

August 20, 1997

Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
400 North Capitol Street N.W.
Suite 650
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Mr. Lamb:

Never before have I taken pen in hand (in this case sat at my keyboard) to write a letter to a member of the television industry, national or local. But, if I don't take an opportunity to communicate with you, I will simply explode. Bravo on the Tocqueville series.

Even though I have spent a lifetime in higher education (as a biological science type), I had not read Tocqueville. In fact, I am ashamed to admit that I had never even heard of Tocqueville. (Evidently mine was a deficient education.) My first introduction was your long interview with the new Speaker of the House following the 1994 elections. I was stunned to learn that Newt Gingrich, like the academic that he is, had given the new freshmen House members **a reading list**. If this man from Georgia was going to have an influence on my life, perhaps I should read through the list.

Democracy in America was difficult to locate. A very old translation was found in the public library of a neighboring community. The two volumes were oddly shaped little books, obviously translated into English a long time ago. The 1969 edition edited by Meyer then appeared in the local bookstore. What a dynamic read. I could not believe what I was seeing. The book was read twice, and Tocqueville was immediately incorporated into the classes that I teach.

The next big event was the appearance on Booknotes of the editor from The Johns Hopkins University Press responsible for the resurrection of the George Wilson Pierson book. This man, whose name I do not recall, was so excited about the book that he was about to come out of his chair. My local bookstore was not able to secure the book and I gave up trying. Then you appeared at the National Press Club. At the end of the presentation, you held up the Pierson book and said something like, "If you want to understand America, read this book". I called Johns Hopkins the next day and bypassed the bookstore. Next came the Tocqueville journey on C-SPAN.

The Tocqueville series is without doubt the best thing on American television in decades. The Saturday morning program from France was magic. Such wonderful television; I wanted to stand up and shout, "Take that ABC, NBC, CBS, and PBS." When I was asked to explain why I enjoy the series so much, I had some difficulty explaining. I now realize the answer is America.

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My answer comes from *A Life on the Road* by Charles Kuralt. Somewhere in that book I recall reading something to the effect that when he left New York and went on the road to create his program, he fell in love with America. For me, this is the secret of your Tocqueville series. Almost all of the 60 channels on my cable are trying to sell something: hamburgers, tax cuts, religion, lesbianism, sex, cars, crime, protection, excitement, and on and on. What we get is plastic banana, good time rock & roll, pure BS. I am reminded of my youth when I stood in front of the carnival tent and the barker tried to entice me to spend my money to go in and view the wonders behind the tent flap. What you are doing is **showing** us America, and I have fallen in love with America again.

Using Tocqueville's trip as an itinerary and focusing on his brilliant commentary to get us to look at ourselves, you have put into full view what America is. The visual images that you are bringing to us are awesome: a rundown town from the old industrial age in the north, a magnificent old post office, wonderful restored homes from a different era, a degraded waterfront left from the past glory of the Hudson River, a famous prison, main street of a small town, Shaker communities, beautiful rivers, and a natural treasure that we call Niagara Falls. These images are great, but they pale before the people.

Small town mayors, curators of county museums, directors of local historical societies, tourists, diner owners, students, teachers, mothers—some articulate and some not, but all wonderful examples of ordinary people that are the treasure of America. No wonder America is a great country. She is populated by phenomenal people. Listening to and watching ordinary Americans describe how they run their businesses, promote their community groups, help each other, welcome visitors, and teach their children are inspiring. Using **live** television to spotlight these people explaining who they are and what they do to move themselves and their communities forward day after day is the genius of your Tocqueville tour. Simple words cannot adequately convey to you the encouragement that I feel and how proud you have made me to be an ordinary American.

A caller to one Tocqueville segment suggested that the journey of Lewis and Clark be used in a similar way. What a wonderful idea. Someone needs to be assigned full-time to that project today before some commercial network jumps on the idea and screws it up.

Please don't become discouraged at the phone, fax and e-mail communications that you receive from people that fail to grasp Tocqueville and what you are doing.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Lake Charles, LA 70605
[REDACTED]