

## Cultural Environment Movement

by Hara Marano

Perhaps it was the day 10-year-olds could name more brands of beer than U.S. Presidents, but somewhere along the way our culture has become so thoroughly manufactured by marketers that it is no longer able to give real substance to thousands of Americans.

Instead of growing up on home-spun stories in which we learn about ourselves, we are fed mass-produced images that fit only a few, stigmatizing and marginalizing the rest. As if this weren't bad enough, we are subsidizing our own dehumanization because we are forced to pay the hidden promotional cost at the checkout counter. Unfair! Taxation without representation, declares the Cultural Environment Movement (CEM), a two-year-old group that is determined to put cultural decision making back where it belongs—with the public. Led by George Gerbner, Ph.D., former dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications, the group feels that this is leading to a great narrowing of cultural perspectives.

Most of us didn't have a hand in bringing about this state of affairs; it didn't arise spontaneously or by thoughtful deliberation. It is, rather, the result of the "concentration of control of and by media." The point is, it is a "radical departure overriding significant public opposition."

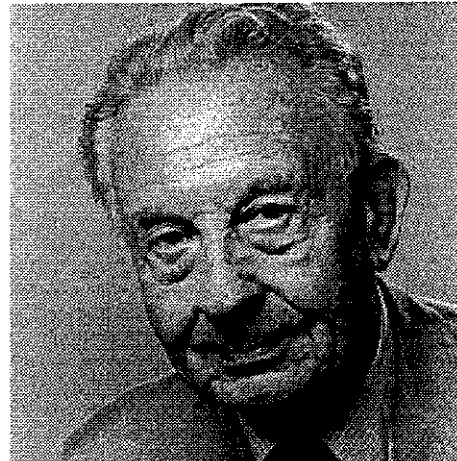
But the fallout is just beginning to be realized: "The promotion of practices that drug, hurt, poison, and kill thousands every day; cults of violence that desensitize, terrorize, and brutalize; the growing siege mentality of our cities; the drift toward ecological suicide; the silent crumbling of our infrastructure ..." You get the picture.

Gerbner and the CEM seek to educate Americans about the media, thus opening it up to the democratic process—without fostering censorship.

## Keynote Address: George Gerbner

FORUM  
SAT/9:30 AM

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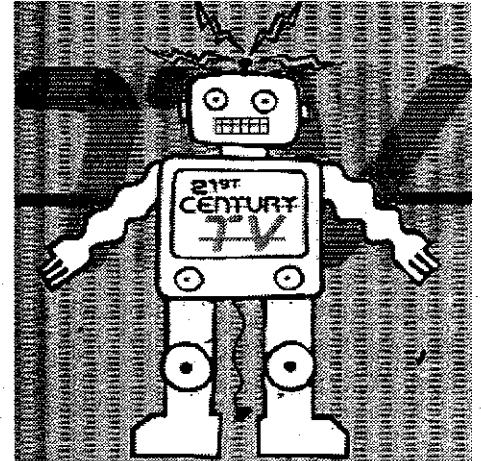


After more than 40 years of research Dr. George Gerbner has gained the well-deserved reputation as one of the world's foremost media theorists. One of his fundamental missions has been the creation of a database, compiled from over 3,000 television programs, which has been used to conduct numerous landmark studies. Gerbner's Diversity Index charts representation in the film and television industries, and his studies on media violence have drawn worldwide attention. Among Gerbner's theories is the "mean-world syndrome," which proposes that media's ratings-driven obsession with violence distorts our perception of the world. The prevalence of TV violence, Gerbner argues, makes society appear to be far more dangerous than it is, cultivating paranoia in the individual, a tendency towards preemptive hostility and, ultimately, the erosion of civility. In 1996, Gerbner was prompted to found the Cultural Environment Movement, an international reform coalition aimed at promoting a more balanced and diverse media. Dr. Gerbner will deliver the keynote address at the 1998 Taos Talking Picture Festival, entitled, "Who Is Telling All the Stories?," and focus on the cultural heritage of storytelling. Laurie Anderson once proposed that technology is the campfire around which our culture tells its stories. George Gerbner asks us to carefully consider how we choose to build that fire.

## 21st Century TV

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The goal of the panel is to encourage some dialogue about the current state of television and begin thinking about where it may be heading. We will cover the technological possibilities, of course, but more importantly, we hope to discuss the evolving sociological, educational and political impact television may have as we approach the turn of the century. Some issues we hope to explore: Will audiences be able to "participate" in TV? If so, how will "interactivity" affect us? In the future will TV become a more democratic or less democratic medium? How does the near future look for representations of women and people of color? The panel will include noted scholars, media activists and media professionals. Among those confirmed are Danny Schecter, former CNN/ABC News producer and founder of Globalvision; Adam Clayton Powell III, Vice President of Technology at the Freedom Forum; ABC News correspondent and author (*Don't Believe the Hype*) Farai Chideya; George Gerbner, noted researcher and Dean Emeritus of The Annenberg School of Communication; and Herb Schiller, communications theorist and Professor Emeritus at the University of California.