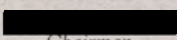
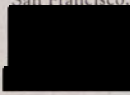

San Francisco, CA 94133


Chairman


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L.A.

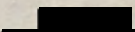
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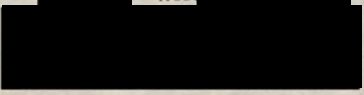
Feb. 5

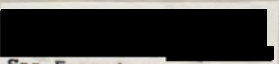
I am locked into C-Span several hours each day. (I know—I'm one of millions.) As a citizen who takes his citizen-ship seriously you are extremely important to me.

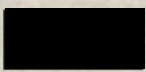
Any threat to C-Span continuing its public interest coverage raises my cholesterol to a dangerously high level with hair fall out that could affect my business career disastrously.

Is it time to organize? C-Span has an army whose loyalty would give pause, followed by fear, to the political hacks (they are a disgrace) who make many of our crucial decisions.

 What can we do, Brian?


Copy: Frank Rich


San Francisco, CA
94111

 o. cable

[REDACTED]

February 6, 1997

Dear Brian Lamb:

Re: "Lamb to the Slaughter"
Frank Rich column-op-ed Feb.5

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[REDACTED] What can we do, Brian?

[REDACTED]

Copy: Frank Rich

[REDACTED]
San Francisco, CA
94111

[REDACTED]

o. cable

#7 News J 1/5/97

Journal

FRANK RICH

Lamb To the Slaughter

On the vast spectrum of American culture, Brian Lamb, the éminence grise of C-Span, is to imperturbability what Madonna is to narcissism. In a TV universe of honking pundits, he has staked his entire network on serving up information deadpan, without ever raising his nonpartisan voice. Nothing gets him ticked off.

Or almost nothing. On Jan. 6 there was a rare sighting of an ever-so-slightly testy Mr. Lamb on C-Span. In a speech at the National Press Club in Washington, he pointed out that his network's two-channel, 24-hour menu of public affairs programming had either been cut or eliminated entirely in some nine million homes in the past two or three years. Why? Cable operators will throw off C-Span if they can sell the same precious slot on the dial to a higher bidder. "Rupert Murdoch has dumped more money into Fox News in the last four or five months than C-Span spent in the last 18 years," he said. "He's buying his way on to cable systems." Mr. Lamb added that he was speaking in frustration, not anger, but his words conveyed real heat as he attributed C-Span's travails to the supposedly "fabulous Telecommunications Act" Congress passed last year.

If Brian Lamb, of all non-firebrands, is smoking, there must be fire. And there is. This week marks the first anniversary of President Clinton's signing of that law he (like leaders of both parties) said would spur marketplace competition to give consumers "the benefits of lower prices, better quality and greater choices in their telephone and cable systems." But conglomerates, not competition, now drive TV: prices are higher, choice is less and "better

Media
giants
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C-Span.

media culture is that it, of all quality programming, has theoretically powerful protectors. C-Span is, after all, the prime unfiltered video showcase for Congress. It is also a network created and financed by the cable industry itself, as a gesture of good citizenship and public relations. (C-Span stands for Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network.) But that gesture may have been a fig leaf. As Gene Kimmelman of Consumers Union says, "Now that stock prices are falling, cable companies will do anything to boost earnings."

Public service or even public relations may stand little chance against the imperatives of the bottom line. The merger-enhanced Time Warner-Turner and Tele-Communications Inc. (TCI) now control what roughly half of America's cable subscribers see. You don't find them or other cable companies ejecting sex or shopping or pay-per-view channels to make room for C-Span 2, let alone for outspoken, independent programming that might be produced by some minority voice not owned by themselves, Disney, Fox, Viacom or G.E.

In his speech, Mr. Lamb understandably did not attack the industry that feeds him. It's up to the public and Congress to do so, but will they? "Politicians are terrorized by media moguls and won't take them on except about minor things like the V-chip," says Jeff Chester of the Center for Media Education. Much of the public, though beginning to complain about higher cable rates and to protest C-Span cutbacks (successfully so this month in Seattle), is still in the dark about the vast and troubling implications of the new media conglomerates. As Neil Hickey writes in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, the 1996 Telecommunications Act was hardly covered by network news and "appeared in the business pages of newspapers (if it appeared at all)."

That's not all that isn't covered. Mr. Hickey wonders how strenuously any TV news organization will investigate human rights abuses in China, given the huge financial interests of their parent corporations in that growing market; NBC even apologized for Bob Costas's criticism of China during the Olympics. Now Brian Lamb tells us that even the most basic of American news — Congressional deliberations — is being silenced in our new TV universe of supposedly infinite choices. We're injured by now to our media giants being greedy, but when a democracy's flow of information is being restricted, something far more important than our monthly cable bill is at stake. □