

I watch C-span because it is the only source of first-hand news available, it allows extensive viewer participation, and serves the public without undue fanfare. A democracy can only endure and flourish when its people can take responsible action based on knowledge gained in a public debate, free from the din of unreasoned passion and partisan rhetoric. Any citizen who loves and worries about his country must appreciate the balanced, uncluttered service C-span provides to its viewers and to the nation at large.

"First-hand news," as used above, consists of those events actually witnessed by an individual. Through the incredible power of television, that individual need not be wealthy or travel great distances to experience happenings of great significance, however remote. Unfortunately, if limited to television coverage exclusive of C-span, he is invariably spoon-fed reporter's interpretations of events, tinted however unintentionally by that person's natural bias. C-span behaves as a "true" reporter, simply providing eyes and ears, while leaving the thinking to their viewers.

On C-span, the viewers have not only eyes and ears, but voices as well. No other news-oriented programming devotes as much air time to the call-in interview format. Not only does this allow average citizens to pose challenging questions and/or statements to prominent guests, but often the contributions of callers are the more illuminating, if for no other reason than it allows one to hear and comment on the ideas of other laymen, bringing fresh fuel to any debate. While the call-in format is popular elsewhere, no one else on television or radio carries on such extensive or free exchange.

Finally, C-span accomplishes its mission without extravagant graphics, fancy studio furniture and backdrops, or inane advertisements and catchy themes. The management at C-span correctly understands that these commercial trappings add nothing to the viewer's assimilation or understanding of events and their attendant issues. Unlike the established television journalists, C-span seems to be able to detach itself from what it is reporting by showing, essentially without comment, the event itself, instead of becoming the event, with showbiz tactics and media stars.

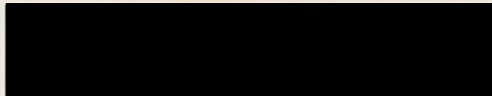
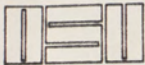
C-span will never become a steady diet for the average television viewer. Even the most civic-minded of us needs an occasional ball game, cartoon, or mindless sitcom. But the thinking man's supplement to the still abbreviated reports that dominate television news today should include C-span. I accept this rather rudimentary television, and watch because I like to see, hear, speak, and think for myself.

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