

1/19/99

Dear Brian Lamb and colleagues,

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The enclosed early Valentine
exactly echoes my own admiration
— and affection — for all of you and
for what you do. I send it along
in case you missed it.

Your brand of journalism is unique
and even mind-boggling. As a Christian
philosopher I marvel at your self-obnegation
and utter lack of prideful posturing.
Keep up your witness, and may your
tube increase!

With affection,



FDR MEMORIAL
FOUNDING MEMBER

Levittown, NY 11756

CULTURE WATCH



Barbara Walder

Viewers, Take Heart: It's a C-Span World, After All

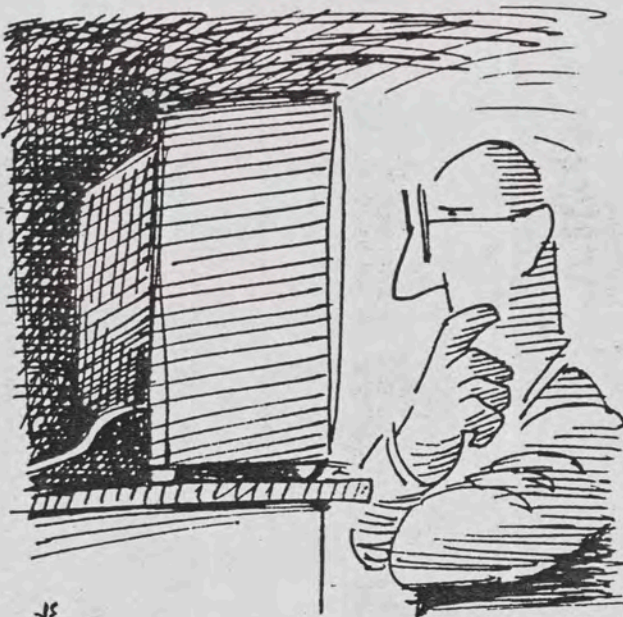
WHAT HAS fabulous funerals, its own cult figure, keeps you company in the middle of the night and on holidays, inspires rabid devotion, hoists the hoi-polloi and humbles the mighty and has the smartest, savviest women around?

It's the suddenly cool C-SPAN, with its charismatic chairman, Brian Lamb, and talented cadre of producers and executives who double as TV hosts. No longer just for political junkies and the pocket-protector brigade, the C-SPAN channels, available to 74 million households, devoted to gavel-to-gavel coverage of Congress, anything to do with public policy and, increasingly, books — are, in this impeachment era, simply must-see TV.

C-SPAN makes politics palatable and the public a part of it, and it informs, rouses and entertains. While the networks have failed us miserably in this time of congressional and presidential hijinks, the little cable channel that could, put-putting away, has come of age, on the eve of its 20th anniversary.

"Washington Journal," C-SPAN's morning, live, seven-days-a-week interview and call-in show, is a main attraction for the apolitical (like me) and the fiercely political Washington insiders. All those in the Congress come on, as do a wide variety of professors, journalists, public policy types and more, from around the country and world. And all, under the poker-faced gaze of the various hosts and the often intelligent questioning of a wide cross-section of the public, straighten up and fly right, however they act on other shows.

The "Journal" had a particularly dazzling day in early November, a Friday fortunately because Brian Lamb, the C-SPAN founder, cult figure and pre-eminent host, was on. With him was an eclectic group of guests: Washington Post grand dame Sally Quinn,



Newsday / Jack Sherman

who had been savaged in absentia by callers earlier in the week for another Beltway know-it-all article; author and Harvard professor of religion and African-American studies Cornel West; and Crispin Sartwell, a 30-ish author and Penn State-Harrisburg professor of philosophy and humanities who lives on a llama farm, writes weekly editorials for the Philadelphia Inquirer and looks like a '60s activist. Sartwell also drove the four-hour round trip to Washington, where C-SPAN is produced, because the not-for-profit, privately funded (by other cable companies) network for the public good has no extra money for travel perks or pretenses.

All three took their hour-or-so turn on the C-SPAN hot seat and it was captivating, exhilarating and boisterous TV. It was especially wonderful

compared to the morning slop you see most days on the commercial networks. Basically dim-witted and dull, with the same old retread establishment guests, these shows focus on the endlessly grinning hosts who are little more than entertainers and MCs for recycled sound bites.

Instead, the "Journal" opens either on the first guest or one of the newspaper articles from around the country that are used as keys by callers — along with articles from their local papers — to prompt purposeful discussion and give the rest of us an idea how things are perceived in Alabama, Minnesota or Tennessee. The calls are not screened, but are balanced, with separate "liberal," moderate" and "conservative" phone lines.

The hosts are never introduced, never personally sign off, and only occasionally does a graphic identify them. After a year of steady watching, I still don't know who all of them are, and I certainly know nothing about their personal lives or hairdos.

But I do know that all the on-air hosts have day jobs, *real* jobs. Lamb, who hosts two days a week, is the CEO as well as chairman of all of C-SPAN. This includes C-SPAN, founded in 1979 to broadcast all the House sessions and C-SPAN-2, started up to do the same for the Senate when it opened to cameras in 1986.

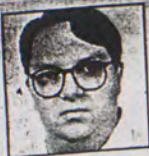
The other regular hosts are C-SPAN's corporate vice president and general counsel; its coordinating producer for all congressional coverage; its programming manager and political producer for conventions.

The two regular hosts I do know for sure are Susan Swain, C-SPAN's executive vice president and co-chief operations officer, and Connie Brod, former executive producer of the 4-year-old "Washington Journal" and now executive producer of the very popular new 48-hour weekend BOOK-TV. Both, unlike most of the women you see on TV, spark with intelli-

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Barbara Walder comments frequently on culture and sports.



David Futrelle is a columnist for the online edition of Upside magazine.

ny Williams (as Drudge) as a deadbeat dad in the White House. In his final dispatch on the subject, last Sunday, Drudge waxed philosophical about his role in the scandal-that-wasn't. "[W]hile the elite media will bark that it was wrong to report the DNA chase that

he's just a very... to melodrama. But I sense he could be much more. He might even manage to achieve a kind of respectable journalistic mediocrity — if only he could teach himself to count to 10 before he hit that "send" button.

C-Span Proves Surefire Cure for Pundit Pretension

— Continued from Page B6

gence and professionalism. Multi-faceted, real and rugged, poised and accessible on the air, they make you want to stand up and cheer. You want role models for your daughters? Have them watch these women, not those doozy ones on the breakfast shows or ABC's "The View."

C-SPAN is much more than "Washington Journal," of course. On its three channels — the third a fledgling in only a million homes — during the day and re-aired in the evening and all through the night, are congressional hearings and all kinds of public policy programming from speeches by Ca-

mille Paglia to a panel discussion by top newspaper publishers from around the country. You can see the British House of Commons "Question Time" every Sunday at 9 p.m. and Brian Lamb's famous 10-year-old "Booknotes" show on Sunday evenings, too.

And there's still so much more. The network runs programming on the courts, all kinds of speeches and election coverage and various oddball public events around the country sought out by C-SPAN's cameras, which can mesmerize you in the middle of a restless night. And most moving are the funerals of important and public Americans, which C-SPAN has been covering for about 15 years now.

As happens with the rest of C-SPAN's programming, the funerals unfold naturally before your eyes, as if you were there. After watching and re-watching a wonderful archive interview and the recent funeral of former Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, from the time people filed into the church until the hearse pulled away, I felt like I knew him and that somehow he was part of my life. The Thurgood Marshall funeral was another C-SPAN triumph. With all the letters and phone calls that come in, it's clear these funerals

deeply touch a large part of the C-SPAN viewing audience.

And who is that? Since there are no advertisers and therefore no ratings, C-SPAN knows only generally, from surveys taken after each presidential election, the size and composition of its viewership.

From 1996, it is known that 22 million Americans, or 12 percent of us, watch C-SPAN at some time during the week. It is also known that the audience is evenly divided among Democrats, Republicans and independents and that most of the audience is under 50, with one-third under 35. And most important, it is known that 37 percent are college graduates, 30 percent have some college education and 33 percent have a high school degree or less, with 31 percent having an income under \$30,000. Between education and income, it's an even distribution, all the way around.

This is America, then, this is us, and that's why the "Journal" call-ins will come from a cab driver in Atlanta, a grandmother in Louisiana and a law professor in California. You feel hooked in and part of something again. So, before the impeachment nonsense makes you abandon all hope and head for the hills, check out C-SPAN and see how the rest of us feel.

Like, Mike

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races closer together. Americans of every stripe, color and level of affluence count on, admire and love him, and some of this love becomes both transitive and associative. Like, Mike. The minds and hearts of Jordan's white fans are more open in the aggregate to people of color, so we all feel less other, more one, than we did before he arrived on the hardwood. And that above all is why 23 is the Man. He's good and he's bad and he's good.

In the meantime Bulls fans from Beijing to Soweto, not to mention the Greater Chicagoland Area, don't feel real whack at this juncture. Not only is Jordan gone, but Phil Jackson, Harry Caray, Jack Brickhouse and whatever virility the Hawks, Bears and White Sox once had. Mike McCaskey, Tribune Co., Arthur Wirtz and the Jerries Reinsdorf and Krause still are in charge around here, so the drought in both championships and civic largess is likely to recommence any day now.

Even so, as travelers arrive at O'Hare, we know that the first thing they'll see, along with the huge glossy shots of the Water Tower, the Art Institute lions and the neon gumball lunacy on the floor of the Board of Trade, is Old Money elevating tongue-sideways above our opponents, welcoming folks to our town with his impossible majesty, but warning them too: Chicago's baddest guys have whipped up on every other town's baddest guys, and they've done it six times, and with class. So we feel pretty proud of ourselves.

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