

Defining and identifying a unique Canadian culture through the eyes of the CBC

The CBC is one of Canada's most vital and essential cultural institutions. At the heart Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's mandate has been the idea that Canadians walk down Canadian streets, look into Canadian faces and thus should be able to find Canadian stories on their television sets. This was the task given to the CBC upon its inception and one that it has struggled with for its entire history. In view of the close proximity and dominating influence of the U.S., Canadians have long been concerned about protecting their national culture and identity. The CBC attempts to create a space for Canadian stories, at regulating cultural development and at prescribing the amount of Canadian content in our airways. The CBC has an obligation to become a living and daily testimony of the Canadian identity, a faithful reflection of our two main cultures and a powerful element of understanding and unity in our country. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation was created by act of Parliament in 1963 to provide national radio in both French and English, the country's two official languages. Initially, the CBC was specifically set up to safeguard Canada from the threat of an overrun U.S culture. The CBC is expected to reflect Canada's multicultural being. The current CBC operates under the Broadcasting Act (1991) stating in sections 3(m) (1) that programming should "be predominantly and distinctively Canadian". By operating under this mandate Canadians are exposed to a culture that they can specifically relate to. The CBC plays

a vital role in identifying the distinctive Canadian culture through a Canadian perspective.

The future of the CBC has been seriously questioned in recent years, due to massive funding cutbacks and lack of interest in the channel's programming. The CBC's programs are often filled with news, documentaries, and more news. Although the news is informative, it lacks entertainment and many more viewers are turning away from the lack thereof. In result of that the CBC has been trying to establish less serious programming such as the news and documentaries, by introducing a line of comedic shows like "*This hour has 22 minutes*, and "*Kids in the Hall*". These shows have proved to be successfully popular with the Canadian audience. The CBC is striving for "high impact and high quality" programming to survive in the competitive American dominated media frenzy. Critics of the integrity of the CBC have claimed that the CBC is anti-Christian or anti-religion. The most vocal critic is Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day, who in the 2000 election threatened to hold a referendum for Canadians to see whether they still feel the CBC is necessary. The Alliance is an extreme right wing political party which believes that corporations such as the CBC should become privatized. As quoted by a critic of the CBC and supporter of the Alliance "I have never seen the press(the CBC), mercilessly attack a politician, at any time as they did Stockwell Day. " The CBC criticized Stockwell Day for his belief in the Creationist theory. The Creationist theory believes that the world was created by God 6,000 years ago along with the dinosaurs. The followers of this theory take everything in the Bible literally and to many that seems unrealistic. There is no refutable evidence to support

the theory that the world is 6,000 years old. Stockwell Day also believes that charity is an important virtue and yet his political platform suggests that he thinks that getting rich is important. The CBC is not being anti-Christian or anti-Bible about this matter. The CBC is just stating that the Bible is not a factual account of some things, and should not be taken completely literally as Creationists do. The CBC's so-called attacks are justified by pointing out the flaws in Days belief structure and the hypocrisy in what he is saying. By doing so the CBC is protecting Canada from a potential threat of ethnocentrism in a very multi-religious country such as Canada.

In living in a democratic society, it is our duty to be knowledgeable about Canadian politics and Canadian culture. It is part of Canadian culture to be democratic and liberated. Canadians identify with a sense of freedom, we have rights such as the right to run for Cabinet, or the right to run for Mayor. Canadians have freedoms to vote for those leaders in society who represent their beliefs and values. The essence of the CBC is to be true to its Canadian culture. In a society where representative government is present, there is a distinct sense of duty on the members to not only take part in the voting process but also to participate actively in his/her community. If society's members voted with no political knowledge whatsoever, someone like Stockwell Day may have beaten Chrétien in the last election. It is important that corporations such as the CBC keep the public informed of current political issues. The CBC also does a quality job at covering World news to ensure Canadians have knowledge of issues that may affect them in some way. Many Canadians are immigrants from all around the world, which explains the cultural diversity of Canada. From around the world, foreign

correspondents of CBC deliver Canadian perspectives on important global events. These events have a fairly significant affect on Canadians because of the high amount of immigrants present in Canada. The CBC supports Canadians in helping them identify with their Canadian culture because the CBC recognizes how diversified the Canadian culture is. Many Arabs, and Muslims, have been discriminated against since September 11. The majority of Canadians oppose any discrimination and there has been much protest to how the Americans have been treating their Arab, and Muslim population. Canadian culture is less willing to discriminate against a specific religion or race because Canada is more diverse in its experience with culture clash.

Canadian politicians and authorities use the CBC and media as a way of communicating their beliefs and their agendas. Part of Premier Bernard Landry's agenda is to increase the growth rate in Quebec. According to the Edmonton Journal, the Premier is paying money to people who have a child 5 years after graduation from a University or College. The money amounts will be 50% of their student loans. In doing so the Premier is spreading the word across Quebec because of his concern for the low birth rate. Of course Landry is also using this as a way to promote his party's re-election on April 14, 2003. Many politicians use the CBC to present political debates and public elections. When elections take place, the CBC communicates to the citizens the locations of voting polls, and the results. The CBC is used as a tool of information to rely on during times of election. "One of the CBC's most significant political roles is helping citizens determine which issues people think and talk about." The CBC's coverage of elections provides in-depth reporting, covering "party news conferences, airing entire

speeches by party leaders, producing long form documentaries, conducting interviews with party leaders... devoting much of its newscast to election stories.” The CBC’s dedication to such important events shape Canadians into knowledgeable and active voting members of society. The CBC is also used as a line of communication to encourage Canadians to help other Canadians in time of need. Last summer, Edmonton faced a drought, and a significant amount of farmers were desperate for help. The spread of the word on CBC radio and TV broadcasts had many Canadians coming together to help with the loss. The farmers found help in Ontario where they were sent help through a lottery setup to provide the drought-stricken farmers with hay and other resources. This is an example of the CBC bringing together Canadians helping other Canadians. Canadians are known for their friendliness and neutral positions on world issues. It is part of the Canadian identity to help other parts of the country in need. The CBC is also a way to communicate threats of health hazards that may affect Canadians. In the case of a mysterious form of pneumonia that has recently been carried from Hong Kong to Ontario, the CBC is letting all Canadians know that traveling to areas in Asia may be a health risk. As Canadians we rely on the CBC to notify us of such things thus creating a relationship of trust that the CBC has formed over the years since its creation in 1936.

By watching the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canadians are told stories about Canadians from a Canadian perspective. When watching specific sports events in which Canadians are involved, the CBC diverts undivided attention onto Canadian athletes providing fans at home a chance to be “patriotic”. During the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, Canadian commentators give special attention to events in

which Canadians are involved. If Canadians were to watch the Olympics through American television, it would be tough for Canadians to truly express their pride and identity as a Canadian. Americans don't know enough about Canadians to really relate to our culture and way of thinking. It seems as though two events are stereotyped to Canadian culture: Canadian beer, and Canadian hockey. It is because of these stereotypes that countries like the U.S. assume that we all live in igloos drinking Canadian Beer and watching *Molson Hockey Night in Canada*. With the presence of the CBC, other countries around the world are depicted to Canadian culture mainly in a positive way. They are exposed to the diverse Canadian culture made up of various groups of people from all around the world. In responding to certain issues in the world, Canadians often share a desire for peacekeeping and peacemaking. The CBC promotes a national identity and culture, and at the same time, caters to regional, ethnic and other minority interests. Many new Canadians move to Canada because they know Canada as an accepting multicultural community and people feel Canada is one of the safest places to live. There has not been a war in Canada or any threat of war over many centuries. According to CBC.ca "the post-Sept. 11 surge of support and sympathy for the United States is slipping away, according to a major survey of global attitudes released Wednesday by the Pew Research Center. The organization interviewed 38,000 people in 44 countries". The unnecessary need for war does not agree with the majority of Canadian citizens because peace and harmony is important to the nature of Canadian culture. According to the survey "Canada is the only place in the world today where a majority of people are actually satisfied with their lives."

The CBC has been many things to us throughout its history but in one truth it remains constant. On a television playing field, where Canadians will always be outnumbered ten to one by the powerful American audience to the south, the CBC is our insurance that we will not be drowned out. It is the force fighting to level the playing field and, whether or not their efforts are successful 100% of the time, it is the effort that is most important. Funding towards the CBC needs to be protected from cutbacks that are increasingly placing harm on the possible success of the CBC. There have been talks about the suggestion that the CBC abandon the role of the general broadcaster and become a specialty channel. Even if that were the case Canada is a large country, and for those in the many distant communities of this country who don't have cable and can't afford satellite, this would mean the loss of their Canadian connection. If CBC's mandate, as a publicly funded broadcaster, is to provide a service equally to all Canadians, then for it to become a specialty channel is simply not an option. To provide a service available to all Canadians is an essential job for the CBC to fulfill. The importance of having a strong public broadcaster such as CBC represents and identifies the distinct Canadian culture through the eyes of a Canadian. The CBC has paved the way for increased Canadian content on television today and should be applauded for remaining true to the Canadian culture it represents.