

CLEARWATER, FL 34623

MAY 9, 1993

Dear Mr. Lant:

Re: Article Enclosed -

I would like to Thank You for C-SPAN. We do not get C-SPAN II unfortunately. I watch M-F from 8^{AM} E.T. to 9 or 9³⁰ AM. That makes my Day. I then do too much letter writing from Notes to those, our ELECTED or APPOINTED SERVANTS. Also, I understand why you do not have 1-800 Phone numbers for your Call-in show. I would be on every half hour, but, I have not called in at all. Some time please have Mr. Martin L. Gross (Author) "Washington waste from A to Z" with a Top Senator D and one Senator (R) for the 1 1/2 hours - That out to be a real good time well spent.

Again many Thanks to you for C-Span

Sincerely

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AUTHORS ON THE AIR



■ Margo Hammond

In a roomful of journalists, it's easy to spot Brian Lamb. He's the one who is listening.

Lamb is the founder and director of C-SPAN, a cable network which for the past 14 years has been dedicated to the notion that television viewers don't need political analysts, gregarious journalists and other sorts of spin doctors to explain to them what they've just seen and heard. C-SPAN just sets up its cameras at meetings, press conferences, speeches and rallies and lets them roll. With no overvoice or breaks for commentary, the network just lets viewers watch and draw their own conclusions.

For millions of C-SPAN addicts, as regular viewers of the network are fond of calling themselves, the formula works. Cable subscribers — C-SPAN beams into 58.7-million households nationwide and around the world via satellite — can watch and listen, unimpeded, to John Majors defending himself in the British Parliament or Bill Clinton telling jokes at the Washington White House Correspondents banquet.

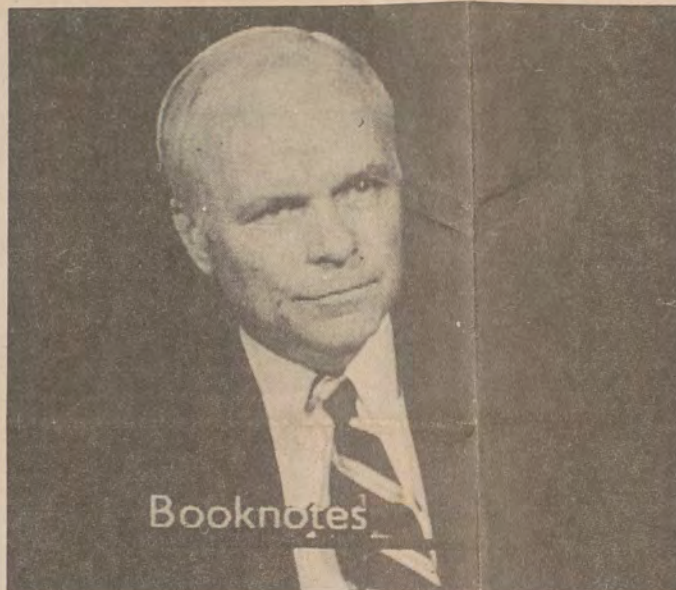
They also can watch the only program on television devoted completely to books: *Booknotes*. Not only is *Booknotes* only about books, but each Sunday evening the program is devoted to only one author who gets to talk about his or her recently published book for an unprecedented one hour. The brainchild of Lamb, *Booknotes* airs at 8 p.m. and is repeated at 11 p.m.

Lamb tapes the shows before airing, conducting the interviews in the network's Washington studios on North Capitol Street. Seated around a cocktail table, he chats with authors as if they are in his living room, prompting them to tell us about their books and their lives. As usual, Lamb does more listening than talking.

"Who would be interested in what I have to say?" he asks, not out of modesty but out of the firm conviction that it is not the interviewer but the interviewee who should be the star. "The author is the one who's really accomplished something. They are the ones who have worked all those long lonely hours in basements and libraries."

Lamb got the idea for *Booknotes* after watching all the book hype on morning talk shows, where authors are invited on but end up with only five minutes to talk about their books. Lamb decided the writers, particularly those of serious nonfiction, deserved a longer format. "An author spends years researching and writing a book," Lamb says. "It seemed shallow to tell him to sum up in 25 words or less what's in it."

Lamb admits he is in awe of authors. "I am not an intellectual, but I am in awe of intellectual pursuit," says the 51-year-old. "I read the books," he adds, which may seem to most of us as a given, but which he says is not all that common among television interviewers. Some, like Larry King, even brag about never



C-SPAN

"I let the author talk and let the watchers make up their own mind if they want to read the book or not."

— Brian Lamb

reading the books they discuss. Apparently, they feel that their questions will be fresher if they don't know the answers in advance. If you read the book, after all, you could end up knowing too much and leave the audience behind.

Fortunately, Lamb doesn't take such a cynical view of his audience. Reading the books and meeting the authors are the high points of his week, he says. "It's a very personal thing for me."

An author gets only one shot at an appearance on *Booknotes*. The book must be nonfiction, on public affairs and currently available. Among the titles that recently have been discussed include Nadine Cohodas' *Strom Thurmond & the Politics of Southern Change* and Blanche Wiesen Cook's *Eleanor Roosevelt: Volume 1, 1884-1933*. Tonight Lamb will be interviewing Charles Adams, author of *For Good and Evil: The Impact of Taxes on the Course of Civilization*.

Now in its fourth year, the book program has been shockingly overlooked by competing media. I was the first journalist to interview Lamb about *Booknotes*, he told me. This comes as no surprise to the C-SPAN director, however. C-SPAN itself was ignored for years before publications like the *New York Times* did stories on the network.

Instead Lamb counts on word-of-mouth publicity. Although he doesn't have any hard data to prove it, he

is convinced that *Booknotes* has, like the rest of C-SPAN, spawned its own addicts. Particularly in New York, Lamb is recognized on the streets and constantly approached by people who "thank me for *Booknotes*," he says.

Mild-mannered and deferential to his guest authors, Lamb rarely challenges the writers on their work. When he brings up controversial material, it is almost apologetically and with a Midwestern politeness that echoes his Indiana origins.

In a recent interview with historian Marshall DeBruhl, author of *Sword of San Jacinto: A Life of Sam Houston*, Lamb asked the author why he continually referred to Houston as an American hero. In his book, after all, DeBruhl describes in ample detail how the famed Texas governor deserted one of his three wives, owned slaves and drank excessively. "I think you can see where I'm going with this," Lamb concluded good-naturedly.

With many other interviewers, this line of reasoning would have been used to broadside the author, to put him in a tight spot. Lamb, however, offered it instead as an honest intellectual exchange. In response DeBruhl outlined Houston's virtues — his defense of the American Indian, his unwillingness to expel freed slaves from Texas and his fight to preserve the Union during the Civil War — and pondered the contradicto-

Broadcasting about books

Hungry for more news about books? Here are some local radio and television programs that focus on books and authors.

Morning Edition and *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio programs that air locally on WUSF-89.7 from 6-8:30 a.m. and 5-6:30 p.m., respectively, occasionally feature talks with authors and book reviews. WUSF's *Florida Report*, which airs from 4:30-5 p.m. from time to time, includes book reviews and author interviews on Florida topics by local reviewers, including Margo Hammond, book editor of the *Times*.

Portions of *Fresh Air*, an hour-long National Public Radio program devoted completely to books, can be heard throughout the day on WMNF-88.5. The first half of the NPR book program, which features author interviews by moderator Terry Gross, airs on Fridays at about 10:30 a.m. Other excerpts from the show are included in the *Radio Activity* programs aired Monday through Thursday at 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Jo Ellen Schilke, the new host of WMNF's *Art in Your Ear*, airs occasional book reviews and author interviews by local reviewers on the 10 a.m. Friday morning arts program.

Authors are often invited on the Charlie Rose show broadcast locally on WEDU-Ch. 3 at 11:30 p.m. weekdays. On Monday Rose will interview Dominick Dunne, author of *Season in Purgatory*. In upcoming shows Rose will be talking to authors Isabelle Allende, Walter Isaacson, James Gleick, Deborah Tannen and Scott Turow.

WTVT-Ch. 13 often books authors visiting the Tampa Bay area for its *Eye on Tampa Bay* program, which airs at 12:30 p.m. weekdays. Giles Hamilton, author of *UFOs: Close Encounters of the Fourth and Fifth Kind*, will be featured Monday on the half-hour talk show, which is moderated by Kathy Fountain.

Local poets and writers appear on *Artists as Alchemists*, a program on Public Access Television, Wednesdays at 9 p.m. on Channel 23 in Tampa and Channel 16 in Brandon, Lutz, Apollo Beach and Plant City, and Thursday at 2 p.m. on Channel 24 in Tampa.

ry nature of so many of our historical figures.

It is just such a subtle and non-combative approach that confounds his critics, who prefer interviewers to be, well, more critical, and endears him to *Booknotes* addicts. "I hope I never insert myself personally in the interviews," concludes Lamb. "I let the author talk and let the watchers make up their own mind if they want to read the book or not."

■ Margo Hammond is book editor of the *Times*. ■

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