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Brian Lamb  
March 27, 1991

Dear Brian Lamb,

This is a fan letter. Plus a few comments as invited by C-span.

C-span is just plain exceptional. C-span is one of those rare cases - at least rare these days - where in an institution is shaped by one principled person with a model in his/her head for said institution. And the "shaper", of course, I strongly suspect, is yourself.

And "Booknotes" is the best. Not nasty and not fawning, it just gets to the point of an important book. And, in the process, we see who and why of it's author.

So why do I write now instead of three months ago or four weeks from now? I think because I see a C-span crisis ahead. You have been discovered! Since the War, folks that never knew C-span existed are talking about what they saw on C-span last night. I fear that the relatively apolitical environment in which C-span has flowered and flourished may be over.

I'm sure you know this so my comments amount to cheerleading and moral support. Hang in there!

Some Comments:

About maintaining the Liberal - Conservative balance: this must be most difficult and I think you come as close as anyone possibly could. And I say this as someone who is, on many issues, on the left edge of liberal. I have no sympathy for those who groan about the domination of conservative views.

About your on-camera folks: Amazing. You have avoided the "star system" while maintaining bright articulate people. New faces appear now and again. Some disappear and I would have disappeared them too. And the new faces that remain always add.

About the guests: Least valuable are the elected officials. Faced with anything beyond softball questions, most tend switch on auto-pilot obfuscation and simply ignore viewer questions. And, I think reasonably, the C-span formate doesn't/can't push them.

The Friday morning media session is top drawer. In general the press, however much I have my reservations about the press, are the most likely to have and/or provoke and original thoughts.



Sidebar Comment on the Press: You may enjoy the rather nasty letter (enclosed) printed in our local paper. I was simply embarrassed by their behavior at the Gulf briefings and I think the defense ("it just appears to be dumb") offered by one of your guests this morning (3/29) is sheer crapola.

About the technical side: Super. A long time ago someone decided that this was an essential part of the whole package and made it happen.

About the C-span visiting the news magazines: YEA! This was a deep, unique and very important look inside a very powerful institution. Terrific. I was also fun to see them be a bit uncomfortable in the spotlight.

One pearl that I got from the C-span hours at TIME: I think it was a capable young chap by name of Kelly who referred to our military leaders as "they". In the context of this usage, I understood him to taking the role of a fan at a boxing match.

The war was between a "they" and a "they", not between us and they. Never mind that he may enjoy a few benefits from living in a society that is rather unlike Sadam's Iran.

About the talkshow visits: Talkshows, boo! I am old fashioned. Open discussion of ideas, any ideas, benefit a democratic society. Talkshow hosts can't worry about ideas, they live and die by ratings. So they must reduce ideas to slogans. They are lightweight and not C-span stuff.

Highlight: My favorite event C-span event reoccurs about every couple weeks. It is watching the confounded face of Brian Lamb when yet another hard-edged tight telephone voice ascribes the course of history to decisions made in murky bowels of the Tri-Lateral Commission or whatever. Then, and at no other time, does the perfect interviewer face of Brian Lamb let it's self be read.

Remember this Mr. Lamb. In this great nation, millions of people watch professional wrestling and believe it is a contest. Disconfirming data has no purchase with those who NEED to believe. I know this from work with paranoid schizophrenics and county board supervisors.

A suggestion: I don't expect they would come, but I would love to see a weekly session with the editors of the publications and networks that the reporters work for. I am quite critical of a press that almost totally missed the S & L crisis, but this is dumb. After all, reporters, save a very few superstars, do what they are assigned to do; by editors.

Best Wishes, Sincerely,

