that both Outkast and Arista Records exhibited very poor judgment in creating the “Indian” themed act, that the Recording Academy deserves reprimand for allowing such a racist performance in its show—particularly given their special measures to prevent any “indecency”—and that CBS has abused its privilege of free use of the country’s airwaves by airing such divisive material.

Founded in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians is the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization in the country. NCAI advocates on behalf of more than 250 tribal governments, promoting strong tribal-federal government-to-government policies, and promoting a better understanding among the general public regarding American Indian and Alaska Native governments, people and rights.