

20 July 1996

Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
400 North Capitol St. NW
Suite 650
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Lamb:

I am a 65 year old white male. I am retired. I am a long-time independent voter. I view a lot of C-SPAN...a whole lot of C-SPAN.

I believe your programming philosophy, your technique and your professionalism represent a unique and welcome source of information for an otherwise manipulated, spin-doctored, Goebbelized American viewing public. I respect and appreciate the educational and entertainment value of your work so much so that I frequently take copious notes of many of your programs, which I believe provide information that is available nowhere else. For example, I took twenty-four pages of notes on your absolutely superb reporting in "Germany Revisited" (August 14-18, 1995). Your whole concept and choice of representative German spokespersons was brilliant, particularly Pordzik, Oschmann, Tolksdorf, Fisher, Heym, Eckstein, Stastny and Schmidt. Five days of history in the making. First-rate television journalism. Bravo.

Having said all that, I must regretably and respectfully disagree with a recent policy change at C-SPAN which, in my opinion, seriously compromises a fundamental cornerstone of your reputation.

Apparently C-SPAN has decided (or was coercion applied?) that there generally have been too many "Clinton bashers" calling in. (5 to 1 ratio?). However, as with the "Gingrich bashers", my own personal viewing assessment is that the calling imbalances, although evident, were not that high. In any event, viewers like me did not call for then, nor do we now call for any sort of imposed "mythical symmetry". Nevertheless, C-SPAN has decided to "screen" future call-ins, which you assume will result in a more proportional presentation. I don't believe that will happen. Your triage-like telephone bank, i.e. a Democrat line, a Republican line, and "other" will only give the appearance of initially resolving this incorrectly perceived "problem". Concealment, dissimulation and duplicity will abound. In this real world, the demarcation between the three telephone lines will quickly blur and then disappear as callers jockey for airspace. Democrats will call in on (202) 624-1115. Republicans will call in on (202) 624-1111 and you will be deluged by "immaculate conversions" calling in as Independents on (202) 737-6734. Hyperbole unintended, this is a "one small step" reversion to the "broadcasting-as-usual" mediocrity of the networks. This policy won't accomplish C-SPAN's questionable goal, but it will certainly result in questions that legitimately challenge C-SPAN's continuing commitment to openness and free speech. C-SPAN is C-SPAN primarily because viewers like me believe it is the only UNFILTERED, unbiased information source available on television. UNFILTERED, UNFILTERED, UNFILTERED ---

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Letter to Brian Lamb dated 20 July 1996, [REDACTED]

that is why C-SPAN earned the reputation it has. As it becomes evident that the new tripartite phone system is failing, as it surely must, C-SPAN will have two options. First, C-SPAN could courageously retreat from this seemingly politically correct, but cursory, judgement. Many of us hope that this option would be considered seriously. C-SPAN, however, could persist in perpetuating and "fixing" this V-Chip in reverse agenda. And, like the V-Chip, this intervention will not work....it is easily subverted. And, unfortunately, to accomplish this expanded effort, C-SPAN will become censors of sort, having to arbitrarily determine, as all censors must, what in each case constitutes "Clinton bashing?" What represents crossing the line between legitimate philosophical debate and differences on an issue and simple bashing? How will your associates fairly and objectively differentiate and identify a caller's position in today's spirited political debate, particularly if "cross-calling" expands, as I predict it will?

Your viewing audience, on any particular day, program or issue, is rarely if ever "balanced", i.e. one-third Democrat, one-third Republican, and one-third "other". Your own market research must continually verify that fact. A policy that simplistically, and some would say guilefully, sets-up a telephone call-in system that arbitrarily imposes this "mythical symmetry" or fraudulent balance, can only tarnish C-SPAN's reputation. Inevitably, your call-in segments are being transformed from generally more accurate representations of the C-SPAN audience's views, as under your previous open system, into some unacceptable, idealized, politically correct fiction that is far less representative of those audiences.

Your audience is politically quite sophisticated compared to the general public. Unwittingly adopting or mimicking the flawed and disingenuous practices and the hidden agendas of the TV networks will not be advisable if market-share expansion is a goal of C-SPAN.

I will continue to watch C-SPAN. Maybe they are right -- "you can't teach an old dog new tricks". However, I humbly suggest that C-SPAN give serious thought to this decision and its probable, counter-productive consequences.
Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Hendersonville, NC 28791

Tel: [REDACTED]