

SYMBIOTIC NEWS COVERAGE OF THE GRENADA CRISIS
IN CANADA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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People in different parts of the world can receive very different impressions of the same event. The symbiotic theory of news suggests that reporters, being products of their own social and psychological environments, will present news information in a manner consistent with these environments. In this study, symbiotic theory is used to account for differences in Canadian and Caribbean newspaper coverage of the 1983 Grenada crisis.

Les habitants des différentes parties du monde peuvent percevoir le même événement de façon différente. Le théorie symbiotique de l'information suggère que les journalistes, étant le produit de leur milieu social et psychologique, présente les informations en fonction de leur environnement. Dans la présente étude, la théorie symbiotique sert à établir les différences, dans le traitement de la crise de Grenade en 1983, entre les journaux canadiens et ceux des Caraïbes.

During the Grenadian crisis of October and November 1983, the media of the world focused on the Caribbean with an intensity that has probably not occurred since the Cuban missile crisis of the early '60s. Reporting of events in Grenada may have varied greatly, thus leaving citizens in different parts of the world with very different impressions and opinions about the events. This study provides quantitative data documenting the differences that may exist between Canadian and Caribbean newspaper coverage of these events.

News As Biased Reality

Our knowledge of what is occurring in the world comes to us directly in only a very small proportion of cases. Most "events" are mediated by the press which provide information extending far beyond our immediate experience. Hence, the way in which the press reports the news is extremely important if readers are to have informed opinions (Cuthbert, 1979).

For coverage of local events, the reader has access to several sources of information, such as personal knowledge and interpersonal communication, which can substantiate or call into question the accuracy, balance and objectivity of the news received. However, when events occur beyond the local environment, accurate news reporting becomes critical as there may be no other information on which to base inferences and judgements.

Governments as well as private citizens depend heavily on newspapers for certain types of information. Though governments have access to diplomatic and other channels, these do not have the capacity to keep a government completely up to date on world events. Press reports may therefore influence the formation of foreign policy, and this can have far reaching consequences (Cohen, 1963).

It is incumbent upon the press to provide readers with news that is as fair, accurate, complete and balanced as possible. The question remains as to whether this goal is theoretically possible. Most research and thinking suggest that it is not possible. Corcoran (1984) observes that the mass media, in general, project a reality that is uniquely crafted and accepted by the public as meaningful. He states:

The key concept here is the power of the media to define, not merely reproduce reality through their narrative devices which actively make things mean. Reality is no longer viewed as a given set of facts,... Instead, it is the result

of a particular way of constructing, through preferred meanings, a 'reality' which would have credibility, legitimacy and a taken-for-grantedness (pp. 49-50).

Bennett (1982) goes further in stating that the primary role of the press in society is "reality defining." He observes:

...the news is a manufactured product, not necessarily in the sense that it is contrived or invented but in the sense that it is the product of a culturally encoded and socially determined process... (p. 295).

Two broad group of findings provide an explanation as to why biased, reality-appearing reporting occurs as a predictable phenomenon. First, the reporter is socialized into his professional role through various overt and covert messages in his work environment which communicate appropriate journalistic behaviour (Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979).

Whatever the views of individual reporters, they are socialized in a newsroom where the limits of organizational tolerance are learned. When reporters differ from the norms and values of the organization, individuality must be submerged if they are to receive good assignments, have stories published, and be promoted (Breed, 1955 and Geiber, 1964). In this sense, reporters are 'organization men'. But every organization exists within a particular national system whose primary goal is self-preservation.

Journalism researcher Albert Hester argues that the function of the news media in any system is the surveillance of the environment in the interests of the system (Hester, 1973). Since one's professional behaviour occurs within an identifiable social, cultural, and economic setting, pressures develop which naturally bend the perspective of the individual and organization within which one works. This could be classified as the "systemic-symbiotic theory of news."

This "symbiotic" perspective leads one to predict that news stories will reflect the interests of the government in power (Sigal,

1973; Bennett, et. al., 1985), and the political perspective of media owners and managers (Merrill, 1965; Halberstam, 1979). Especially in relation to *culturally held stereotypes and beliefs concerning foreign (particularly Third World) news*, newspapers would be expected to present views that correspond to conventional wisdom (Riffe and Shaw, 1982).

Second, reporters, desire to serve the psychological and informational needs of their audience. Therefore, the information conveyed will also parallel conventional wisdom for the audience and offer a sense of "well-being." This "well-being" could be called "psychological symbiosis;" the news is presented in a fashion that is efficiently read and digested, while corresponding to a normative belief system held by one's culture.

The concept of "cognitive consistency" has developed from work completed by prominent social psychologists such as Abelson, Aronson, Festinger, Fishbein, McGuire, Osgood, Rosenberg, and Singer, among others (Feldman, 1966). "Common to the concepts of balance, congruity, and dissonance is the notion that thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour tend to organize themselves in meaningful and sensible ways" (Zajonc, 1960). It is posited here that newsmen attempt to retain normative psychological balance among their readers, and attempt to reduce the occurrence of dissonance. If the audience receives what they psychologically desire from a newspaper, a favourable newspaper-reader relationship will exist. Research analyzing media portrayals of Maurice Bishop have been supportive of this premise (Soderlund and Surlin, 1986).

Therefore, the theoretic approach used for this study suggests that through the combination of reporter enculturation/socialization, and, the desire to achieve psychological balance both with one's readers and for the benefit of one's readers, the process of news reporting will inevitably result in a biased presentation.

Research relating to crisis reporting has determined that the media do tend to carry a higher proportion of inaccuracies and rumour during periods of crisis and disaster (Scanlon, et. al., 1978). Because of the very nature of such events it is difficult to provide accurate information. Findings suggest that the media may not even try to be accurate, but give reports without attribution or information about the source of their data, seeming to produce figures "out of thin air" (Scanlon, et. al., 1978).

Research Question and Hypotheses

The major research question concerns the extent to which the amount and direction of media coverage of the Grenada crisis varied. Obtaining hard data on this provides a basis for inferences about sources of the coverage. It was assumed that variation would depend heavily on proximity to Grenada, the degree of involvement by the home country of the particular medium, and news sources. More specifically, it was assumed that the countries closest to Grenada were most interested in the immediate solution to the political problems in that country, as a means of protecting their own political and economic positions, than were countries further from the crisis. It was therefore hypothesized that:

1. Amount of coverage would vary with proximity to and/or degree of direct involvement in Grenada, (i.e., Caribbean newspapers would offer more coverage than Canadian newspapers).
2. The greater the proximity to and amount of direct involvement in Grenada the more positive the coverage would be towards the U.S. position and invasion, (i.e., Caribbean newspaper would have more positive headlines than Canadian newspapers).
3. The greater the dependency on news sources from countries involved in the intervention, the more positive the coverage would be.

Method

Content analysis was used to measure news story size, dateline, sources, and journalistic typology. Further interpretive content analysis included headline direction, the violence-orientation of news reports, and governmental positions emphasized.

Sample: The study analyzed all items about Grenada from October 15th, beginning with the detention of Grenada's Prime Minister Maurice Bishop, to November 20, 1983, when relative normalization had returned.¹ This rather lengthy continuous sample was chosen instead of the more common two-week random sample for two reasons: (a) continuity of the sample is important for qualitative comparisons since media do not always carry stories on the same day; (b) since non-Caribbean media were not expected to carry a large number of stories on the crisis, a large sample was necessary to provide sufficient items for purpose of analysis.

Items on Grenada in the following media were analyzed, including both daily and Sunday editions:² In the Caribbean, the Gleaner of Jamaica, Advocate and Nation/Sunday Sun of Barbados, and the Guardian and Express of Trinidad and Tobago; In Canada, the Vancouver Sun, Winnipeg Free Press, Windsor Star, Toronto Globe and Mail and Halifax Chronicle Herald.

Unit of Analysis and Variables: The unit of analysis in the study was the individual newspaper item in which Grenada, or implications of the crisis, occupied one third or more of the item's content. The variables coded include the following:

1. Newspaper.
2. Number of Square Centimetres, including headlines.
3. **Dateline** - 30 different datelines were individually coded.
4. Source - 27 different sources were coded.
5. Type of item - News Story, defined as current news

- Situationer/Feature; a situationer is defined as a story giving background; a feature gives indepth analysis of a general, non-immediate nature
 - Opinion, including editorials, columns, letters, etc.
 - Photo/Graphics (maps, caricatures)
 - Combination of these
6. Major Subject - coded under 43 different headings.
 7. Headline Division - whether positive, negative or neutral/ not identifiable.

Coders also wrote out all headlines in full.

Headline direction was coded from the perspective of the U.S. government and invading forces; that is, a positive story is one which would seem positive to the supporters of the U.S. position/ invasion. This category must be carefully interpreted. A headline coded as positive towards the U.S. does not necessarily imply a positive attitude of the newspaper toward the U.S. but simply reflects a factual situation that favours the U.S.

Inter-Coder Reliability and Limitations of the Data: The study involved coding 4,051 items of eleven variables, making a total of 45,000 coding decisions. Intercoder reliability was computed using the following formula to determine the reliability of two coders (Budd, et. al., 1967, p. 68):

$$R = \frac{2(C_{1,2})}{C_1 + C_2}$$

$C_{1,2}$ is the number of category assignments both coders agree on, and $C_1 + C_2$ is the total of category assignments made by both coders. The formula can be extended for any number of coders.

One limitation of the study is that, because of the great distance of coders from each other, it was not possible to arrive at a

composite reliability coefficient, so reliability was computed separately in each region. All coders worked from a common code guide. In Canada, inter-coder reliability was .80. The Caribbean coders accepted up to 3 sq. cm. difference in coding of item size. With this adjustment, Caribbean inter-coder reliability reached .84.

Another limitation on the data which affects comparability is that the Canadian coders did not include headlines in the measurement of square centimetres; hence the size of Canadian items is underestimated.

Findings and Analysis³

Number, Size and Type of Story: Table 1 shows both the total number of items and the average number of items carried per day by each newspaper.⁴ As expected, Caribbean newspapers carried far more items than Canadian newspapers. The largest number of items, an average of 30 per day, was carried by the Nation and its Sunday paper, the Sunday Sun, in Barbados, a country both near to Grenada and directly involved in the crisis. The Nation printed two special evening editions on October 20 and 25, thus increasing its total output.

In spite of Jamaica's direct military and political involvement in the crisis, the Gleaner of Jamaica carried the smallest average number of items per day (17) among Caribbean newspapers studied. This smaller number can be explained in part by Jamaica's lack of proximity to Grenada; the islands are more than 1,000 miles apart. Jamaica is much nearer to Miami than it is to Grenada. Following from this is the fact that, unlike Barbados and Trinidad, few people in Jamaica have friends and relatives in Grenada.

Canadian papers carried considerably fewer items on Grenada on a daily basis. With the exception of the Toronto Globe and Mail, Canadian papers averaged about 1 to 1 1/2 items per day. The Globe and Mail averaged about 4 per day.

TABLE 1

Number of Items on Grenada in Caribbean and Canadian Newspapers October 14 - November 20, 1983		
Newspaper	Number of Stories	Average Number per Day
CARIBBEAN		
Gleaner, (Jamaica)	614	17
Nation, (Barbados)	858	30
Advocate, (Barbados)	727	20
Express, (Trinidad)	692	23
Guardian, (Trinidad)	823	27
ALL CARIBBEAN	3,714	22.5
CANADIAN		
Vancouver Sun	46	1.3
Halifax Chronicle-Herald	37	1.0
Toronto Globe and Mail	153	4.1
Windsor Star	62	1.7
Winnipeg Free Press	38	1.0
ALL CANADIAN	336	1.8

These findings support the first hypothesis. Caribbean newspapers did have a greater amount of coverage and the greatest amount of coverage came from the Nation in Barbados, a country which is in close proximity to Grenada, and which was directly involved in the crisis. The fact that the Toronto Globe and Mail had much greater coverage than other Canadian papers might be explained

in part by the large number of Toronto readers of West Indian origin which gives the paper a "psychological proximity" to the Caribbean.

TABLE 2

Caribbean and Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Grenada by Size of Article						
Article Size	Caribbean		Canadian		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
50 Sq. cm. or less	842	23	20	6	862	21
51 - 300 sq. cm.	2,463	66	284	84	2,747	68
301 or more sq. cm.	410	11	32	10	442	11
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	3,715	100%	336	100%	4,051	100%
	(92%)		(8%)		(100%)	

Newspapers of both countries contained a large proportion of medium length stores (51 - 300 sq. cm.), although the proportion was larger in Canadian papers, as Table 2 indicates. Canadian papers carried many more long stores (301 or more sq. cm.) than short (50 sq. cm. or less), while Caribbean papers had twice as many short as long stories. It also should be remembered that since the headlines were not measured in Canadian papers, the size of Canadian articles is underrepresented. The higher percentage of longer Canadian stories is supported by data in Table 3, which shows that the longest type of story, the feature, was carried considerably more frequently than by Caribbean papers.

It is also evident from Table 3 that about half of all stories were **straight news**. There were more opinion pieces in the Caribbean than in Canada, an indication of the high degree of interest and controversy aroused in the Caribbean by the events, and an indication of the effort to make sense of these events and give direction to the formation of public opinion.

TABLE 3

Caribbean and Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Grenada by Type of Story						
Story Type	Caribbean		Canadian		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
News	1,637	45	177	53	1,814	45
Feature	343	9	50	15	393	10
Opinion	945	25	43	12	988	24
Photo News	790	21	66	20	856	21
TOTAL	3,715 (92%)	100	336 (8%)	100	4,051 (100%)	100

Headline Direction: Table 4 shows the number and percentage of headlines coded as positive, negative and neutral for each country. An assumption is made here that headlines generally reflect their story. Two-thirds of Caribbean, but only half of Canadian, items fell into the neutral category. This category also includes photographs, graphics and very short stories which did not have headlines. Overall, Caribbean newspapers had twice as many positive as negative headlines, while Canadian media had about equal numbers of positive and negative headlines, just over 25% of each.

TABLE 4

Caribbean and Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Grenada by Headline Direction						
Headline Direction	Caribbean		Canadian		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Positive	770	21	87	26	857	21
Negative	407	11	90	27	497	12
Neutral	<u>2,538</u>	<u>68</u>	<u>159</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>2,697</u>	<u>67</u>
TOTAL	3,715 (92%)	100	336 (8%)	100	4,051 (100%)	100

For each source the percentage of headlines which were positive, negative and neutral is presented in Table 5. Headlines of stories originating with the Caribbean News Agency (CANA) were positive about twice as often as negative. The five Caribbean newspapers were almost three times more positive than negative in the headlines of stories for which they were the news source. Stories from Canadian sources were negatively headlined more than twice as often.

Many of the positive headlines may simply reflect a factual event which is positive for the U.S., and not necessarily a positive editorial position. However, the fact that Caribbean sources were headlined positively twice as often as negatively, and that Canadian sources were the opposite (negative twice as often as positive), suggests that real differences in perceptions of the event existed.

TABLE 5

Caribbean and Canadian News Sources by Headline Direction								
Headline Direction	Caribbean News Agency (CANA)		Five Caribbean Newspapers		Canadian Sources (CP and Others)		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Positive	173	25	203	16	6	10	382	18
Negative	88	13	84	6	15	25	187	9
Neutral	433	62	1,035	78	38	65	1,506	73
	<u>694</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>1,322</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>2,075</u>	<u>100</u>
	(33%)		(64%)		(3%)		(100%)	

The second hypothesis is strongly supported. Not only do Caribbean newspapers have an overall more neutral approach to reporting the event, but their opinionated headlines favour the U.S. position in Grenada a great deal more often than the headlines of Canadian newspapers. Likewise, headlines from four Caribbean newspaper sources, and headlines written for Caribbean News Agency stories are significantly more likely to be favourable to the U.S. position than are Canadian news sources, including the Canadian Press wire service. This finding supports our "systemic-symbiotic theory" of news coverage since a majority of Caribbean governments supported U.S. actions in Grenada, while Canada did not.

Datelines, Sources and Violence Orientation

In Table 6 we see that Caribbean stories are strongly based on regional datelines, that is Caribbean papers did not carry much news from other areas of the world even though more details on worldwide reaction presumably would have been of interest. The most common non-Caribbean datelines were American, but there were very few news stories with Canadian or European datelines.

Canadian stories were gathered from a wide variety of areas. An equal number of Canadian stories (28% each) were datelined Canada and the Caribbean; thus less than a third of the stories came from the Caribbean where the events occurred. U.S. sources accounted for nearly 20% of Canadian stories.

TABLE 6

Caribbean and Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Grenada by Dateline						
Dateline	Caribbean		Canadian		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Caribbean	3,035	82	94	28	3,129	77
U.S.	292	8	63	19	355	9
Canadian	25	1	94	28	119	3
European	118	3	33	10	151	4
Other and No Dateline	245	6	52	15	297	7
	3,715	100	336	100	4,051	100
	(92%)		(8%)		(100%)	

Table 7 indicates that Caribbean stories were predominantly based on Caribbean sources, primarily CANA and individual correspondents. Little attention was paid to sources outside the region. Canadian sources were more varied, relying 17% to 26% of the time on international wire services, Canadian sources, individual correspondents and unspecified/other sources. However, Canadian papers used few Caribbean sources, which one would have expected journalists to seek out for reporting on a Caribbean event.

TABLE 7

Caribbean and Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Grenada by Source						
Source	Caribbean		Canadian		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Caribbean	2,326	63	11	3	2,337	58
International Wire Service	369	10	85	25	454	11
Canadian	1		58	17	59	1
U.S.	117	3	14	4	131	3
Individual Correspondent	756	20	82	25	838	21
Other	146	4	86	26	232	6
	3,715 (92%)	100	336 (8%)	100	4,051 (100%)	100

The data presented in Tables 6 and 7 support the third hypothesis which posits a relationship between dependency on Caribbean news sources and positive coverage of the Grenadian crisis. The Canadian newspapers were considerably less dependent on Caribbean sources, and were more apt to be negative in their headline treatment; the opposite was true for Caribbean newspapers.

TABLE 8

Caribbean and Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Grenada by Violence Orientation of Story						
Violence Orientation of Story	Caribbean		Canadian		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Violence Oriented	618	17	85	25	703	17
Non-Violence Oriented	3,097	83	251	75	3,348	83
TOTAL	3,715 (92%)	100	336 (8%)	100	4,051 (100%)	100

Table 8 provides a breakdown of Grenada news story subjects according to their violence orientation. This included stories on military action, violence, weaponry, victims, and people in physical jeopardy. Overall, about one in five stories had a violence orientation. Canadian stories were more focused on violence (25% of stories) while only 17% of Caribbean stories had such a focus. Obviously, violence is part of the story of Grenada, but Canadian newspapers chose to focus upon this issue to a greater degree than did Caribbean newspapers.

TABLE 9

Caribbean and Canadian Newspaper Coverage of Grenada by Governmental Positions Emphasized						
Governmental Positions	Caribbean		Canadian		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Caribbean Governments	567	65	11	12	578	60
Other Governments	312	35	77	88	389	40
TOTAL	879 (92%)	100	88 (8%)	100	967 (100%)	100

Table 9 shows the governmental positions emphasized by the Caribbean and Canadian press. This includes all stories for which the primary focus was an emphasis on governmental reactions and positions concerning the Grenada crisis. The difference is extremely sharp, with Caribbean stories focusing on Caribbean government reaction, and Canadians focusing on the reaction by other governments and showing little concern for the reaction of Caribbean governments. This finding emphasizes the lack of focus by the Canadian press upon the reaction of Caribbean people to the events surrounding Grenada.

Conclusion

Geographic distance and the fact that events in Grenada had no immediate consequences for Canada certainly had a part in diminishing the quantity of Canadian newspaper coverage of the events of October 15th to 20th, 1983. The opposite was true for Caribbean papers.

In terms of quality, considerable differences in Canadian and Caribbean coverage suggest that, at minimum, journalists differed

greatly in their perspective on, and interpretation of, the events. In each country, the public is dependent on journalistic sources for its perspective. The journalists, in turn, are dependent upon the sources to which they have access. And the perspective of both journalists and their sources is in large part a function of how a sociopolitical system views itself in relation to a particular news event.

In the Grenada crisis, Caribbean journalists were concerned about how the event would affect the Caribbean in general, and their island specifically. They were interested in each other's observations and opinions. News stories were frequent, analytic, issue-oriented, focused upon Caribbean reaction, and supportive of the U.S. position. Caribbean sources were used 83% of the time.⁵

In contrast, Canadians seemed to perceive the Grenada crisis within a larger context of news from around the world. Grenada was an important, but not dominant, story. Canadian reporters were interested in how "the world" was reacting to the event. Thus, a broad range of news sources were sought and used. Further, the event became an opportunity to be critical of a "superpower" nation which seemed overzealous in flexing its military power. Hence, Canadian news stories dwelt more often upon the violence occurring in Grenada, and the negative reaction emanating from governments around the world. The not-so-hidden Canadian agenda was the fear that if the U.S. was so quick to seek a military intervention in Grenada, this could set a precedent for other interventions.

Caribbean newspapers and news sources being from nations which were physically, emotionally and, except for Trinidad, directly involved in the event, reacted to the immediate horror of the killings of Prime Minister Bishop and others, and saw the U.S. invasion as a short-term solution to a dreadful aberration in the Caribbean system. In contrast, most Canadian newspapers and their sources, more removed physically and emotionally from the event, reacted to the

long-term implications which a superpower invasion had for the international system.

The resulting positive coverage provided for the Caribbean public, and negative coverage for the Canadian public, most likely led citizens to very different conclusions about the event. Presumably journalists in both regions were reporting "professionally," but they did report very differently. Journalistic professionalism, it would appear, is necessarily constrained by perceptions of the sociopolitical system and one's readers.

The "symbiotic theory of news" is supported by results reported here. It may be an irreducible fact of existence that leads to support of this theory for all journalists across all cultures. However, research should continue to search for situations in which the symbiotic theory is not supported. At that point, the conditions leading to non-support could be cited and analyzed. In this way, we could make journalists better able to resist the professional constraints of journalistic symbiosis. Until journalists begin to understand these constraints, they cannot hope to facilitate genuine communication among the publics of the world.

NOTES

1. This paper is part of a larger study, coordinated by Dr. Marlene Cuthbert, comparing coverage of the Grenada crisis in the Caribbean, U.S., Canada and Europe. It was commissioned by the Press Association of Jamaica and funded by Radio Jamaica based upon the recognition of the event as a unique Caribbean case study useful in assessing journalistic professional practices. Parts of this study are reported, along with analysis of the larger sample in Marlene Cuthbert, 1986, "Ideological Differences in Press Coverage of the Grenada Crisis." In Peter Desbarats and John Southerst (Eds.), Information/Crisis/Development: News from the Third World, Graduate School of Journalism, University of Western Ontario, London, pp. 91-109. An earlier version of this article appeared in Marlene Cuthbert and Stuart H. Surlin, 1985, "Canadian and Caribbean Coverage of the Grenada Crisis." In Walter C. Soderlund and Stuart H. Surlin (Eds.), Media in Latin American and the Caribbean: Domestic and International Perspectives, Ontario Cooperative Program in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Windsor, Ontario, pp. 232-253.
2. In some newspapers, issues were not available for every sample day because of holidays, no Saturday or Sunday edition, and missing issues.
3. Since the entire population of newspaper articles dealing with Grenada for the designated time period was analyzed for this project, the differences reported here represent true differences in news coverage between Canada and the Caribbean. Therefore, statistical analysis is unnecessary and inappropriate.
4. The average number of items per day is a more comparable figure since all issues of all papers were not available for coding.
5. Interestingly, one Caribbean journalist, Rickey Singh, the Guyanese editor of a regional Christian newspaper based in Barbados, who wrote strongly against the invasion, using the same reasoning as European and Canadian journalists, was branded a communist and had his work permit withdrawn by the Barbados government. The permit was returned in 1987.

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