

Cayuga Nation Files Lawsuit Against Showtime Network and *Billions* Series Writers, Producers

August 13, 2019—The Cayuga Nation, a federally recognized Native American nation with a reservation in Upstate New York, has filed a lawsuit against the Showtime television network and the writers and producers of its popular television series *Billions*.

Filed in NY County Supreme Court, the lawsuit alleges that an episode of *Billions* that first aired on May 5, 2019 defamed the Cayuga Nation and federal representative Clint Halftown by using their names and by a “deliberate and intentional resort to an offensive stereotype of Native Americans as irresponsible, corruptible, and even criminal, thereby exposing the Cayuga Nation and Mr. Halftown to public contempt, aversion, and disgrace.”

The complaint alleges the *Billions* episode used both Halftown’s last name and title as a “council member” and also referred to the Cayuga Nation by name. The episode portrayed the Halftown character as engaging in a conversation with *Billions* principal characters Chuck Rhoades and his father, Chuck Rhoades, Sr., during which an illegal casino land deal was discussed and a public official was bribed.

“In an age where diversity has been championed and ethnic stereotypes recognized as blatantly offensive, the way this television show depicted our nation as well as myself was not merely callous and insensitive, it was insulting and defamatory,” Clint Halftown, Cayuga Nation federal representative, said. “At no time did the creators or writers of the show reach out to our nation or me to seek permission to use our names, nor did they even take the time to research our nation, its rich history, and its reputation.”

In support of the Cayuga Nation, the United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) released the following statement: “The persistent misrepresentation, stereotyping, and falsehoods about Native Americans, often depicted and reinforced by various media platforms, are directly attributable to America’s public opinion and attitude toward us. Too often, the story depicted by the media creates a negative narrative that reinforces myth, lacks completeness, and is often disrespectful. This sort of narrative further perpetuates societal ignorance and lends itself to even greater misunderstanding and unawareness about America’s first people. Our story and our relationship with America is long and complicated and deserves greater recognition and respect. The media must do a better job in recognizing that it plays a significant role in shaping public opinions and attitudes about us. Instead of reinforcing ignorance, the opportunity for the media to lead with truth and accuracy about America’s first people is now and long overdue.”

Sued in the case are Showtime Networks, Inc. and Brian Koppelman, Andrew Ross Sorkin, and David Levien, who are the creators, producers, and writers of the series. The lawsuit seeks an unspecified amount of damages.

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