

Mr. Brian Lamb
C-Span

Sept. 10, 1998

Dear Mr. Lamb:

I read with great interest a recent New York Times article describing your interest in reviewing books that raise significant issues but that are not selling great numbers of copies. I think that a book I wrote, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (Yale University Press 1998) fits that description well. Unlike many widely read books, it is a critique of ourselves, now, rather than an historical analysis or a dissection of others.. That seems to make readers and reviewers wary; but I think it makes the book more important, not less.

I am an anthropologist looking at the culture of the United States from the outside and treating it as an arbitrary set of rules and assumptions that can be dissected and evaluated like any other culture. Most Americans do not seem to grasp that ours is one culture among many and that we can learn from others even if we do not want to adopt or even tolerate all of their habits. I consider that concept the most important thing that liberal education can teach and part of [REDACTED] is an attempt to teach that basic idea to a general audience.

But I also suggest that specific misperceptions or faulty assumptions of our own culture make it hard for us to understand others and prevent us from solving many of our own problems. I address a number of contemporary issues--IQ testing, affirmative action, multicultural education and some actions of our courts--from this perspective. I also suggest that we must reconsider several aspects of our culture that are not usually perceived as problems: our somewhat distorted perceptions of morality, progress, freedom, efficiency, property, the role of law and government, individualism and individual success.

The book has won the [REDACTED] Award given by the [REDACTED] center of New York. It was chosen because it made original contributions to the understanding of intolerance. The few reviews that have appeared so far (enclosed) have also described it as a strong defense of affirmative action, an original dissection of the Bell Curve, and a strong counter to "strict constructionism" and the ideology that Charles Murray and Allan Bloom represent. One reviewer has suggested that serious consideration of my arguments by readers at all levels, would make the United States a better place.

I hope I have piqued your interest.

[REDACTED]
Distinguished Teaching Professor.

fax
email

[REDACTED]