





# *The Dalton* *Camp Award*

Presentation of the 2003 Dalton Camp Award  
Banff Television Festival  
June 9th, 2003



# The Dalton Camp Award

Friends of Canadian Broadcasting announced the creation of The Dalton Camp Award in December 2002 to honour the memory of the late Dalton Camp, a distinguished commentator on Canadian public affairs, who passed away earlier that year.

The Dalton Camp Award is available to up to three Canadians each year, the winners of an essay competition on how the media influence Canadian democracy. Each Award consists of a cash prize of \$5,000 as well as a bronze cast medal by Canadian sculptress Dora de Pédery-Hunt.

Friends' goal is to encourage young Canadians to reflect and express themselves through original essays on the link between democratic values and the quality of media in Canada.

The Selection Committee is chaired by Jim Byrd, Chief Operating Officer of the Banff Television Foundation. The other members are Knowlton Nash and Maggie Siggins.

The winners of the 2003 Dalton Camp Award will be announced at the opening session of the Banff Television Festival on June 9th, 2003. They are Jean Coléno, Leslie Vryenhoek and Russell Wangersky. Friends of Canadian Broadcasting is pleased to publish their essays herein and on Friends' web site: "friendscb.ca", where details on the 2004 Dalton Camp Award can also be found.

Friends of Canadian Broadcasting wishes to thank the Banff Television Foundation, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the Canadian University Press, Mitchell Gabourie, St. Thomas University and the *Toronto Star* for their cooperation in the launch of The Dalton Camp Award.

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# The Medal

**DORA DE PÉDÉRY-HUNT** is Canada's foremost medal designer and sculptress. Among her designs are the dollar coin and a cast medal of Norman Bethune presented by Prime Minister Trudeau to Mao Tse-tung in 1973. She recently received the J. Sanford Saltus Award Medal for 2003, the American Numismatic Society's prestigious medal for signal achievement in the art of the medal.



# The Winners



**JEAN COLÉNO**, originally from Montreal, is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto where his research focuses on political theory and media studies.



**LESLIE VRYENHOEK** is a writer and communications professional in Winnipeg. She has worked in public relations and media relations for several non-profit organizations, including the Canadian Red Cross.



**RUSSELL WANGERSKY** is editor of the *St. John's Telegram* and also a columnist and freelance magazine writer. His columns have appeared in the *Edmonton Journal*, the *National Post*, the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Vancouver Province*. *BBC Wildlife Magazine*, *Canadian Geographic*, *Maclean's* and *Time* have published his articles. He is the 2003 editorial winner in the Canadian Newspaper Awards.

# *The Winning Essays*

# Context and Ideology in the Canadian Media

BY JEAN COLÉNO

“People don’t actually read newspapers,” Marshall McLuhan famously said. “They get into them every morning, like a hot bath.” McLuhan’s quip was meant to apply only to newspapers, but it unfortunately holds true for most of the Canadian media. Too often, our media affect us like a cozy, stupefying bath, when they should jolt us like a cold, invigorating shower.

A healthy democracy needs knowledgeable, curious, and critically minded citizens. In at least two respects, the Canadian media fail in their duty to foster these qualities of good citizenship: first, the media tend to present news without proper historical and social context, making it difficult for citizens to evaluate events in an informed manner; and second, the media allow political debate to be monopolized by ideologues who adhere dogmatically to their respective political catechisms. These problems are more closely related than they appear and can best be overcome in tandem.

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Last autumn, a major civil war broke out in the Ivory Coast. Knowing little about this small country, I scoured Canada’s “quality” press to learn about the background from which the conflict emerged. For several weeks, I expected to come across a media piece on the conditions that gave birth to this tragedy. I waited in vain; if any major Canadian media outlet presented a thoughtful report on the background to this civil war, it somehow escaped the notice of this media junkie. I did eventually find what I was looking for, but I had to look beyond the Canadian media.

Newsworthy stories tend to involve bad or tragic events. With the possible exception of freak accidents, such events cannot be understood outside of their historical, social, or economic circumstances. When violent events such as civil wars are presented without context, their perpetrators come across as Charles Mansons, demented and wicked brutes inexplicably bent on spreading havoc. Of course, a few such people exist, but even they do not pop up out of nowhere and are best understood by examining the environment in which they grew.

On certain sorts of international questions, the Canadian media do a better job of supplying context than they did a few years ago.

Since September 11th, the press has made a laudable effort to situate events in the Middle East within a broader historical and social context. Anyone with even a trace of curiosity now knows far more about the history of Islam and about the various interests and forces at play in the Middle East than he or she did on September 10th, 2001.

Still, there remains much room for improvement. Consider the question of the legality or illegality of the war waged by the United States and its military allies against Iraq. As of late March of this year, I have come across dozens of claims in the Canadian media that this war is illegal, and dozens of counterclaims that the war is, on the contrary, perfectly legal, but I have not come across a single serious piece attempting to weigh the evidence for and against each of these positions.<sup>2</sup> By failing to address a question of such magnitude, the media make it easy for Canadians to spout off on this subject according to their preconceived biases; in fact, the media positively encourage this sort of empty political bluster by airing the views of ideologues who can be counted on to follow their respective party lines on every given issue.

This brings me to my second main concern: media debate is dominated by dogmatists of the left, right, and centre. Far too many of our media commentators approach political issues by reflexively consulting their musty political catechisms. Give me a typical pundit's views on, say, abortion and government-subsidized housing, and I can guess with a high degree of accuracy his or her views on tax cuts, capital punishment, and war with Iraq. Needless to say, such conformists seldom merit one's attention except as case studies in herd mentality.

Thankfully, there are public commentators who try to approach politics with a questioning mind, but these are the rare exceptions. Our public "thinkers" are usually content to occupy a square on the ideological chessboard from which they launch rhetorical assaults on their political opponents. In the worst cases, these media figures are mere mascots skilled at waving flashy ideological banners to the cheers of their rabid fans. Such pundits do not even bother trying to persuade skeptics through reasoned arguments, for that is simply not what mascots are paid to do.

It is easy to point to shameless ideological mascots whose views we disagree with, but if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit

to having sometimes cheered mascots on our side of the political field. Such pundits flourish across the ideological spectrum: they specialize in shouting catchy slogans, spewing moral indignation, casting doubt on the intentions and intelligence of their opponents, and staging cheap publicity stunts.

I would not want to be misunderstood as an unthinking defender of the “sensible centre.” Such a rhetorical pose is yet another form of knee-jerk cheerleading: its sloganeers routinely present themselves as the sane and balanced folks in contrast to those crazed wackos on the left and right. When adopted blindly, political centrism is nothing but a “mean” between whichever political alternatives happen to dominate one’s era, without concern for the decency – or lack thereof – of these alternatives.

In contrast to the mascots, a small number of political commentators are engaged in an honest, open-ended quest for the truth. Like everyone else, they have their biases and presuppositions, and may tend to identify with the political left, right, or centre. Nevertheless, they try to approach a given issue on its own terms without giving cheap thrills to the ideological hooligans in the stands. The work of these commentators tends to be respectful, carefully argued, and based on solid facts. It is also inherently fascinating: one is naturally curious to know what such people think about a given question, and one is keen to see how they come to their conclusions.

The model of this kind of political commentary is rightly held to be George Orwell, whose essays tower over those of other twentieth-century English writers. Like everyone else, Orwell had his blind spots and silly moments, but his essays and journalistic work are almost all worth reading, for they allow us to peer into an active, enquiring, and fundamentally honest mind. Because of these qualities, Orwell has been esteemed by generations of inquisitive writers and journalists, even among those with little sympathy for his left-wing views; conversely, he has been vilified by generations of left- and right-wing party hacks, much to his own credit.

Orwell alienated most of his peers, in part because he refused to squeeze empirical evidence into a preconceived ideological framework. In his writings on colonialism, homelessness, coal mining, and the Spanish Civil War, Orwell was often willing to question his own

cherished assumptions. Moreover, Orwell based these writings on direct experience, and he took care to discuss these subjects within their larger social and historical contexts. By emphasizing the complexity of these subjects, Orwell tried to prevent his readers from judging these issues according to preconceived notions. His writings were like a cold but healthy shower, washing readers clean of ideological muck and jolting them from their dogmatic slumbers.

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I have, of course, simplified matters too much. Most Canadian journalists are neither raving ideologues nor independent spirits like Orwell. Nevertheless, journalists can only benefit from Orwell's example, and they can equally benefit by refusing to follow the shabby example of the mascots among them. Newsroom managers and editors should be on the lookout for both types, encouraging the potential Orwells and spurning the ideological loudmouths.

As I have suggested above, journalists can also improve their work by paying greater attention to the broader context in which events occur. The more one does this, the harder it is to be a political mascot, for one cannot take note of the world's complexity without undermining one's faith in facile ideological solutions. As Orwell knew, the search for context is a step toward mental independence.

1 Attributed to Marshall McLuhan in *The Oxford Dictionary of 20th Century Quotations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

2 For an interesting but overly brief piece from outside Canada, see "Pro, con and muddled," *The Economist* (20 March 2003).



the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased from 10.5 million to 12.5 million. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and this has implications for the way in which the public sector is managed and the way in which it is funded.

The public sector is a complex and diverse organisation, and it is difficult to define it precisely. However, it can be defined as the part of the economy that is owned and controlled by the state. This includes a wide range of organisations, from the police and the fire service to the NHS and the local authorities.

The public sector is a major employer in the UK, and it has a significant impact on the economy. It provides a wide range of services, and it is responsible for the provision of many of the public services that we all rely on. The public sector is also a major source of revenue for the state, and it plays a key role in the financing of the public services that we all rely on.

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## Mourning Strangers: The Impact of Emotional Reporting on Public Discourse

BY LESLIE VRYENHOEK

The once smiling face of the now dead child. The soldier portrayed as husband and son. The grief-stricken family member recalling the tragic loss of a loved one. These are the familiar human faces that bring a media story, and all its inherent issues, to life.

Leading with the personal account is a time-honoured and effective technique designed to draw in the audience and build an affinity for the subject matter. Increasingly, however, the personal narrative doesn't lead us into the larger story – it is the story, without context or further substance.

The immediacy and intimacy achieved through modern technology, when coupled with this focus on the personal, can lead the media consumer to experience profound emotional involvement in the lives – and the tragedies – of others. As a result, it has become commonplace for Canadians to expend large amounts of energy mourning strangers.

By strangers, I don't mean Pierre Trudeau or the Princess of Wales, who were known to us in life – even if we were not known to them. Our desire to mourn them, bolstered as it may have been by overeager media coverage, was a natural outgrowth of our loss. When I speak of strangers, I mean those who become known to us solely due to the circumstances of their death.

Quite apart from the effect that mourning strangers has on the personal well-being of the individual, the danger of engineered grief lies in its impact on public discourse. High emotion is as likely to foster outrage as it is to inspire wisdom and generosity borne of sorrow. The result is a move away from informed decision-making toward something less rational and more visceral.

Grief politicizes and polarizes. Those who have experienced personal loss are moved to action with a single-minded ferocity that makes change not just possible but inevitable. This can be a tremendously positive force for change. Canada's drunk driving laws, for example, have been transformed by the organized fervour of parents who channeled their grief into meaningful, relentless advocacy.

Armchair mourners are not as motivated as grief-stricken parents, of course, and so are likely to undertake only armchair advocacy – writing a letter to an editor or a cheque to charity, perhaps, or expressing an impassioned opinion in the lunchroom or to a pollster. While the

impact of those actions, when taken individually, may not seem great, the combined volume of similar reaction can make them significant.

During the years that I have worked for an international humanitarian aid organization, I have been grateful for the media's predilection for vivid images of human suffering. The ability to get the story, bring it back to people far away and make it real is what drives humanitarian impulse. When flooding devastated Mozambique in 2000, the images of people hanging from trees, filmed from a rescue helicopter, provided gripping drama that drew a tremendous response from Canadians. Donations poured in. Like it or not, the cameraman who took a seat on that rescue helicopter helped to finance the relief effort. Contrast that with the much larger humanitarian disaster that took hold in southern Africa in the winter of 2002. Famine makes lousy television, and as a result, it was impossible to draw the donor response necessary to save lives.

Like donor impulse, public policy in a democracy often turns on emotion more than it does on reasoned debate. Never mind minds – hearts and guts are what guide voters, just as polls measuring the mood of the country guide politicians. The brain, however, must be allowed to play a pivotal role in informing the heart.

The greatest impact of any medium lies not in its intellectual ability to inform (or deceive), to present facts (while concealing others), or to illuminate (and obscure). These factors all have influence, to be sure, but the surest path to change is through an emotional connection. Advertisers, filmmakers and fundraisers know this, so they employ emotional content to fire memory cells and provoke action. The best journalism must also engage the emotions. But unlike artists and promoters, journalists have a larger mandate – to motivate and improve public discourse. If a news story elicits only a visceral reaction, then no matter how memorable or moving, it has failed in its responsibility to foster an informed state among its audience.

No event has more vividly underlined the impact of media-inspired grief than that which began on September 11, 2001. This caught-on-camera calamity, and the weeks and months of coverage that ensued, raised the bar on collective mourning and became, in the minds of an enormous chunk of the North American population, the largest event to happen ever, anywhere.

In that first remarkable week, the world (the western world, at least) sat glued, grief-stricken, to its television screen. One woman confided that she sacrificed three nights' sleep to watch the coverage. Another told me her father had cried inconsolably for days, all the while seeking stories that would make him cry harder. I heard someone else say that they felt guilty when they turned off the TV, as if they were abandoning those trapped in the rubble. These responses, and the millions like them, were genuine reactions to the astonishing intensity of emotionally charged media content.

It would have been impossible to report on those first astounding days without focusing on the intense emotion of the time. But it is impossible to deny that, when the world caught its breath and we all found our feet, the media turned up the volume with endless features on victims and families. Music played, flags unfurled, emotions were manipulated.

Unfortunately grief – along with its close relative, fear – provokes extreme reactions that can make rational debate difficult, if not downright dangerous. Public commentary in Canada reflected the considerable emotional impact following 9-11. It became easier to distrust foreigners, to call for tighter immigration controls, to start talking about curtailing freedom to in the interest of freedom from. “After what happened to those poor people on September 11th” became a common opening refrain among callers to talk radio who wanted to rage and be heard.

The emotional involvement of Canadians in this tragedy made the commitment of our troops to the war on terror in Afghanistan *a fait accompli*, with none of the hand-wringing and divisive, if necessary, debate that marked the Canadian reaction to the war in Iraq. Even with regard to Iraq, listen to the pro-war forces in the streets and on talk radio, and you will hear *After what happened on September 11th...* This is an earnest reaction, based in nothing but immense grief. And that grief was, in part, inspired by a media frenzy that capitalized on individual victims' stories, wringing tears from the tragedy at the expense of a larger understanding.

Many of those who most avidly watched the 9-11 coverage later expressed disgust with the media, complaining of manipulation and exploitation. But it is the nature of mass media that what prompts a

strong reaction draws more coverage – leading the media, in essence, to chase its own tail. Consumers must look to their own unquenchable thirst for personal stories before casting blame on the media.

What drives us all to peer closely at news of others' tragedies is not just voyeurism, but the need to confirm that the dead differ from our own loved ones. This is why tragedy far away, in cultures vastly different than ours, is so much easier to take. *Those people aren't like us, they don't feel the same, we believe. They think life is cheap so death doesn't bother them, we lie. They don't love their children like we do.* We find ways to find distance. And when we find those differences, even the most emotionally-charged footage has the effect of diminishing the enormity of a tragedy. If they are not like us, we reason, then it matters less.

But if instead we find unbearable similarities, we are driven to grief, and sometimes to fear and outrage.

Large-scale catastrophes provide extensive material for emotional coverage, but the greatest danger to our institutions and to sensible public policy is often sparked by the atypical individual death.

Local and limited in nature, these tragedies are covered precisely because of the unusual circumstances under which they occur. However, they make more compelling stories if the anomaly is underplayed, and the potential danger to the audience is highlighted. Fear becomes the conduit through which the audience is engaged. In these instances, the personal story is not used to put a human face on a larger issue, but to create a larger issue from an aberrant human tragedy.

As with fear, any suggestion of negligence or bureaucratic failure will almost surely guarantee an emotional response among mourners.

Family members, of course, can be forgiven for expressing emotional outrage and looking to lay blame during times of deep personal crisis. Lamenting the shortcomings of a public health system that failed to save a loved one, for example, or questioning the virtue of safety protocols that prevented emergency workers from rescuing trapped family members, are natural reactions of the bereaved. But when a large contingent of strangers, spurred by evocative news reports, takes up the cause and demands changes, an unsettling groundswell occurs. Policies forged through careful balancing of priorities can be laid to waste in the rush to accommodate the feelings and fears of an ill-informed but outraged public.

Unfortunately, once grief, fear and outrage have taken hold, rational discourse becomes improbable. Any refusal to give in to the sentimentality of the moment appears heartless, even suspect.

The media can, and should, guard against helping to foster such an irrational climate in which the ideals and institutions that give strength to democracy cannot flourish. Journalists place enormous importance on their obligation to provide balanced coverage of issues. That concept must be expanded to include a balancing of emotional content with intellectual rigour.

Emotional connection is a place to start, because engaging the heart is the surest way to opening the mind. We would all do well to remember, however, that moved to tears is not the same thing as well informed. Emotional content has a place in Canadian journalism as a means to an end – but it is not an end in itself.



## EBITDA-mocracy

### How Canada's changing media threatens democracy

BY RUSSELL WANGERSKY

There is no real mass media in North Harbour, not unless you count the very simplest kind; the roadside sign that warns “Fox snares in area,” or the yellow and black provincial government signs that mark the rough corners of the domestic wood cutting areas.

Tucked into one corner of Newfoundland's St. Mary's Bay, it is a linear town, a handful – maybe three handfuls – of houses and one small store that run along one side of a narrow arm of the bay, a string of small beads on a long thread of road. The town is tucked down below Hat Pond, past the rocky black inflows of the North Harbour and Flinn Rivers – sudden, floody rivers that drain vast shallow basins of bog and low brush. The houses don't all line up; some face the shore of the bay and the three long fingers of wharves, while others sit iconoclastically and kitty-cornered, looking pointedly away from their neighbours. There are new bungalows and older homes boasting big, rectangular windows with old-fashioned, storm windows fastened on with carelessly over-painted hooks and eyes. There are, of course, abandoned houses, as there are almost everywhere in a province and – a country – feeling the uneven tug-of-war between urban and rural life.

Political intrigues are far away from the practical realities of life; it matters less what a Member of Parliament does, and more that crab caught in the most recent fishery are uniformly smaller than in past years and that there are more afflicted with the unnerving bitter crab disease, which turns the crab flesh milky and liquid.

In the fall of 2002, high water along the Flinn backed up with the sudden weight of a fall storm, the sort of localized storm that regularly rattles nearby Placentia with heavy rain and occasional thunder and then rolls, disgorging, across the spine of the peninsula towards North Harbour.

There is nothing abstract about the Flinn; as the water rose, it began to carry fallen trees and slash along its long, flat course, until the flotsam met the simple bridge of a highway culvert sideways at the North Harbour road and made its own dam.

The water rose level with the pavement and then began to flow across the road: the gravel on the downhill side was swept away first, and then the pavement simply fell in. Soon, there was nothing left except the denuded, four-foot-high corrugated culvert, standing alone

in the hole, perpendicular to where the road had run. The only road, cut as cleanly as string with scissors.

Nothing abstract indeed – it would have been a news story, in fact, a provincial highway cut by a heavy autumn storm, its residents cut off and wondering when they could expect their children to be able to return safely to school – except that it was one far enough geographically from the mainstream media that almost no one chose to cover it. One hundred and thirty kilometres or so from St. John's, but it could as easily have been a thousand.

Unlike the Flinn, democracy is an abstract notion, and one that for large parts of our Canadian confederacy is growing more abstract and disconnected from its users with each passing year. The media should have a role to play in keeping democracy close, especially in a country as disparate as Canada, because the media could be the thread that connects the Canadian dots. But the media is failing in that role.

On the face of it, you'd think that the problem with the media started and ended with the obvious threats – threats like the one found near a bridge in Selma, Alabama, for instance.

Selma became famous as the start of the first protests that eventually led to the 1965 U.S. Voting Rights Act, the start of a march that was to stretch all the way to Montgomery, but which ended instead at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The bridge stands at the edge of Selma, and state troopers waited there to bludgeon, tear-gas and whip the marchers. Hundreds were arrested, on March 7, 1965, a day that, in the civil rights movement, became known as Bloody Sunday.

On March 7, 2002, 37 years to the day after Bloody Sunday, the Selma Times-Journal wrote about the news a Hyundai manufacturing plant might be coming to the area – but they didn't talk about what taxpayers were offering the automaker. Instead, they wrote about why it would be better to stay silent.

“Big companies do not like pressure. They don't like to be told where they should move, and they sure don't like ordinary citizens like us telling them they'd better move to our community. Big companies like to do things their way. They like to visit communities like ours, eat at our restaurants and ask us how much money we can give them to help them build the plant...

“When media get involved, when members of the press ask questions and get pushy about details, big companies get angry. They ask the media to leave them alone. They ask state officials to stay quiet. And if state officials know what’s best, they do stay quiet.

“Some say the people and press over in Mississippi talked so much about Hyundai that Hyundai said ‘See ya.’ We can’t let that happen to us... So for now, we’ll remain quiet on Hyundai, just like every other media organization in Alabama should do.”

So what is the connection between Selma and North Harbour?

Well, it is the media and democracy.

But perhaps not in the way you are thinking.

In Selma, the media was afraid of driving money away, and chose deliberately to close its eyes – chose not to do what the media is supposed to do, to provide the information required for an informed democracy. It is such an obvious twisting of the nature of the media that it almost reads as an absurdity – but it is no different, in the long run, from the fate of the informed democracy in Canada.

In North Harbour, it is the lack of money that, more and more, keeps the media away. And while it is far less obvious than the sentiments outlined in a Selma editorial, it might be even more dangerous, because the result is the same; a lack of information for that informed democracy.

In Selma, at least you have a choice to disagree with the message, because as distasteful as it is, desire for money is right there in front of you. It’s an experience that happens here, too – as the amounts of revenue raised from advertisers increase and the amounts raised from subscribers decrease, smaller outlets are finding that advertisers have a much more powerful part, not in what does get covered, but in what does not. The Globe and Mail can afford to ignore the wishes of its advertisers – it’s not so easy for media outlets scrabbling by their fingertips.

For North Harbour, the problem is more insidious.

There, like in much of rural Canada, just as democracy is growing further away from the individual concerns of Canadian citizens, a homogenized, EBITDA-driven media is growing further away as well.

EBITDA? It’s an important term, the measuring-stick of many of the

concentrated private media that operate in Canada – it is the abbreviation for the accounting term “earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization.” It is supposed to be the new bottom line, one exempt from the vagaries of differing accounting measures, a level playing field for prospective owners and shareholders to examine the question of the relative profitability of substantially differing businesses.

The problem with the level playing field of EBITDA, especially as far as the media is concerned, is that the media’s own playing field in Canada is growing more and more uneven. The growing concentration of traditional media ownership and the broadening pool of other sources of information have created a strangely splintered media.

Perhaps the best comparison is that the pull of business is doing to the media exactly what the current economic downturn is doing to the airline industry and the airlines’ presence in small-town Canada – there is a drawing-in towards the centre that leaves the fringes behind.

The problem is, we are a country built along the fringes.

And for the media, a level playing field may satisfy corporate owners, but it actually does little to protect the flow of information. A newspaper owner might compare an operation in the Atlantic provinces to one in St. Catharines, Ontario, and suggest, as is often done in this industry, that costs and returns for similar-sized papers should be similar as well. It is a factor like the old Southam measure – one editorial employee for every 1,000 subscribers of your circulation.

So the media battles for the more cost-effective ground, be that smaller coverage areas or “converged” media, and more is done, perpetually with less. Even the country’s public broadcaster is not immune; national broadcasting, by and large, has trumped local coverage. Regional newscasts, like the one that serves North Harbour, make do with smaller time slots and a smaller budget – they, too, necessarily pull in towards the centre, and coverage defaults to that which can be done most cheaply and most easily.

At the same time, the audience thins across what appears to be a broader and broader river bed of available media sources, each with proportionately smaller resources. The water may run faster, but it is markedly shallower, too.

The great oddity is that, in our democracy, rural voters often have

a franchise that counts for more than their urban compatriots. One North Harbour vote means more to the chances of a federal politician than two votes in a Toronto district – yet, to the media, North Harbour has come to mean almost nothing at all. It is, by and larger, easier and cheaper to aim for the largest homogenous block of readers or viewers – and the problem there is that, as more and more stations or papers angle for what have become crucial demographic segments of our society, large portions of the population – large, geographically-spread portions of the population – are becoming disenfranchised, to the point that their voices are no longer heard.

Not because they choose to be silent, but because there is no one there to listen.

In Selma, the danger to democracy was the fact that money might be coming to town, money important enough that a community was willing to allow a democratic drawing of the blinds. In North Harbour, the danger is more that the lack of money has slowly drawn away any hope of directly informing its citizens – and surely, that damages our democracy just as much.

There is a real danger that our only remaining consistent thread might someday be dollars.

In North Harbour, the sheers twitch in the windows and people watch when you park beside the road and look out across the long flat silver bay. The ocean swells are clipped off sharply as they enter the foot of the bay, down past Dog Pond and the mouth of the Big Barrisway River, so the only waves that make their way to your feet are small, lapping curls that fall over their own feet at the beach. There is no reason to be concerned if Paul Martin is placing his vast shipping holdings in a blind trust or handing them over to his sons; the fact is, neither the concept of conflict of interest nor the vast size of the Martin holdings make any sense to someone who has spent the morning sanding the bottom of his cradled fishing boat. Dogs bark, and you can hear the solid thunk of someone splitting wood.

And in a real way, North Harbour is just as cut off as if the Flinn were still overflowing its banks, undercutting the pavement and sucking the road gravel of that one fine thread of road far out into a deep and waiting sea.





