

MEDIA

Visible minorities find out what society thinks of them, in part, by the way they are portrayed in the media. Many members of majority groups have few interactions with minorities and are more likely to develop images from newspaper stories and television. With the advent of television and subsequent technological advances, media images have become more and more a substitute for social experience. The media therefore play a powerful role in shaping social values and in developing the esteem which groups in the Canadian mosaic have of each other.

Unfortunately, we are so homogenized in the mass media that individuals and groups are usually presented as a single North American type. Canadians of southern and eastern European origins are under-represented, although less so in Canada than in the United States, and visible minorities are practically invisible. The media are very far from the goal "of making Canadians visible to each other". Our very advance to the forefront of communications technology brings with it a threat to our identity as a nation, not to mention to ethnic groups within the nation. However, the multiculturalism policy of Canada clearly distinguishes us from the melting-pot society of the United States, our main source of assimilation by media. The Committee believes that multiculturalism and multiethnicity comprise an essential feature of Canadian identity, and that the delineation of this feature by the media is strategically important in defending our national identity as well as in building our national unity.

In support of Canadian identity and unity, the media should first remove within its own institutions barriers to the full participation of visible minorities, and second, should portray visible minorities to the whole society in an adequate and fair manner. Promising models of this were found by the Committee in recent initiatives undertaken by a radio-television organization (the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation), a radio station (CKFM of Toronto) and a daily newspaper (The Toronto Star).

- Recognizing how few visible minority persons are employed in the broadcast media, the CBC commenced in the fall of 1983 a special program to train a group of eight such persons, without however, any commitment to employ them on completion of training. Some 850 persons applied to be trained, of whom 150 were deemed worthy of being interviewed for possible selection.
- Following protests about a racist remark made by an announcer in August 1982, radio station CKFM of Toronto set up a community advisory board to improve its staff's understanding of minority groups in the area it covered. The station hired a minority journalist and has been rejecting advertisements which reflect negatively on ethnic minorities.
- The Toronto Star has made an audit of its staff to determine the under-representation of visible minorities and has reviewed its hiring procedures. Besides improving its coverage of ethnic minorities, this daily has instituted a policy of not mentioning the race of a person unless it is directly relevant to the report.

Some progress has been made in recent years, and one milestone has been the conference on Visible Minorities and the Media, convened by the Multiculturalism Directorate in Toronto in October 1982. There was a fruitful exchange of views