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Citizenship, Politics and Television Panel
Unboxing TV Conference
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I'd like to discuss two interrelated sets of issues: The first has to do with the reconfiguration of 'public service' as the discursive and regulatory framework through which broadcasting's relationship to citizenship has historically been warranted; the second has to do with the utility of theories of governmentality for analyzing changes in the configuration of citizenship, and television's role in those changes.

As TV becomes increasingly fragmented, digitalized and converged with other media technologies, its role as a 'public service,' and a technology of citizenship, changes as well. 'Good citizenship' is no longer something that is to be facilitated, through the old language of public service, by the delivery of unprofitable informational/news/educational programming. This doesn't mean that citizenship has disappeared from the discourse of television, but rather it has been reconfigured in ways that both complement broader socio-political trends, and push the boundaries of existing TV scholarship.

Today, citizenship is an activity, or a process, that the TV viewer must accomplish largely on her own, in part by navigating the ever-proliferating sites of self work, private resources, partnerships, civic/community involvement and volunteerism that television organizes. The text, so to speak, has become but one relay to be acted upon, in a dispersed multimedia network of resources and activities through which the various dimensions of current citizenship are to be accomplished. For me, the crucial issue is not whether post-textual interactivity is in itself empowering, but rather how, exactly, power operates when the current sites and passages of citizenship formation intersect with broader logics of neoliberalism, niche marketing and corporate synergy.

I have found theories of governmentality to be useful for thinking through the privatized model of citizenship prioritized by today's deregulated mediascape—and by broader policies and politics as well. This literature's focus on the dispersion of government, and on the everyday, technical dimensions of governing ourselves through freedom rather than control, is valuable for thinking through television's relationship to changes in the way we think of and practice citizenship. The emphasis on productive power also moves us away from a nostalgic fear of the loss of a public/civic culture, and toward a richer analysis of civic life as it currently exists. Instead of simply criticizing or celebrating TV's representations of citizenship, I want to push forward by contemplating how changes in TV culture are helping to constitute changes in citizenship and civic life. Toward that end, some of the questions I bring to the panel include: What are the new freedoms, and also the new responsibilities, afforded by what we might call "interactive" or neo-citizenship? To what extent is the market rubric of individual choice being translated, in part by television, into the requirements of citizenship? How do we theorize the power of the media corporation in light of the seeming dispersion of

multimedia citizenship formation? Why has good citizenship—once a burden for the reluctant networks to bear -- become a lucrative neo-network branding device (I'm thinking of examples like American Idol Gives Back and ABC TV's Better Community project)? What does the thoroughly privatized and interactive model of citizenship offer to capital that earlier (and largely unrealized) ideals did not?