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January 27, 1997

Brian Lamb
C-Span Networks
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Dear Mr. Lamb:

I recently watched your interview with Shelby Foote. The experience was so sublime I find myself compelled, finally, to write down the kind of appreciative, even evangelical, comments I make regarding C-Span to anyone in earshot I think might have the least amount of sympathy.

My praise is typically centered not on broadcasting the processes of government; while I am wildly enthusiastic about the fact of the coverage, I find it difficult to remain engaged in the politics of governing. It is the ancillary coverage I most like; of that, however, my favorite things are Booknotes and About Books. I find it so incredible these programs exist at all I am a little frightened that someone might take them away from me; like describing a favorite, cozy neighborhood restaurant to a food critic and finding it later ruined by its own success.

As a card-carrying child of the sixties, my faith in the ultimate decency and common-sense of Americans has many times been shaken, but not yet shattered. I believe C-Span is one of the most "subversive" experiences available to the general public, and focussing on books a particularly intense and clear-headed kind of subversiveness. Jefferson, et al, would be proud. The fact you love books, and were willing to put that love on the line, is remarkable, all the more so for your being a voice in the wilderness (though Oprah gets points for trying).

My need to write at this time has also been influenced, specifically, by an article in (I think) The New Yorker a while back, and by your recent appearance at the Press Club. All the virtues explicated in those venues, and more, are evident in the Shelby Foote interview: the disciplined, straightforward, plain style of presentation and interviewing; the thorough, thoughtful preparation; your ability (and the other hosts'), while still guiding

an interview, to lay back and let someone have their say; the assumption that the audience has a brain -- even if they are a member of the lay audience; and of course, the enthusiasm for the job. Central, as well, is simply the time allotted; which is to say enough time.

These qualities and the general air of restraint and professional behavior that suffuses C-Span are so rare in comparison to most broadcast mediums (and publications) that they very often go unrecognized for what they are, mistaken for a sterile, even unskilled kind of broadcasting, production a notch above local access. I suppose those qualities have always been rare, but they feel more so now than they have for long time. I feel a compunction to correct this kind of gross misunderstanding whenever I run across it, which typically comes from people who haven't taken the time to watch; nonetheless, it's clear that some people consider me to be operating from a quixotic place. Their loss. What so many people fail to recognize is that it is the very ordinariness of being restrained, respectful, and prepared that can provide a bounty of high-quality information and insight; there are lots of articulate, interesting people out there, and it is terrific that C-Span allows them a forum, even, I hate to say, including the ones I think should be drawn and quartered.

As for the Shelby Foote interview, in addition to the above virtues, as a reader and sometime writer I found it thrilling for his ability to articulate his toughmindedness, his love for reading and writing, his processes and habits, and for your abilities as an interviewer to engage in such a dialogue, including your careful way of touching on so many personal issues, whether it was the nature and specifics of his friendship with Walker Percy, why he loves Proust (Proust on t.v. -- wow!), how well-off he is, or why art and music are so critically important to him. The interview was very smart, and, had so much heart, as well. I suppose I'm well beyond gushing at this point, but, even by C-Span standards, I thought it was a triumph of the art. Broadcast interviews of a like kind are not uncommon on C-Span while so rare anywhere else; only Terri Gross on Fresh Air is so consistent in this regard. If C-Span were part of CPB my check would already be in the mail. Actually, it would have been in the mail some years back.

Thank you and continued success,

