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Invitational Convention 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.