

Thank you for your interest in the Cultural Environment Movement.

Our message is simple and compelling. Scotch patriot Andrew Fletcher once said that whoever tells the stories of a nation need not care who makes its laws. Who tells most of the stories today? No longer home and community. No longer parents, schools, or church. In many parts of the world not even the native country. Our children are born into homes in which the dominant story tellers are not those who have something to tell but a small group of global conglomerates that have something to sell.

Channels multiply but communication technologies converge and media merge. With every merger, staffs shrink and creative opportunities diminish. Cross-media conglomeration reduces competition and denies entry to newcomers. Fewer sources fill more outlets more of the time with ever more standardized fare. Alternative perspectives vanish from the mainstream. Media coalesce into a seamless, pervasive, and increasingly homogenized cultural environment that has drifted out of democratic reach.

Other distortions of the democratic process include the promotion of practices that drug, hurt, poison, and kill thousands every day: portrayals that dehumanize and stigmatize; cults of media violence that desensitize, terrorize, and brutalize; the growing siege mentality of our cities; the drift toward ecological suicide; the silent crumbling of our infrastructure; the widening resource gaps in the richest country that already has the most glaring inequalities in the industrial world; the costly neglect of vital institutions such as public education and the arts; and image politics corrupting the electoral process.

The Cultural Environment Movement was born to meet the crucial challenge of our time: to build new mechanisms of independent citizen initiative and participation in cultural decision-making. We must organize as citizens as effectively as commercials mobilize us to act as consumers.

We need your membership and generous contributions. Please use the enclosed form to help meet the crucial challenge of our time.



George Gerbner
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- ☐ "Equity and Access to Information Technology." In the *Annual Review of Institute for Information Studies.*

By Paul Carton

- ☐ "Mass Media Culture and the Breakdown of Values Among Inner-City Youth." In *Future Choices*, published by the Youth Policy Institute, Washington, DC.
- ☐ "Mass Media and Young People." In *Nieman Reports*, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Winter, 1991. pp. 24-30.

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Prospectus

Most of what we know, or think we know, we know from stories we're told. That process used to be hand-crafted, home-made, and community-inspired. Now it is mostly mass-produced and policy-driven. It is the end result of a complex manufacturing and marketing process.

For the first time in human history, most children are born into homes where most of the stories do not come from their parents, schools, churches, communities, and in many places even from their native countries, but from a handful of conglomerates who have something to sell.

These changes have had profound consequences. They have altered the ways we grow up, learn, and live. Channels proliferate and new technologies pervade home and office while mergers and bottomline pressures *shrink* creative alternatives and reduce diversity of content. Media are coalescing into an integrated cultural environment that constrains life's choices as the natural environment defines life's chances.

The consequences are as diverse as they are far-reaching. For many people they mean an enrichment of local cultural horizons. But for many they also mean a narrowing of perspectives, homogenization of outlooks, and limitation of alternatives.

This condition did not emerge spontaneously or after thoughtful deliberation. It has been a radical departure overriding significant public opposition, a fact little noted in our history books. Its world-wide fallout and human implications have only recently been studied and are just beginning to be understood.

Ten-year-olds responding to a survey could name more brands of beer than presidents. Nine out of ten six-year-olds recognized "Old Joe" as a Camel cigarette ad. The new cultural environment blurs diverse outlooks, blends perspectives into a pervasive mainstream, and bends that mainstream to the service of those who own and pay for it.

Of course, ultimately we pay for it as consumers, but we pay when we wash, not when we watch. The price of a bar of

soap includes money to pay for the "soap opera" that plugs the brands of soap and a style of life. And we have no choice but to pay that levy.

For citizens, this is *taxation without representation*. For advertisers, it is a tax-deductible business expense that buys the rights to tell the stories we hold in common. For society it is a way of preempting alternatives, limiting freedom of the press to those who own it, divorcing payment from choice, and denying meaningful public participation in cultural decision-making.

The Cultural Environment Movement is concerned with such distortions of the democratic process. They include the promotion of practices that drug, hurt, poison, and kill thousands every day; portrayals that dehumanize and stigmatize; cults of violence that desensitize, terrorize and brutalize; the growing siege mentality of our cities; the drift toward ecological suicide; the silent crumbling of our infrastructure; widening resource gaps and the most glaring inequalities in the industrial world; the costly neglect of vital institutions such as public education, health care, and the arts; make-believe image politics corrupting the electoral process.

How can we heal the wounds of all the stories that hurt and tear us apart? How can we put culture-power to liberating ends? The new cultural environment challenges us to mobilize as public citizens as effectively as commercials mobilize us to act as private consumers and to address these questions.

We propose six areas:

(1) Build a new coalition and constituency

The Cultural Environment Movement involves media-oriented networks and councils in the U.S. and abroad; teachers, students and parents; groups concerned with children, youth and aging; women's groups; minority organizations; religious, educational, health, environmental, legal, and other professional associations; consumer groups and agencies; associations of creative workers in the media and in the arts and sciences; independent computer network organizers; and other organizations and individuals committed to creating mechanisms of

public participation in cultural policy-making.

(2) Oppose domination

We resist censorship, both public and private; act to extend the First Amendment beyond its use as a shield for the powerful; work to reduce concentration of control of and by media and to include in decision-making the less affluent, more vulnerable groups marginalized by marketers.

(3) Cooperate with groups in other countries that work for the integrity and independence of their own cultural decision-making

We need to learn from countries that have opened their media to the democratic process and oppose trade policies that make cultural development more difficult.

(4) Join forces with creative workers in the media

We work with journalists, artists, writers, actors, directors, and other creative workers struggling for greater freedom and diversity in media employment and expression.

(5) Promote media literacy, awareness, critical viewing and reading, and other media education efforts

We collect, publicize and disseminate information about relevant programs, services, curricula, and research and teaching materials.

(6) Place cultural policy issues on the social-political agenda

We support local and national and international media councils, study groups, citizen groups, minority and professional groups and other forums of public discussion, policy development, representation, and action, moving toward a realistic democratic media agenda.

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As we move forward with our plans for the Founding Conference of the Cultural Environment Movement in the Spring of 1996, it is important to gain diverse perspectives and representation.

Please take a moment to recommend the names and addresses of friends and associates—and especially leaders of organizations—you think will benefit from affiliating with CEM. We will send them a letter of inquiry of their interest and a package of information, including a *FREE* copy of *Women and Minorities in Television: A Study of Casting and Fate* by George Gerbner.

Please print or type the information

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Country _____ Phone _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Country _____ Phone _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Country _____ Phone _____

Print your name _____

May we use your name as a recommender? Yes, please ☐

No, thanks ☐

Feel free to duplicate this form for additional names as needed. Return form to:

cultural environment movement
P.O. Box 31847 • Philadelphia, PA 19104 • USA