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Abstract
Unboxing Television
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As a keyword, citizenship brings with it an expansive vocabulary capable of describing both concrete phenomena, such as people's daily behavior in relationship to each other, and highly abstract forms of social organization such as the state, or democracy. The term's usages range widely over the course of twentieth century political culture. It describes a legal status, one that confers access to a nationally- and morally-defined set of rights and protections, from suffrage to Habeus Corpus, and which often presents itself as a universal good. It refers to a cultural ideal of political life—being a good citizen—and demarcates a particular affective realm, naming a sense of belonging to, and identification with, some collectivity. Usually (but not always) this collectivity is the nation, although importantly, it is now possible to talk about, and debate, the values that might shape some kinds of transnational citizenships—diasporic, socialist, feminist, Pan African, Latino. Central to both pluralism and exclusion, invoked as both a normative and an alternative identity, citizenship is, in Toby Miller's words, "a polysemic category, open to contestation, an avatar for all parts of the spectrum…an open technology, a means of transformation ready for definition and disposal[.]" If there is any common conceptual thread, it lies in the way that the category seems to assume that those people it describes are in need of ongoing training and reform if they are truly to live up to the title citizen. "The making of citizens," notes Barbara Cruickshank, "is a permanent political project for democracy."

My remarks on the panel focus on the moment of my current research, the first two decades following World War II. In this period, ideas about the rights, responsibilities, and values associated with citizenship as a particular category of personhood overwhelmingly seem dictated by one particular set of historical relations, and their attendant contradictions: the Cold War. To speak of citizenship was to speak constantly and promiscuously of freedom, although it was a moment in American history (until today's war on terror) that saw an unparalleled assault on the "five freedoms" guaranteed by the first amendment to the U.S. constitution: Speech, Press, Religion, Assembly, Petition. It was also a moment when it became commonplace to describe economic entities as citizens—the corporation, the consumer, and occasionally organized labor—a conceptual move that transformed the production, exchange, and accumulation of goods into a moral and patriotic act. And it was a period in international relations when the U.S. loudly proclaimed the superiority of American citizenship against the repressions suffered by people living in communist states, even though racist campaigns of terror against Black Southerners revealed to domestic and international observers in the "free world" and beyond the hollowness of such tenets of U.S. democracy as the right to vote and be represented, and to enjoy free and equal treatment under the law.

In this historical context, as I'll explain, members of the bipartisan social network then called the Establishment, organized across diverse nonprofit and corporate institutions, undertook the sponsorship of television programs as a way to teach Americans about the nature of citizenship in the prosperous and perilous culture of the Cold War United States. These programs, often laughably didactic, were quite obviously limited as instruments of governance. But that does not mean they were ineffective in

shaping U.S. political culture. Their very inadequacies allowed for the restaging and replication of debates among sponsors, producers, and broadcasters about how to rule through televisual rhetoric, bringing together powerful political constituencies in negotiations that could only solidify the idea of governing by television as a benevolent goal. In their shared encounters with popular media the elites who sponsored public service television affirmed the moral mandate to rule, distilled the epistemological certainties about the viewing population through which this rule might be known and measured, and consolidated (if only through dissension) the language in which the populace might be addressed. The specific organization of broadcast technology in the postwar period aided these conversations in that the concept of the national television audience provided a convenient collective noun for talking about the nation as a population, one with discrete characteristics, reachable through certain aesthetic and rhetorical techniques, and knowable via statistics and other forms of empirical measurement. Indeed, the point of civic television in this period may not have been so much the teaching of citizenship as the consolidation of non-state modes of everyday governance among the powerful, a mode of political speech among elites, not a form of communication in which elites spoke to the "masses."