

For immediate release

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## Invitational Conference to Convene at Webster University

On March 15-17, 1996, CEM will hold its "Founding Conference" in St. Louis. The Convention is hosted by Webster University and co-sponsored by Webster and other organizations including the Children's Division of the American Humane Association, the Minority Media and Telecommunication Council, the Center for Media Education, the Center for the Study of Commercialism, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and other national and regional organizations.

The Convention will assemble 250 invited representatives of a broad range of independent organizations and leading media activists and scholars to ratify a People's Communication Charter, draft an action program, and set up a Coordinating Council of organizations to guide the program. Most of the work of the Convention will be done in regional, national, and international work sessions and in task groups representing a wide diversity of interests including media education, religion, creative workers in media, independent producers, labor, women's and minority groups, youth and senior citizens, and groups concerned with children, violence, and physical and mental health.

### What is the Cultural Environment?

The events leading up to this Convention began in 1991 with the founding of CEM by George Gerbner, an active Board of Directors, and a large advisory group, as an educational non-profit corporation. After many years of study, research and observation, it became clear to many that media coalesce into a seamless, pervasive, and increasingly centralized, homogenized and globalized cultural environment that has drifted out of democratic reach. CEM was launched in response to this drift. It is committed to building a coalition of independent organizations working for freedom, fairness, diversity and democracy on the cultural front. CEM believes that these goals can be achieved through greater public participation in cultural decision-making in a variety of specific areas, and that independent citizen action can build appropriate mechanisms for such participation.

ADBUSTERS magazines published the CEM prospectus under the title "The Second American Revolution." PSYCHOLOGY TODAY published a summary under the heading, "Take Back the Culture." Regional meetings, broadcast interviews, newspaper stories, and lecture tours across the U.S., in Latin America, and overseas keeps generating enthusiastic response. Over 3,000 persons responded by joining, requesting information, and offering to help build the movement. Over 100 organizations in all regions of the U.S., Canada, and several other countries wrote to express interest in affiliation.

CEM confronts the challenge of our time. Scotch patriot Andrew Fletcher once said that whoever tells the stories of a nation need not care who makes its laws. That was a time when stories were still hand-crafted, home-made, community-inspired. Today, they are the products of a complex mass-production and marketing process.

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 a small group of global conglomerates that have something to sell.

It is impossible to exaggerate the consequences of that historic shift for human socialization and governance. 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.

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.

## **What is the Movement?**

The Cultural Environment Movement was born to build new mechanisms of independent citizen initiative and participation in cultural decision-making. That means:

- Building a broad new coalition of organizations and individuals committed to broadening the freedom and diversity of communication.
- Opposing domination and working to abolish existing concentration of ownership and censorship, public or private. That includes extending the freedom of speech and access to media beyond those who own them.
- Seeking out and cooperating with cultural liberation forces of other countries, working for the integrity and independence of their own decision-making and against cultural domination and invasion.
- Working with journalists, artists, writers, actors, directors, independent producers and other creative workers struggling for more freedom from marketing formulas imposed on them.
- Promoting critical media awareness and literacy as a fresh approach to a liberal education on every level.
- Placing cultural policymaking on the socio-political agenda.

The new frontier for resisting repression and advancing toward a just society is the cultural frontier. CEM works for the chance of every child to be born into a cultural environment that is reasonably free, fair, diverse, and non-damaging.

## **CO-SPONSORS — CEM FOUNDING CONVENTION (draft)**

### **Webster University, Convention Host**

Linda Holtzman, Dept. of Mass Communication  
St. Louis, MO

### **American Federation of Television and Radio Artists**

Pamm Fair, Assistant Executive Director  
Hollywood, CA

### **American Humane Association, Children's Division**

Suzanne Barnard, Director of Communications and  
Public Relations, Englewood, CO

### **Canadians Concerned About Violence in Entertainment**

Rose Dyson, Chair, Toronto, Canada

### **Center for Children's Media**

Cheryl Hirshman, Executive Director, Boston, MA

### **Center for Ecoliteracy**

Zenobia Barlow, Executive Director; Craig Crouch,  
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### **Center for Media Education**

Jeffrey Chester and Kathryn Montgomery,  
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### **Center for Media Literacy**

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### **Center for the Study of Commercialism**

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### **Citizens for Media Literacy**

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### **Communications Consortium Media Center**

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### **Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility**

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### **Foundation for Deep Ecology**

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### **International Association for Mass Communication Research**

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### **Media Action Network for Asian Americans**

Guy Aoli, President, and Daniel M. Mayeda, Esq.,  
Liaison, Los Angeles, CA

### **Media Image Coalition**

Don Bustany, Co-president, Los Angeles, CA

### **Media Watch USA**

Ann Simonton, Director, Santa Cruz, CA

### **Minority Media and Telecommunications Council**

David Honig, Executive Director, Washington, DC

### **National Council of Churches**

Joan Campbell, President; Michael Maus, Director of  
Communications, New York, NY

### **National Stigma Clearinghouse**

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### **National Telemedia Council**

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### **New World Foundation**

Colin Greer, President, New York, NY

### **Northlands Storytelling Network and National Story League (Central and Western)**

Elaine Wynne and Larry Johnson, Minneapolis, MN

### **Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force**

Rita Addressa, Executive Director, Philadelphia, PA

### **Physicians for Social Responsibility**

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### **Project Censored**

Carl Jensen, Director, Sonoma State University,  
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### **Public Media Center**

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### **Screen Actors Guild**

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### **Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press**

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### **Writers Guild of America, West**

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for Diversity, Los Angeles, CA