

The ACPA 2010 Boston Convention Theme...

The upcoming 2010 ACPA Convention theme is “Innovative Ideas, Revolutionary Results”. The marketing campaign that was officially launched at convention 2009 in Washington, DC centered on a strong visual association of the tea cup and the “Boston Tea Party” with the theme by utilizing phrases such as “Join us for tea in Boston”, “Something Big is Brewing in Boston”, and “Join the revolution in Boston” to promote the convention. Persons dressed in tea bag costumes were handing out packets of tea bags to advertise convention 2010 and were making direct references to the Boston Tea Party. While the intention may or may not have been to directly evoke images and suggestions regarding the historical act that took place in the United States on December 16, 1773, the messages that the convention team and volunteers used to increase excitement about the upcoming convention included a strong reference to this US event. For the Native American Network and Native people in the Boston area, linking the words Boston, tea, and revolution, into a theme indicates Boston Tea Party, whether or not that was intended. Of course, NAN sees the “Tea Cup” in direct correlation to the Boston Tea Party and its misrepresentation of Native Americans, in which the colonists dressed up as members of the Mohawk Nation in a direct attempt to blame the crime on Native people.

The use of tea and tea parties also evoke other images and references. Tea parties in a modern sense are most often held by young children, often girls, or historically by white women of financial privilege. Tea itself has a history imbedded in the British Empire as a major export from British colonies such as India.

Why is this important?

- **Boston Tea Party:** Historically, the “Boston Tea Party” is one event in United States history that represents our American desire for freedom- a fundamental value of American citizens. Unfortunately, that event, like many others, is significantly misrepresented in our history books. It is often glorified and written from a white male paradigm. Some participants of the “Boston Tea Party” dressed up as Native Americans when they raided the ship and dumped the tea. They took on that dress to conceal their true identities, so in the event they were caught, they could attempt to place the blame on Native Americans. This is an act of racism. This act, the “Boston Tea Party”, was serving as ACPA’s marketing strategy for the 2010 convention.
- **International Association:** ACPA exists and prides itself as being an international organization dedicated to inclusion as one of its core values. Inclusion means that all members feel safe, welcome and included in ACPA business, policies and practices. However, the convention planning team chose a United States historical event reference directly linked and represented within its theme. This raises the issue that the convention theme might exclude the members that are not US citizens and do not identify with US history and/or culture.
- **Tea Parties:** The argument has been made that a Tea Party is also a gathering, a place of community, a place where ideas are developed and friendships are strengthened. While this may be true, the notion that a tea party is a community building event is not broadly representative of the experience of our members, and does not meet our ACPA Core value of Inclusion.
- **British Colonization:** Colonization in many forms and the effects it has had on many cultures is an issue that is continually unrecognized and silenced. Native peoples on this continent and others were forced out of their homes and off of their land to make way for colonists and their needs. Shortly after the Boston Tea Party, the Boston harbor was closed until the British East India Trading Company was repaid the price of the tea that was

destroyed. This British company was a shipping monopoly that later took control of many important commercial ports from native peoples. It was these colonies utilizing cheap native labor that would later supply illegal opium to China in exchange for tea. Tensions over smuggling eventually sparked the first opium war which led Great Britain to seize control of Hong Kong. This is just one piece of how colonization has affected many different cultures.

What's happened up to now?

The above concerns were voiced by the Standing Committee for Women (SCW) to the Convention Planning Team and ACPA Leadership during the 2009 Convention in Washington, DC last March. These concerns were heard by multiple individuals while on site at convention. The concerns were not addressed, but instead statements were delivered to SCW that “experts” in diversity did not think it was a big issue and did not warrant further discussion or action. The convention team repeatedly indicated that the theme and marketing materials would not change. Over the spring and summer months, SCW partnered with the Native American Network (NAN) and continued to voice concerns. On numerous occasions, ACPA leadership, including President Tom Jackson, dismissed the concerns. In an email, Tom Jackson informed ACPA leaders that it was their duty to “move on from this issue”, and in yet another email stated that NAN and SCW had “one unique perspective” on the issue that was not shared by ACPA leaders and thus, nothing would be done to change the theme or marketing materials. At the ACPA summer leadership meeting, Susan Johnson, the Director of Equity and Inclusion, became fully informed and engaged in the conflict over this issue. This partnership allowed the first issue of the “Boston Tea Party” reference to be heard and acknowledged by ACPA leaders in high profile positions; this was our first glimpse of action on the issue. However, in August, ACPA posted an “explanation of the theme” to the convention website. This explanation co-opted the research of a prominent Native researcher in order to explain how the “Boston Tea Party” and US history have “multiple interpretations” and as such, stated that the chosen interpretation of the convention theme and marketing campaign were remaining. This webpage was quickly removed due to an outcry from leaders of NAN and SCW.

SCW and NAN continued their engagement around this issue throughout the summer and into the early fall, through sending emails and letters, informing other ACPA constituency groups and asking for support and involvement. We had continuing discussions with ACPA leaders about actions to be taken, including what needed to be done to educate ACPA members concerning this issue and the ultimate resolution SCW and NAN hoped would occur. In late September, after receiving a recommendation from a small task group of current ACPA leaders, the Convention Planning Team agreed to remove all tea and tea cup marketing from their campaign and communicate the process and potential timeline for how this change will take place with SCW and NAN. While this agreement made some progress, without a space for education, awareness, accountability, and discussion, instances like this are doomed to be repeated. After waiting several weeks for the convention planning team to release an official statement that would include the information above, SCW and NAN engaged with Susan Johnson, Director of Equity and Inclusion, requesting the agreed timeline of the removal of all tea references and images from all marketing and convention materials. SCW and NAN also specifically requested details on how the Convention Planning Team will provide a space for the needed education on this issue.

After waiting three weeks and after convention registration opened, SCW and NAN received a letter signed by Susan Johnson, Director of Equity and Inclusion; Ron Jackson, Coordinator for Standing Committees; and Robin Diana, Convention Chair. This letter, in summary, stated that SCW and NAN were at fault for a “lack of clarity” around this issue which resulted in difficulties for ACPA leaders to know what to do. The letter also informed SCW and NAN that “Phase II” of the marketing plan would be implemented immediately and all tea cup pictures/references were being removed that day from the website and marketing materials. Additionally, the letter focused on “proper protocols” (protocols which do not currently exist) and on educating membership about how to follow those protocols in the future should an issue like this arise again. Educating ACPA members on this issue was not included in the plans presented, nor was acknowledgement of the harm caused or work needed to begin healing as an association. Members of SCW and NAN were personally and professionally offended by this letter. It is yet another example of the insensitivity and dismissal experienced by individuals who have been actively engaged in this issue since the start. Individuals who have been attacked personally and professionally, who have continuously stood up for what they believe to be right, in the face of great resistance. Individuals who have paid a price for this work this past year, fighting for an issue that could have been resolved with simple dignity and authentic regret and instead became a battle against ignorance, denial and power.

After learning of the email sent to SCW and NAN, the Directorate of the ACPA Standing Committee on Multicultural Affairs, of which NAN is a member, forwarded a Resolution to Susan Johnson, which acknowledged the decision to remove references to the tea, and more importantly strongly recommended, "that the leadership of ACPA acknowledge the culturally sensitive issues underlying the removal of the tea cup marketing strategy and educate its membership regarding why replacement of the tea theme was necessary." CMA agrees with SCW and NAN that it is important for our leaders and members understand the underlying concerns in order to hopefully not have such a situation repeat itself in ACPA's future as an international organization that acknowledges and values its membership's multiple cultural histories and viewpoints.

SCW and NAN have specifically, consistently, and intentionally offered to be a part of the education and change. We have offered our expertise, our staffing support, our energy, passion, enthusiasm and ideas. Yet, we have not been included in many of the processes occurring above or around this issue. It is the hope of SCW and NAN that we will be invited to participate in the education and healing surrounding the issues discussed above and that ACPA leadership will stand up, acknowledge the harm caused, and engage in the work of education and healing along with us. This document is one step SCW is taking to educate you, our members, about the work that has been happening around this issue in the name of the Standing Committee for Women. This work is directly linked to our Vision, Mission, Goals and Statement of Inclusion- which specifically list Advocacy and Inclusion as two key pieces of the work of SCW.

How can I help?

Join the dialogue!

Contact ACPA Leadership and share your thoughts about this issue. You can find a complete listing of the Governing Board here, in particular, Susan Johnson, Director of Equity and Inclusion has been identified as the point person for this issue:

http://members.myacpa.org/Scripts/4Disapi.dll/4DCGI/committees/Roles.html?Action=Show_Comm_Roles&CommCode=ACPA*GovBoard&Name=Officers&Status=Active&

Speak your mind!

Share your thoughts with the Standing Committee for Women and let us know how you'd like us to proceed in our education and advocacy around this issue specifically:

standingcommitteeformen@gmail.com.

Educate others!

Let your colleagues and campus communities know about this issue. Engage in dialogue and learn more about this and other issues of inclusion for our association. Inclusion is a Core Value of ACPA so let's come together to learn and live it!