



March 2002

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**Canadian Identity II After 9/11: New Directions II Training Future Leaders
News From England and Russia II Propaganda**

From the Winter Olympics to the Simpsons: Why Canada needs instant celebrityhood



Canadians have long had an image problem. We seem to inhabit a massive inferiority complex that can adversely affect our industrial success and hamper what we do in the world of entertainment. We are a polite people and, unlike Americans whose historical myth is traced to the rugged individual confronting the wild frontier, we opted for the Canadian way of peace, order and good government – a formula for Dullsville. Is it any surprise that our quintessential operative expression is "I'm sorry!"

Writers and cultural critics such as Margaret Atwood have pointed out that our dominant narrative as witnessed in our film and literature centers on "survival" and that we typically perceive our selves as "willing victims." The title of Leonard Cohen's enigmatic novel – *Beautiful Losers* – says it all.

Is it any wonder that we have a love-hate relationship with American media and popular culture? Here is my point – we need to exploit the media to validate our fragile identity.

On the positive side, our smaller, low-key view of the American universe seems to provide a valuable, semidetached intellectual perspective that inspires us to construct incisive media critiques. (See the works of Marshall McLuhan, Harold Innis and Dallas Smythe.) We send south of the border a raft of comedians and comic writers who dominate the US entertainment business (Jim Carrey, John Candy, Tom Green, Lorne Michaels of *Saturday Night Live* fame and *Kids in the Hall*, to name a few).

The above mini analysis provides some context for explaining three recent media events: The winter Olympic pair skating competition at Salt Lake city, the performance of Team Canada's hockey teams – both men's and women's – and a new *Simpsons* episode set in Toronto.





Canada was front page news for several days in February when the Olympic skating pair competition with Jamie Sale and David Pelletier eventually got their gold medal after the pressure was brought to bear on the Olympic committee to address the scandal of fixed judging. In the process, Jamie and David became media darlings who had gone from victims to victors. Canadians were finally on the world stage as "somebody's" who deserved to bask in the glory. This continued with the upset victories by Canadians when Team Canada for both women's and the men's hockey beat the USA for the gold medals. Thanks to superb media coverage and international recognition, proud Canadians have achieved something as a nation.

The event raised important questions about how the media made 'skategate' such a cause celebre and why Canadians took it all so personally. Recently In *USA Today*, media critic Jonathan Katz pointed out that when stories appear on various electronic outlets, they are picked up by other outlets with such speed and ferocity that they move beyond anyone's ability to control. Media conglomerates are under intense pressure for viewers, listeners and readers. In this hyperkinetic universe, all it takes to heat things up is a good story and hordes of media reporters anxious to make their mark. "It has become a huge big-bucks game that it didn't used to be," Katz says. "Journalism was supposed to be a considered medium. It was never supposed to be medium that transmitted information instantly."

After four days it was no surprise that the same media that had elevated the skaters started to turn against them (Sale and Pelletier dared to call a press conference in the middle of the day) and they were accused of exploiting their instant fame. After all, if the couple chooses, they could receive millions of dollars in endorsements.

Toward the end of the Olympics, Canadian athletes started to reap an unprecedented harvest of medals, ending up in fourth place standing. The much favoured US women's hockey team was beaten by the Canadian team.

Finally, there was the February 17th episode of the *Simpsons*. Two of the writers on the show are Canadians and they had no trouble getting their jabs at us. (Different American cities serving as a backdrop for the plot of a *Simpsons* episode are greeted indifferently in the United States but the Canadian episode was given front page coverage in two newspaper TV guides.) On arriving in Toronto, Marge feels at home and exclaims: "It's so clean and bland." Homer gets hit by a car but relaxes because he knows that he can use our outstanding Medicare system. The family tours the city and we see familiar landmarks and the inevitable winter sports such as curling. Mix in a few Mounties and we have a bounty of hilarious clichés. Once again, we have been validated by the media. Blame it on Canada! Oh, sorry, that's from another darn TV program.



Source: CP



A Media Lit Tool Kit for Examining Canadian Culture/Media Texts

- How do Canadians perceive themselves because of their success at the Winter Olympics in winning medals and the extensive media coverage, both national and international.
- Brainstorm a list of Canadian cultural images that come to mind. Debate which ones are mere clichés and half-truths. Which ones could be construed as genuine? Where do these images come from? What role does popular culture play in keeping them alive?
- Discuss the Molson Canadian's incredibly successful advertising campaign in 2000 which explored Canadian identity through a parody of American's clichéd perspective of Canada (our conversations peppered with the use of "eh?" our wearing toques, our love affair with the noble beaver).
- If you saw Rick Mercer's "Talking to Americans" program on CBC television, use this resource as a discussion about a humorous look at Canadian knowledge and identity and reverse prejudice. (The program was a one-hour collection of interviews that comedian Rick Mercer staged in which Americans were asked (manipulated) to state their opinion and/or lack of knowledge of Canada: e.g. "Congratulations Canadians on getting FM radio and running water.")
- View several prominent Canadian films such *The Sweet Hereafter* and *The Grey Fox*. What are the dominant cultural themes which emerge? (You may also want to use some National Film Board short films on video such as *Sky* and *City of Gold*.)

- Discuss this provocative quotation:

"If we are nationalists and believe in ourselves as Canadian, the American product really is the enemy – both in the cinema and on television: not because it is bad in itself (which it obviously isn't) but because by monopolizing our screens it has colonized our imaginations, offering its product as if it were our own. Without ever being aware of it, we have been conditioned to respond to the kinesthetic excitements of fast-moving action, to the glamour of stars, and to the overriding mythology of power, big money, of the glamorous life, that when we don't find those qualities in our own films, we tend to think of them as inferior."

Peter Harcourt, *Movies and Mythologies*. CBC Publications, 1977.

- In order to explore Canadian cultural myths, refer to a cross section of novels such as Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Timothy Findley's *The Wars* and short stories by writers such as Alice Munro and Carol Shields.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of constructing a Canadian discourse in which low-key, unheroic survivors seem to prevail.
- Culture critic Philip Marchand writing in the *Toronto Star* on Feb. 24 comments on the apparent contradiction at the heart of Canadian hockey:

"Canada, fabled for its politeness, its diffidence – Canada, so anxious to believe in a different national myth, that we are the world's "peacekeepers" – shows its deepest feelings in a sport which is hyper-aggressive and full of in-your-face violence."

How would you account for our contradictory behavior?

- Who are the memorable, pop culture heroes, rogues and comics? What are special mass media events in Canadian popular culture? Read and report on a selection of pieces from the



critically acclaimed book *Mondo Canuck: Popular Culture in Canada* (1996) by Grieg Diamond and Geoff Pevere.

- Following the example of the *Simpsons*, choose a popular American television program and introduce some significant Canadian content.
- Write an outline for an original satiric film centering on the difficulties posed by the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in exploring the Canadian identity.

And Speaking of Canadian Identity...

This would make an interesting class activity.



After the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States and the ensuing "war against terrorism," a dialogue about what it means to be Canadian has risen to the fore. The definition of being Canadian by virtue of not being American no longer stands. In the days following the attacks we became, like much of the Western world, 'all American' in our support and sympathy for the United States. Add to that a backlash against Muslim and Arab Canadians and proposals for racial profiling, tighter immigration policy and increased intelligence gathering and traditional notions of who we are begin to break down. Now, more than ever, we need to define what it means to be Canadian.

This is a proposal to invite Canadians of all ages and backgrounds from across the country to reflect on Canada's national identity in an open, online dialogue that will culminate in a one-hour documentary airing on Canada Day, July 1st, 2001.

In the months leading up to this broadcast, we will encourage Canadians to come to a CBC Web site to share their thoughts through text, photos, video, music, spoken word, poetry, flash – however they wish to express themselves. To help stimulate discussion and model the type of expression we are seeking, we will invite high-profile Canadian artists to share their views in creative and engaging ways on this same theme. We will also develop an outreach program to help generate participation from remote regions in Canada.

After months of this online discussion we will create a documentary that weaves together a selection of the contributions to present a rich and varied account of who we are and where we are headed as a country and as Canadians. It will be vibrant with the energy and emotion embedded in the original interpretations of "what it means to be Canadian" that we collect through the online discussion forum. Canadian voices will narrate their own poems and sing their own songs. Images of their personal photographs, paintings, home videos and flash creations will fill the screen and propel the story of what it means to be Canadian. What are we now? What will we be in the future? The ImagineNation Web site will serve as a repository of current perceptions of Canadian identity and artistic expression for years into the future.

If you are interested in participating in this project or finding out more about ImagineNation please contact:

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sarah_morris@cbc.ca



Training the Future Leaders of Media Education

Media Part One, York University

One shot workshops on media literacy are fine; five day summer institutes are better; but full-scale university courses that are sponsored by faculties of education are the best. In Ontario, much of the progress and achievements of the Association for Media Literacy are the direct result of the leadership generated from the teachers who took the AQ (Additional Qualification) courses that were offered from 1987-1994. Unfortunately, these courses nearly vanished thanks to the obsession in the mid-1990's with computers-in-education, the devastating cuts in educational funding, and the impact of teacher malaise. (The latter was created in large part because of the teacher-bashing tactics of our right wing conservative government that nearly destroyed public education.)



Last August, after a long absence, The Association for Media Literacy was able to launch a successful AQ course, Media: Part One, through York University in Toronto. (After taking Part Two and Part Three, teachers will receive a Media Specialist certificate.) Running for four days last August, followed by bi-weekly evening sessions until February, the course was taught by Toronto teachers and media educators Neil Andersen, Barry Duncan and Ian Esquivel. I can say with no hesitation that for the 14 educators who took this course, it was hailed as a major success. The course enrolled 12 secondary teachers and two elementary teachers.

Educators who are interested in developing similar programs, can use the course outline that was developed for Media: Part One as a helpful guide. It can be printed in PDF format at:

http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/class/multilib/media_ed_training.pdf

After 9/11: Directions for Culture, Media and Education in the New World Order

Forum held on February 7, 2002 at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto.





The panel for this event consisted of Barrie Zwicker, well known Toronto media critic and host of Vision TV's *Media File*. Rachel Giese, social activist and *Toronto Star* columnist. Ali Mallah, President of the Canadian Arab Federation and Carol Arcus, English and Media teacher and member of the Association for Media Literacy executive. Neil Andersen served as the chair.

An important community event, this forum was truly energizing. The presenters entertained a diversity of opinion from the audience, heard well-formulated arguments and communicated new perspectives to listeners on a topic that many perceive as going stale because of so much superficial news coverage.

Since January, Barrie Zwicker has been raising key questions about 9/11 with special emphasis on the inexplicable non-response from the military after it was known that three airplanes had been hijacked.

Carol Arcus was appalled that many schools on September 11 would not allow students to watch the television coverage in the classroom, leading her to see the evident cynicism of students regarding their attitudes to formal education. Her students compared the headlines of the Toronto dailies, ranging from "Bastards!" to "Day of Terror" and "Day of Infamy." She noted that the context of Hollywood movies about terrorism influenced how they often responded and raised questions about what is real.

Ali Mallah noted that there were innumerable incidents of racial slurs and violence directed against the Arab community in North America. He also pointed out how many right wing columnists were guilty of fanning the flames of hatred and intolerance.

Rachel Giese noted that 9/11 has prompted more hate mail than any other topic she has written about in recent years. She expressed dismay at the notion that "this was not the time to be critical" and that to do so would, as George Bush reminds us, put us on the side of the terrorists. Hence we are in a perpetual state of fear because people are prepared to give up their civil liberties.

International News



News from England

From Cary Bazalgette



Cary Bazalgette's report from the British Film Institute provides us with the vital statistics about the numbers in England of media students enrolled in the secondary school A-level Media or Film Studies. These are impressive numbers and indicate, compared to small numbers in North America media education, a major achievement in innovative curriculum development.

They have leaped up by 46 percent, to 18,310 candidates in 2001, probably due to the introduction of a new one-year course which allows students to opt for a larger number of subjects at this level. Fully updated figures should be on our Web site shortly. This represents a very small number of students in relation to the whole age-group. The question of access to media education by ALL pupils in mandatory education is far more important politically.



News from The Russian Association for Film and Media Education

From Alexander Federov, fedor@pbox.ttn.ru

There is a new address for the Web site of The Russian Association for Film and Media Education: www.mediaeducation.boom.ru (English Version). The main parts are: History and Methods of Russian Media Education; Violence on the Screen and Russian Youth Audience; Program of Media Education; and Media Education Links.

The Russian Association for Film and Media Education is proposing a new Media Education International Festival in July 2002. This festival will include: media education master classes; a competition of new films for children and Youth; a round table about media education; Children and the Internet; meetings with media professionals (directors, actors, etc.) who have made productions for children; children's discussion about media texts (films, Internet sites, TV programs, etc.). This event is at the proposal stage at present. I will elaborate when our association has found more sponsors for this event.

The Russian Association for Film and Media Education and Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute organized an International Media Education conference in September 2001 and have published the conference book with papers from Chris Worsnop (Canada), Renee Hobbs (USA), Trygve Panhoff (Norway), Per Lundgren (Sweden), Alfonso G.Martin (Spain), Alexander Federov (Russia), Anastassia Novikova (Russia), Gennady Polichko (Russia), Natalia Ryzhykh (Russia), Irina Cheleshyva (Russia), Irina Caruna (Russia), Elena Murukina (Russia), Valery Gura (Russia) and others.

In September and October 2001 Dr. Anastassia Novikova led a media education seminar for students of Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute. Supported by a grant from the Freedom Support Act Program Alumni (USA), this seminar included information about approaches to Media Education in the United States. Speakers at this seminar were Prof. Alexander Federov, Dr. Anastassia Novikova, Prof. Tatiana Molotsova, and Natalia Ryzhykh.

Prof. Alexander Federov is leading a research group on the topic of History and Theory of Media Education in Russia (with the support of the Russian Foundation for Humanities) in 2001-2003. He will also teach a new course, "Media Education and Information Technologies," in Taganrog Radiot Technical University for Ph.D. students.

Alexander Federov published the monograph *Media Education: History, Theory and Methods*, which analyzes the history, theory and methods of media education in Russia and abroad. The



author describes the creative works of the leaders of Russian media education and the practical ways of the film and video clubs for students. Other themes of this book are: "Violence on the Russian Screen and Youth Audience," "Media Preferences of Russian Students," and "Who is Who in Russian Media Education." The book also includes a list of Russian media education literature and Web sites for associations and organizations for media education. The book is in Russian; however, you can see the short English materials from the book on the Web at: www.mediaeducation.boom.ru.

Finally, you can see the results of some Russian media education surveys on the Web at www.mediaeducation.boom.ru.

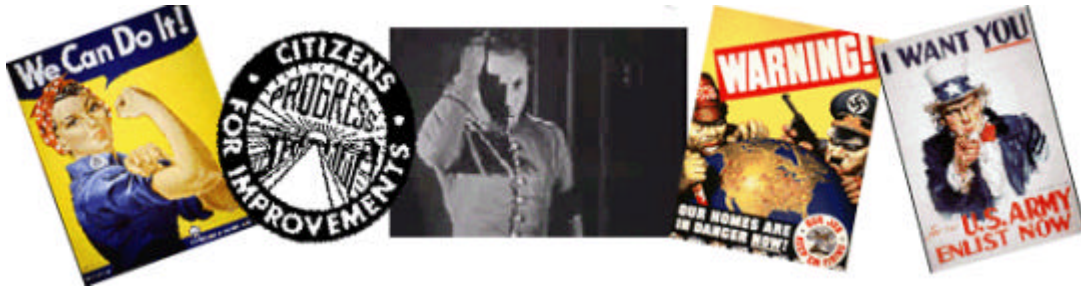
Recommended Resources

Exemplary Curriculum

The Toronto District School Board recently published for their teachers a four-page curriculum related in large part to the aftermath of 9/11. Entitled "Media and Global Conflict," it consists of four pages of advice about responding to extreme acts of violence as well as a variety of class activities – much of it on how to process the media coverage. There are activities for both elementary and secondary school. Written by experienced media educators – Neil Andersen, Dede Sinclair and Sylvie Webb – the document is a model in cross-curricular strategies well-grounded in media literacy concepts. Although this publication is not available to the general public, the board should be commended for encouraging top caliber, fast response curriculum in a time of crisis.



Propaganda: Some valuable Sites



Media Teacher Terry Dugas recommends these sites for the study of propaganda. A favorite topic with teachers, here are some resources to broaden your scope.

- The Propaganda Gallery features film clips dating back to 1917
<http://carmen.artsci.washington.edu/propaganda/video/index.html>
- Propaganda is the parent site for the above segment. The section on "Common Techniques" is useful.
<http://carmen.artsci.washington.edu/propaganda/home.htm>
- Political propaganda and persuasion
<http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/propaganda/politics.html>
- Powers of persuasion - Poster Art from WW II
<http://www.nara.gov/exhall/powers/powers.html>
- The Centre for the Study of Propaganda
<http://www.ukc.ac.uk/history/centres/propcent.html>

Upcoming Events

Media Ethics Since September 11

Monday March 11, 2002

1:00 - 4:00

The Ryerson Commons, Room A250.

First come, first served.

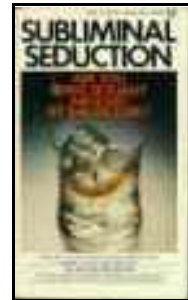
This workshop, sponsored by The Media Studies Working Group of the Ryerson Ethics Centre, will feature Mark Crispin Miller (New York University), Jay Newman (University of Guelph), and Robert Fulford (*The National Post*, Toronto)



The Final Word

Some Footnotes to Subliminal advertising. Is this all a con job?

The topic of subliminal advertising has recently made its way into media education list-serves. The person who, for a short time, played the see-the-subliminals in the ice cubes game was, of course, Wilson Bryan Key. His books, now out-of-print, included 1970's titles, *Subliminal Seduction* and *The Clam Plate Orgy*.



I heard Bryan Wilson Key back around 1974 at the International Visual Literacy Conference in Toronto, just after the publication of his controversial book *Subliminal Seduction*. It seems there were few skeptics in the audience. Why? Most of the audience were eager to believe his quasi-Freudian thesis.

More interesting than that occasion was a public forum held in Toronto about a year later, involving Bryan Key and a bunch of guys from ad agencies. Again the audience sided with Key who, with his shaved head, looked like a confident and menacing Yul Brunner. The crowd gasped with amazement as his slides revealed the many hidden messages. The ad people, of course, denounced it all as hokum and affirmed that at least in Canada such things didn't happen. One of them said that "If we thought this really worked, we would do it ourselves."

I spoke to an advertising executive a few years later who had talked informally to Key who had confessed that he only half believed in subliminals, but because his books were selling like hotcakes, there was no stopping him.

I met a teacher who had studied under Key at the University of Western Ontario. If you didn't find the subliminal messages in the ads he was showing, you failed the course! No wonder he was booted out of the university, although he apparently received a generous settlement.

There is an interesting chapter evaluating Key and other contenders for the subliminal throne in *Advertising and Society* by Ben Singer (Addison Wesley Canada, 1986. Out-of-print.) Included is an excerpt of a tongue-in-cheek student review of the time:

"Using Key's technique, a person observing nature will have to admit that he can perceive clouds that represent women engaged in cunnilingus with lesbian flying squirrels, bushes that symbolize choir boys committing necrophilia on toads, phallic trees, and the like, almost ad-infinitum."

Lord have mercy on us all for being so blind.

Barry Duncan is an award-winning teacher, author, consultant and founder and past president of the Ontario-based Association for Media Literacy. Co-author of the best selling text book, *Mass Media and Popular Culture*, he has presented workshops and keynote addresses to thousands of teachers in Canada and around the world. You can contact Barry at baduncan@interlog.com.

