

**A Letter to 14 Local Television Stations:  
An example of how democratic leaders can destroy democratic ideals.**

**Bryan H. Meadows**

This paper brings to light an overt attempt on the part of the Republican National Committee (RNC), the current majority political party in the United States, to disrupt the equal access to political discourse which is required in a democratic society. In the midst of the current administration's crusade for Social Security (public retirement pension) reform, an opposition group, *Moveon.org*, entered the public arena of debate with a television ad critical of the White House's proposed reforms. In response, the President's political party, the RNC, conducted a letter campaign targeting 14 television stations requesting that they not broadcast the opposition ad. Assuming a position rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the author exposes the inner workings of this assault on the basic democratic notion of freedom of the press by the very power structure that purports to advocate such ideals.

Critical Discourse Analysis authors pay close attention to the way power structures use language to manipulate public discourse in ways that allow for current social inequalities to persist. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, Critical Discourse Analysis writings cover a wide range of social issues such as racism, class discrimination, and gender discrimination. The particular strand that is featured in this paper is concerned with the techniques politicians use to construct and maintain, through the use of language, a discourse with the public that is favorable to their political aims.

This paper's analysis adopts the classic CDA framework of *language, power, and ideology* as established by Norman Fairclough (1989). Following these major headings, it is revealed that the RNC is cognizant of the power *language* has to direct thinking (Fairclough, 1995) and thus, uses their letter to call on television stations to contest the opposition's interpretation of the term, 'benefit cut'. Next, in concordance with van Dijk's (1996) observation that access to discourse through the media is a tap to *power*, it is clear that the RNC letter is an overt attempt to hijack the voice of the opposition by strangling its broadcast source. Finally, analysis of the letter reveals the RNC developing the *ideology of Us vs. Them*, or appropriation of the Other (Caldas-Coulthard, 2003; Kubota, 2001), on both an explicit and implicit level. When approached with a perspective rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis, there is indeed no question that the RNC letter violates the sacred American notion of *freedom of the press*.

(References on reverse)

- van Dijk, T. (1996). Discourse, power and access. In C. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.). *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 84-106). New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and Power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The critical study of language*. London/New York: Longman.
- Caldas-Coulthard, C. (2003). Cross-cultural representation of 'otherness' in media discourse. In G. Weiss & R. Wodak (Eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity* (pp. 272-296). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kubota, Ryuko. (2001) Discursive Construction of the Images of U.S. Classrooms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35, 1, Spring, 9-38.