

UNITY 2004: A Powerful Alliance

UNITY continued
from front page

Native journalists join with African American, Asian and Hispanic journalists for a convention known as Unity — Journalists of Color. This year's event in early August, drew more than 7,000. It was the group's third convention, having met the first time in 1994.

The size of the giant conference and the range of cultures attending proved irresistible to this all-star cast of federal politicians.

At the NAJA awards banquet, National Congress of American Indians President Tex Hall said that "the Tribal trust land story needs to be told from our perspective."

"You can open doors," he told the journalists in the house, "that many times a politician can't."

The advice in dozens of panel discussions ranged from making use of political muscle to making sense of race and culture.

An exposition accompanying the conference drew more than 300 sponsors that provided information and opportunities for journalists. Most major media companies conducted job interviews live and on-site.

The U.S. Census Bureau brought books and CDs to help journalists make use of the virtual mountain of information the agency collects.

The American Medical Association brought reports about violence in society. The National Cancer Institute provided statistical abstracts.

Teaching Tolerance brought a program entitled "Struggles for Equality in America," designed for teachers as well as reporters.

The New York Times hosted a series of discussion groups for media professionals including photographers and foreign correspondents.

It was a week of the latest in industry news and trends.

One theme emerged in a panel discussion led by Suzan Shown Harjo. "Reaching Across the Color Lines: Journalists of Color Who Uses Their Ink for Other People of Color" was one way of saying it.

At a party in honor of NAJA's 20th year this year, *News From Indian Country* Publisher Paul

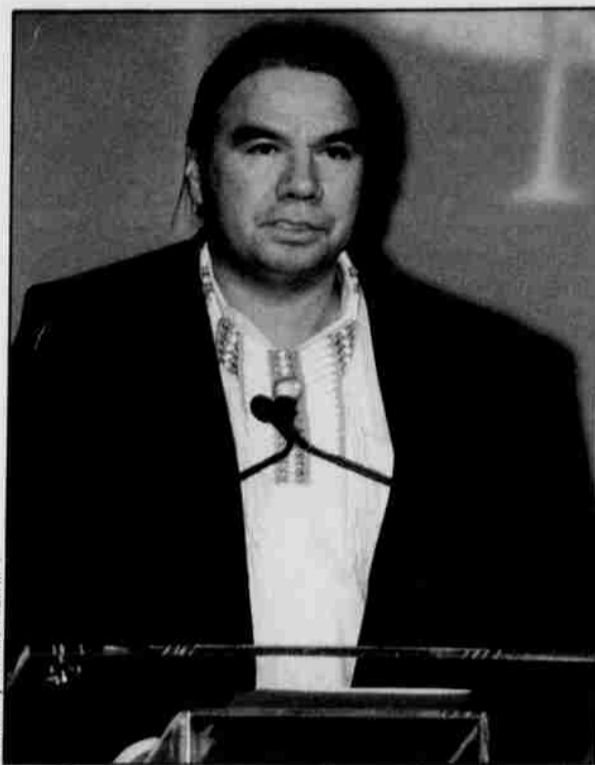


Photo by Brent Merrill

Indian Leader — National Congress of American Indians President Tex Hall talked to Native journalists about the importance of their role in getting vital information out to the people. Hall said there are many stories in Indian Country that need to be told and he encouraged journalists to be vigilant. "You can open doors," said Hall.

DeMain, one of NAJA's founders, came at the idea from another direction: "I don't think it was ever about 'I,'" he said of all the efforts many people have put into the organization over the years.

Another theme that came up time and again was voting. "If you don't vote," said Tex Hall, "you're not going to have any sovereignty to protect."

Is It Race Or Is It Culture?

Session after session took on questions of race and culture. Though geneticists tell us that race is genetically insignificant — representing less than 1/10th of 1 percent of genetic material, and noting incidentally that there is more genetic difference within races than between races — the cultural issues derived from mankind's focus on race nevertheless continue to loom large.

In response, the conference took on questions of how reporters ought to approach communities of color, terms and cultural mistakes to avoid, though Miami Herald columnist Leonard Pitts summed up a lot saying that for him it comes down to "treating others as you would have them treat you."

National Public Radio Atlanta Station Manager Michael Fields described his frustration with not getting calls back from Indian sources. "If we run the story without their input, they complain that we got it wrong, and if we don't run the story (because we were not able to reach an Indian source), they complain we're ignoring them," he said.

Paul DeMain and *Indian Country Today* columnist Suzan Shown Harjo, for example, each noted how they are happy to guide other journalists to sources that outside journalists may need but not know about. Their comments fit into a wider-ranging discussion about the role journalists are playing to bring cultures together.

A panel including former NAJA President Mary Annette Pember and The Oregonian Race and Ethnicity Reporter Angie Chuang, opened up the question by covering the issue for reporters and subjects with two, three or more cultures and/or races in their backgrounds.

"In Oregon," said Chuang, setting the stage, "one of seven children born in 1999 had par-

ents of different races."

"Ask people how they want to be identified," suggested panelist Erin Texeira, Race and Demographics Reporter for Long Island's *Newsday*. "Within each family, siblings may identify themselves differently."

In many cases, said Texeira, articles need more space to adequately define people in terms of their cultural backgrounds.

"It is very difficult for journalists to be objective about this issue," said Mavin Magazine Editor Matthew Kelley, "especially for journalists of color." Mavin Magazine covers multi-racial issues.

"This is an issue that is not going away," he said.

Freedom Of Press In Indian Country

Paul DeMain and The Native Voice Publisher Frank King III led panels beating the drum for freedom of the press in Indian country. DeMain rattled off the names of many who had been driven out of their jobs and sometimes out of Indian publications altogether for stories critical of particular Tribal councils.

He praised award-winning *Navajo Times* Editor Tom Arviso, Jr. "for breaking away from the Tribe (gaining press freedom) and still keeping the bond (with the Tribe) strong." He also saluted Cherokee Dan Ageant who was instrumental in securing freedom of the press legislation from his Tribe.

"Freedom," King said, "starts with freedom of the press."

The National Congress of American Indians also is on record supporting a free press in Indian country.

Politics, As Usual

For the first time for Indian journalists, America's leading political figures reached out to them in a concrete way. They addressed the Unity convention, and even more important, they took questions on the national stage about issues important to journalists of color.

Nevertheless, President Bush did not appear to understand the concept of Tribal sovereignty.

The difficulty came out in his answer to a question from NAJA member and Seattle Post-Intelligencer Editorial Page Editor Mark Trahan: "What does Tribal sovereignty mean in the 21st Century?"

"Tribal sovereignty means that — sovereignty," said the President. "You've been given sovereignty and you are viewed as a sovereign entity."

Embarrassed by the President's response, the audience laughed, and afterwards, a number of journalists said they looked down and felt sorry



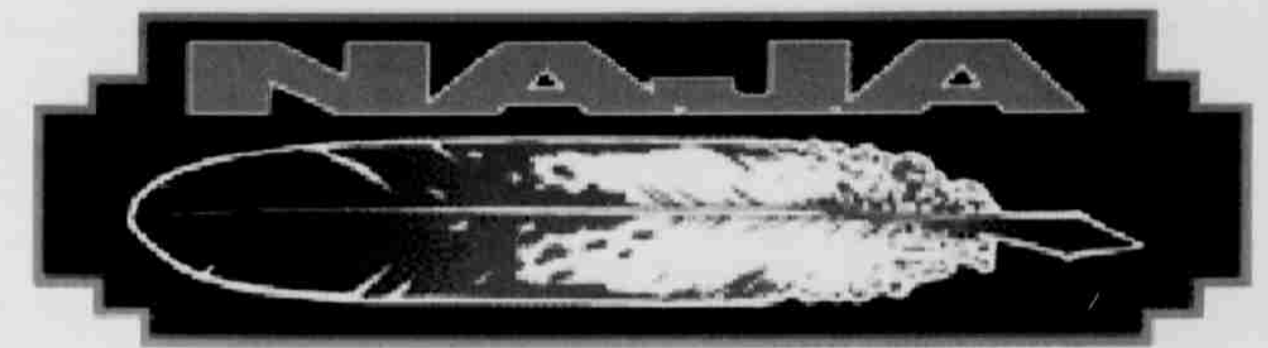
Photo by Justin Phillips

Tour — Native journalists were given a sneak peek at the new National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. on Friday, August 6. The museum will be dedicated with a ceremony on Tuesday, September 21. The museum, which was created by an act of Congress in 1989, is dedicated to the preservation, study and exhibition of the life, languages, literature, history and arts of the Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

for him as he spoke.

Chicago Tribune Columnist Roland Martin cornered the President into supporting an end to legacies in university enrollment policies in order to be consistent with his position opposing racial quotas as an admissions tool. The President is a third generation legacy at Yale University.

John Kerry promised "to reopen the doors of the White House to the First Americans," but



said nothing about the giant mess surrounding federal trust funds for Indian peoples or finally honoring long broken Treaties.

Patty Talahongva, outgoing NAJA President and UNITY Board Member, met with each speaker before their talks and presented to both Kerry and Bush people a Tee shirt with images of the great Indian warriors bearing the legend: "Fighting Terrorism since 1492."

She secured a promise from Kerry to visit a Reservation before the campaign was over. No such luck, however, with the President.

"His record in Texas," she said of President Bush, "does not reflect his respect for sovereignty." She described his reaction to a forest fire in recent years that destroyed the largest stand of Ponderosa Pines in the U.S. Much of it had covered the lands of the White River Apaches who, she said, have long counted on forestry for their living.

Instead of visiting the Apaches in the wake of the fire, he visited a small town of white folks living nearby.

"It's going to take 200-300 years" for those trees to grow back to where they were, she said. "It showed he didn't look at who was being affected."

On the other hand, she also applauded him "for coming to UNITY and for taking questions. I would like both parties to remember this," she said. ■

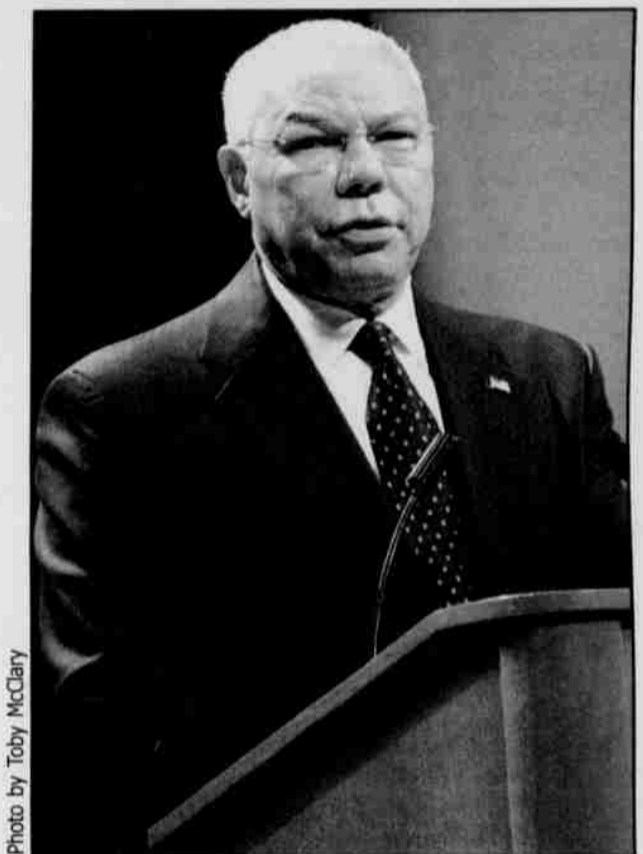


Photo by Toby McClary

Power — Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke to those gathered at UNITY about the current state of affairs in America. Powell said he thinks America is strong and managing its affairs wisely and in the best interest of the citizens of the United States. Much to everyone's disappointment, Powell did not sing or dance.

The Awards

Smoke Signals traditionally is honored for its work at NAJA. This year, the newspapers and its staffers earned 15 awards for excellence, almost twice as many as last year. In addition, Editor and Tribal member Brent Merrill's production of the Restoration video made in honor of Restoration's 20th anniversary last year received a second place in the multi-mediacategory.

Merrill also won a 3rd place for newswriting award for a story he wrote about the Davidson family reopening their restaurant after tragedy struck the family.

Newspaper designer and Tribal member Justin Phillips earned a second place award for tabloid-style newspaper layout and design.

Staff Photographer Peta Tinda, Nakota, earned five photography awards, including a clean sweep in the single picture feature photograph category, winning first, second and third places for his photographs. Tinda also won an award for newswriting award for a story he wrote about Tribal member Tom Leno's struggle with the after effects of Agent Orange that he was exposed to while serving his country in Vietnam.

Staff Writer Ron Karten won six awards for his writing. He was awarded a first and second place for news writing for his stories, "Apparent Suicide Attempt on Highway 18 Leaves Police Baffled" and "Front Page Picture of Native American Skull Insults Oregon Indians." He was awarded a second place and honorable mention for his feature stories, "Life on the Edge: Tribal Members Join Team that Faces the Danger and Beauty of Fighting Oregon's Annual Forest Fires," and "Grand Ronde Tribes — 20 years of Restoration." He also won a second and third place for Environmental Journalism; for his article about efforts to dredge the Columbia River and the "2003 Water Feature."



Photo by Toby McClary



Photo by Toby McClary

A Man Of Peace — The Rev. Jesse Jackson made an appearance at this year's UNITY Conference and said that the current leadership of this country is not doing its job. He said that people of color are talented and capable and need to take every opportunity to be the best that they can be in their profession. Jackson said that there is no talent deficit in minority journalists, just an opportunity deficit. Jackson said that there needs to be minority representation in every newsroom in America.



Photo by Toby McClary

Nation's Capitol — Washington D.C. was the site for this year's Native American Journalists Conference. This year's gathering was part of UNITY — Journalists of Color as Native American journalists joined with Asian, Hispanic and Black journalists to become the largest gathering of minority journalists in history. Over 7,000 journalists attended the four-day conference.