



You are logged in as Joe Escobar (Logout)

Home ► My courses ► HST 209 W13 (Escobar 32269) ► January 13 - January 19 ► Forum 1 CLOSED
► Introducing Ken Burns



Search forums

Display replies in nested form

Move this discussion to ...

[\(Introducing Ken Burns\) Next >](#)**Introducing Ken Burns**

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, January 13, 2013, 1:02 AM

To post, you will click the "reply" link MY post. If you want to reply to a specific comment made by another student, click the "reply" link located on that student's specific post.

I strongly recommend that you do NOT attempt to answer all questions in a single post. There is no limit to the number of posts and replies you can make this week.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

When addressing the materials and questions, DO NOT leave your subject line blank (or the same as mine). Put something descriptive in the subject line of your post, such as "Burn's Video", "First Article", or "Historical Problems". Other students wanting to talk about the same topic can click the "reply" button to your post, thus helping organize this discussion.

Sum of ratings: -

[Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**The first video viewing "The Cause"**

by Karen Jenkins - Sunday, January 13, 2013, 9:26 PM

I viewed the videos and introduction by Mr. Burns and really enjoyed watching the video. Mr. Burns is a very descriptive and thorough narrator and author of this documentary I really am riveted to watching it. I find I enjoy the very descriptive artifacts and pictures. It is easy to follow along and easy to understand. I really enjoy the narratives by Mr. Shelley Foote. In critiquing the video on "The Cause" I enjoyed how Mr. Burns is biased in his personal views and gets straight to the point in the views of what led up to the war and the actual cause not being that of Slavery or of the Confederacy. He portrays each side in a more factual historical way and also keeps you entertained and fascinated at how he uses every little fact right down to what a soldier wore, ate and how he survived. He also depicts the slaves in there views and how life was for them. This war effected every race in america, from the Immigrants, colored folks, Indians, Mexicans and from Sea to Shining Sea everyone in this nation suffered a great loss to gain a land divided back to one nation under god. What do you classmates think of the way he uses such interesting methods like virtual realities of old

photographs to portray the way the soldier and the colored folk, slave masters lived?? I thought it to be just fascinating. I am not a historian but I really enjoyed this video and the critics views of this author/director of this documentary.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Ken Burns-The Video

by Jennifer King - Tuesday, January 15, 2013, 10:50 AM

I reviewed the material for our forum after viewing episode one "The Causes." I suppose I did that somewhat backwards this week. Because after watching the video clip featuring Ken Burns and the process in which he goes through to create his documentaries, I found myself getting excited all over again to view the series. It is hard not to admire Burns and his message after watching the video clip. He is clearly passionate about both history and his film work. It is clear he puts time and care into creating films which are both fairly accurate as well as esthetically pleasing to watch. As someone who has not sought out to watch historical documentaries in my spare time, I enjoyed the first episode in the series immensely, and I look forward to viewing the rest of the videos as I am sure they will be just as interesting as the first.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



The Articles

by Jennifer King - Tuesday, January 15, 2013, 11:01 AM

After reading the articles about Burns and the Civil War series, my opinion of both him and the film did not waver much. The second article was quite harsh in its appraisal of the films historical accuracy. While reading it, I did find myself question the faith I put in the facts of the film. However, a quote from Burns in the first article resonated with me; "One thing that we haven't really said is how much history has been murdered by people who are professionally employed as historians.....[W]hat we were trying to produce is not a piece of academic paper. We were trying to speak to a very large audience ... and excite them and not be the last word or the first word."

Burns did not intend for his film to be a person's only source of historical knowledge. Yes there were facts which were left out from his film as the second article points out, but from a logical standpoint if he were to have included every detail of the Civil War I'm sure it would have been a much longer series.

I have a great deal of confidence in this series as being our main video source of historical information about the war. I feel like it is a well put together and thought out documentary and makes a great companion to our text. Also the fact that *Battle Cry of Freedom* was mentioned in the second article as a good resource for more detailed information of the events leading up to the Civil War reinforced my opinion that the film and book make a great pair.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: The Articles**

by Karen Jenkins - Tuesday, January 15, 2013, 8:45 PM

Hi Jennifer I would have to agree with you the second article was quite critical about the historical factual information that was incorrect and not exact. I in my own opinions would have to state that each individual has his/her own perspective in the way one views history. One has to keep it in mind that it has been so milled over and re created and stated so many times over the past 150 years, whom is to say what is historic fact or fiction. Theatrically I think he did a wonderful job in tackling such a difficult war and subject and fitting it into one bound book. Amazing is what I have to say about the video and book.. Just fascinating to me.. Great post love it.. Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: The Articles**

by Jennifer King - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 8:11 AM

Thank you Karen! I love what you said about history being re-created and re-told so many times. That's something I often wonder about when trying to figure out if a source is credible or not. It really is hard to say what is fact or fiction like you pointed out. It's like the game of telephone kids play, something always gets lost or changed in the original message by the time it reaches the last person. Sometimes I think the same things have happened to historical facts and recreations. One thing that I love about the video series we are watching is that Burns includes actual photographs and quotes from letters from the time period itself. I feel like journals and letters from soldiers and civilians who lived through it are one of the best ways to get an accurate idea of what was happening at that time.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Ken Burns Video and Articles**

by Ashley Clark - Tuesday, January 15, 2013, 11:36 AM

I took an immediate liking to Ken Burns after watching his video clip. He really brings the story to life, and I enjoy the way he makes the story interesting to the viewers, truly opening up a new viewpoint to history for the public.

After reading the articles, I still felt more or less the same. We can't expect every detail to be explored, for everything that could be mentioned to be brought up. I don't wonder as to the historical accuracy, I can see from the video that he and his team have put a lot of work

into research. The second article gives scathing criticism, the author obviously peeved that there wasn't the desired level of historical allusions and mentions of various people. Although I would like to see more detail, I can't bring myself to further agree with them.

I'm still extremely confident with this series. Burns wanted to bring history to the people, to produce something that the public would find interesting and engaging. It wasn't meant to be a textbook, it wasn't meant to include every single possible tidbit about the Civil War era. The series was intended to get the public interested in history by telling the story of one of the most important, life-changing times for America. It was supposed to tell the story of life during those years, to make people realize what people went through during the period. To illustrate my point, the second article mentions Burns' portrayal of slavery and how he "never conveys to the viewers the complexity of the South's 'peculiar institution'" (43). Perhaps this was not the angle he was going for. Would the common public need to understand this "complexity" in order to realize that slavery is wrong and that the abuse endured by many of the workers needed to be stopped? Hardly. Sure, I worry about not getting the in-depth knowledge I'd like to have, but I believe that as long as I am able to gain a better understanding of the time period and get an idea on what it was like for the people living there (beyond what the ink and paper tell me), I'll do well.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Ken Burns Video and Articles

by Jennifer King - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 8:15 AM

Ashley,

I had the same reaction to Ken Burns after watching the clip as you did, and I also agree that he does a great job of bringing history to life. I have the same confidence as you with the series. The intention Burns had with his films was not to be the ultimate source of all historical facts about the Civil War. He wanted to get people excited about the subject as well as to educate. What's nice about the series is, it is exciting, and personally it made me want to learn more. The film provides a great base of knowledge to start to build on with the help of other historical references like our text.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Ken Burns Video and Articles

by Ashley Clark - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 9:01 PM

Thanks Jennifer!

I have a lot more confidence now that I've watched one of the episodes. I believe that the articles were overly critical of his work, as I found it to be entertaining and engaging. I'm glad you had the same response.

I agree with you about it being more a base than an actual source, and that it made me want to learn more. The way it was explained may not have been thorough, but there were several instances that I rushed to look up to see in greater detail, and I found myself laughing and recording a lot of the quotes from the soldiers' letters. I can't wait to watch more!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Ken Burns Video and Articles

by Julie Skinner - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 3:08 PM

Ashley,

I think you hit the nail on the head! I agree that Burn's purpose with this series appears to be to bring History to the common person. He has put forth an amazing tool in which to do this. It makes the subject interesting and easy to understand for so many people no matter their age or education. While this can, and has been criticized by many, I applaud his ability to make a confusing subject understandable and enjoyable enough for anyone to be able to benefit from it.

I think that there is enough to be gained by viewing this series that we shouldn't worry about the film series not being in depth enough. I'm sure that through the textbook and the forums we will be able to round out any information that might be lacking in Burn's film series.

Julie

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Limitations of Classroom Media

by Micah Young - Tuesday, January 15, 2013, 4:04 PM

I enjoyed the first Civil War video. Through it's music, pictures, and quoted literature it helped me feel and empathize with the history, although not necessarily understand it. In watching "The Cause" I was not under the impression that Ken Burns was trying to give a good introduction to the beginning of the Civil War. The film seemed poised for action, willing to avoid particulars about antebellum politics and society, and anxious to begin retelling events of the war. The film provided a poor introduction to the causes or 'cause' of the war, but unlike the two history professors from Purdue University, I'm not very bothered by that. The review "The Limitations of Classroom Media: Ken Burns' Civil War Series as a Test Case" had me convinced about the inadequacies of Burns' Civil War introduction by the beginning of the second page. As the title of the article suggests, the two professors are not only reviewing Burns' series, they are defending history, and how it is traditionally taught, against the inadequacies of film based systems. I don't prefer to learn history through film, and I think that I learned more history through this article than I will likely learn

in several of Burns' not so short videos; however, the two historians went too far in debunking Burns' introduction by bringing up so much (though it was good) pre-war history only then to point out that Burns didn't use that material. They made their point by page two, only to then follow it up with seven more well documented pages even more thoroughly discrediting the film's introduction. Though at first I thought they wrote too much, now I think they probably stopped short because they could have used some of this material for a short book entitled something like "History as Omitted by Ken Burns: why not to use his films for academic purposes." But then it's funny, considering the course that we are all in now.

Did they change my expectation of the film? Yes, a little. However, as a historical narrative, I think my expectations for the series were lower than theirs. Regarding a series like this, I ask, how can this film fill in gaps of my historical knowledge, the authors of the article ask, how will popular film based histories properly represent the nuances of the past? So, the professors need the series to accomplish more than do I. Also, I knew that the series' introduction was weak before reading this article as much of the history that was referenced in it was familiar to me. I will know better whether I am concerned about the credibility of the series after watching further episodes. I never approach a series like this as a primary source for history, so I'm not currently very concerned about being misled or misinformed.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Limitations of Classroom Media



by Karen Jenkins - Tuesday, January 15, 2013, 9:01 PM

Hi Micah: I enjoyed your summary of the review of the video and book. I felt the same way in the facts that the director was lacking in his historical accuracies after reading the second review of the documentary. But whom is to say how accurate history is when communications of that era were so lacking in effectiveness. The war has been written and reviewed several times and I am sure there were alot of factual information and theories lost. I did, however enjoy his theatrical way he portrayed the documentary even with its own fallacies. I was riveted to the movie and the book thus far. It is such a overwhelming amount of historical info that it is hard to remeber all the facts. So I like to review and watch the videos a few times so I can remeber at least some of the information. The Causes of the War, Mr. Burns does tend to lean toward the slavery issues and the north when that was not the case. I am a visual learner and a doer so this format of learning is works great for me. It is nice to have a format much different that the boring textbook classroom ol fashioned way that stereotypes learners or students to one way of learning. It is refreshing to see a lot more creativity in how one can learn things online these days. I really enjoy this class and your post Micah.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

Re: Limitations of Classroom Media





by Micah Young - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 11:45 AM

Hi Karen. Thanks for the reply and feedback. I have also enjoyed the video series and like how it pictures events during the Civil War. I don't think that the historical discrepancies between the review and the film are interpretation based, at least not primarily. I think that the point the reviewers were making was that the introduction was, at first, inadequate. They write that Burns could have "challenged public tastes instead of pandering to them" (40) by focusing less on action and battles and more on political, economic, diplomatic, and social history. They would prefer the introduction of the war in the video series to be similar to that of our text book *Battle Cry of Freedom* which uses about a third of its text to describe the coming of the war. Doing so would obviously have drastically changed the series, and that was not the goal of its director. Even the historical data in their article that they endite Burns for skipping would have required at least several hours of film time to explain. So, I think that the differences in how the history is presented by both the film and the review are not necessarily issues of accuracy (though there are some) but of philosophy, regarding where one wants to begin telling the story and which parts of that story will be given the most time. So, though I agree with the article that the introduction is not comprehensive, I don't mind it, because we have other resources to make up the difference. Thanks

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Limitations of Classroom Media



by Ashley Clark - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 9:15 PM

It's interesting to see your outlook, as it's a bit more negative than the ones I've read so far.

I agree with you about the fact that Ken Burns was not trying to come up with a good introduction to the war. I personally feel that his purpose was more to introduce the public to his series, rather than introduce the leading causes of the war. I also agree that the critics went a bit too far, because it seemed incredibly...well, honestly irritated. It seemed less objectively critical and more offended.

I wasn't personally swayed by the critiques, but I see where you're coming from 😊

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Limitations of Classroom Media



by Micah Young - Thursday, January 17, 2013, 11:45 AM

Hi Ashley! Thanks for the feedback. I don't mean to be negative about the film

series. I like it so far. I was sincerely just joking about the book that might be written about omitted history. I meant to tease the article's authors for their relentless rebuttal of the film's introduction, not add further critique to it. As I scrolled down the article, page after page I kept reading things like Ken Burns didn't... fill in the blank, and I thought wow, they're still going; and, they already have an advantage since they are professional historians reviewing a documentary, including aspects of history that the documentary didn't attempt to cover. The whole exchange definitely humored me. I certainly found the review to be helpful, but it didn't make me disappointed about the film. Thanks again for the feedback and I appreciated reading your comments.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Ken Burns "The Cause" video 1

by Jennifer Faiman - Tuesday, January 15, 2013, 5:18 PM

I have always had a passion for learning out our history as humans, as societies, and cultures. These types of topics fascinated me. I love to learn all that I can about the major events throughout history that have shaped us as individuals and as a whole. The American Civil War has played probably the largest role, aside from the revolution, in the development of our present day U.S.A.

I felt that Burns did a great job of explaining how the Civil War came to be, was fought and how it impacted us today. I felt that he did a fairly good job of being accurate. With so many different accounts of what happened, when, and where it is difficult to know exactly what is the true facts. I once heard a saying... the winner writes the history. This seems to be the case in most wars and therefore we do not always get the full and most accurate account of events.

I felt that the photos that he used really helped to pull the viewers in on a personal level as did the different voice actors, including Morgan Freeman as Frederick Douglass. Overall I think that this series will be a good source of information for this class a great compliment to our required text.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Introducing Ken Burns

by Adam Duff - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 10:13 AM

After watching the first episode of The Civil War, I was actually impressed. Although it was a rather long video, it was a very informal one. I feel that the script was well written even though it wasn't really planned but rather but together as they filming went on. After reading the article I still feel the same way about the video. I say this because the people who were in the war; the ones who truly know what went on, are not here with us today, so the

filmmakers had to collect information from many different sources. Over time as stories are passed on they change a little, so I can understand as to why certain topics in this film are slightly off from the truth.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Ken Burns Video Introduction

by Jacob Pusey - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 1:26 PM

Ken Burns has always been one of my favorite filmmakers. But, I do realize that his purpose when he makes his documentaries is to inform as well as to entertain an audience that “has a rather simplistic notion of history”. I think in his movies he tries to use a combination of simple but, accepted historical facts and he adds beautiful imagery, wonderful music and recognizable voices in order to attract a wide audience. The clip underscores the passion that Burns has for history, but even more so for cinematography. I do appreciate how he suggests his films are intended to intrigue his audiences into escalating the “conversation” about history and not to simply be the final word in whatever subject he decided to focus the spotlight on.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Accuracy of the Series

by Jacob Pusey - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 1:28 PM

The third article talks much more about the reluctance or at least the warning that educators should give their students before the documentary is used as a resource. I appreciate that we have been given this warning as it could have been dismissed. One of the main criticisms in the article is the lack of social and political background of what led up to the war in the film. I'm relieved that Morrison and May mention *Battle Cry of Freedom* and how wonderful of a job McPherson did covering that exact subject. One specific point that jumped out at me was how Burns depicts John Brown's attempt at arming slaves at Harper's Ferry. Apparently in the movie Brown had a “wagonload of guns” when in reality he was bringing them pikes and tools to use in a fight. This is a pretty big mistake and could easily jeopardize how someone might interpret what Brown was trying to accomplish. Despite the criticism in these articles, I have quite a bit of confidence in this series. I have seen other documentaries Burns has made and they do not disappoint. I have never used one for a class so I look forward to making comparisons with the book and maybe being a little more critical than if I were watching it for entertainment.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Accuracy of the Series

by Jennifer King - Friday, January 18, 2013, 11:51 AM

I agree with you, I appreciate that we have been giving the warning about the documentary as well. I think it is great to have upfront knowledge that the film does not contain everything we need to know about the Civil War. I think at times people forget the necessity of consulting different sources, and just take one as the ultimate source. I was also comforted by the mention of our text in the article. The fact that they credited McPherson with covering what Burns didn't makes the film and book a great pair as far as I am concerned.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Burns Video



by Julie Skinner - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 2:58 PM

After viewing the short film about Ken Burns, I found him to be extremely affable and knowledgeable about his subject. He strikes me as a person who is passionate about the projects he takes on and concerned about the validity of the subject that he is investigating. I got the impression that he is passionate about putting forth not only an accurate accounting of the events that lead up to, as well as took place during the Civil War, but he is determined to do so in a beautiful format using an abundance of relevant photographs and a musical score that is comforting and pleasing to the viewer. So yes, I found myself "admiring" his zeal and "liking" the image he presented. I look forward to viewing the film over the course of the next 9 weeks.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Burns Video



by Karen Jenkins - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 3:52 PM

Hi Julie; I would have to say that it is really nice to actually be able to see real live photos, clips and letters that they actually wrote and not someone elses statements or opinions of what there perceptions of the war was. I think Ken Burns did a wonderful job of enertaining and giving good information to his viewing audiences. I agree with your post it is much more enjoyable to actually click on a link and be taken to a site that actually shows the era and how they lived, what they ate, and wore and where they slept, how the war and battlefields were carried out and where to. I really enjoy his way of portraying the war. Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



What was the "Cause" of the Civil War?



by Karen Jenkins - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 3:34 PM

After reading in depth the reviews and the a bit in the chapters,I was a bit confused as to

the actual factual reasons for the cause of the War?? If slavery was not a viable factual issue then what was? It seems the North was in a political debate with the South and its rights to freedom and its own economical and industrial factions. My understanding is they were all fighting over "the Union" of the Confederacy and the other states that took up being niether Union or Confederate. In my readings of the Chapters I am also curious to know is WHY are we starting in the middle of the book and not the beginning? All the factual information in the book can become mind boggling and confusing to me. So what was the real reasons for Secession and the Civil War?? The book skirts over this issue and the video doesnt really state but a seemingly biased opinion toward the North claiming that there idealogies were the reasons for the War? Something to ponder on I must say and would like to get a bit of help to clear this up about?? thanks Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: What was the "Cause" of the Civil War?

by Stephanie Sheets - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 5:47 PM

Karen-

I can definitely understand how this is a confusing issue for you. To be honest, I would say it is the most misunderstood and confusing issue of the whole Civil War. It can be said that there are two sides to every story, and I think there are way more than two sides to this story. There are several ways I think we can look at the question of motives and form an opinion of what "really" caused the war. Also, we have to remember that since we weren't there (and even if we were), there's really no way we could ever full understand the cause of something so tragic.

To begin, we could put the past into perspective by relating it to something culturally relevant for us. Think back to the last 11 years or so, and the issues surrounding the War in Iraq. While the generally agreed upon cause of invasion is "terrorism", this is not actually and answer. The laundry list of stories we've heard on the matter range from disappearing WMD's and terror cells to oil control and finishing a father's war.

The Civil War began over 150 years ago. Can we even imagine what opinion's they'll have about our war in 150 years? Understanding the gap in perspective, we can then begin to sort out what the facts seem to tell us.

Was the war about slavery? I'm sure it was for some. To the southern owners of great cotton and tobacco plantations, the debate over slavery was a matter of livelihood and a loss of "property". The wealthy certainly tend to influence the judgment of politicians. Many southerners didn't own slaves, though. In fact, I believe most didn't. How could the issue be about slavery for them? I think that this relates really closely to the current gun debates. I am a non-gun-owning citizen. I still stand firmly behind gun rights and find it despicable that we may be on the verge of a huge breach of the second amendment. Perhaps southern citizens felt the same way about slaves. This was a time when slaves in the south were considered more like farm equipment than people. (That may be horrifying to think of now, but we have to be

willing to understand historical context.) To southerners who took arms for the Confederacy, the issue may have sounded something like this:

The country elected a radical official who doesn't agree with the use of our "farm equipment", and (though he hasn't said so, outright) is probably going to take them away from us. That would be taking away our livelihood. They can't do that. That's against free enterprise and all that America stands for. This is no longer the democracy we believed it to be. We have to secede before they take away everything we've worked for our whole lives... (and so on).

All politicians had to do to maximize on this opportunity was continue building hysteria until southerners fell in line. At this point, this has all come from my interpretation, but using what I know about Civil War history, the text resources, and humanity, I can imagine it's not far off. Going back to the gun issue: I know many people who have never had a need or want to own a weapon in all of their life, but knowing it is now threatened are going out and stocking up on weapons and ammunition. One sporting goods store in my hometown (one of the largest in the nation) sold 3 years' worth of ammunition in the 3 weeks following President Obama's speech alluding to future gun restrictions. People behave rashly in the face of suspected oppression.

Finally, for an understanding of the northern perspective, I would look to that second review of Ken Burns' *The Civil War* in this week's forum assignment:

"And so, as Lincoln said, the war came. Was it a crusade against slavery as Ken Burns wants us to believe? We need to remember that the Emancipation Proclamation came midway through the war, not at its inception, and that many Union soldiers initially marched off to battle assuming that their mission was to restore the Union rather than free the slaves. When Republicans in Congress and President Lincoln took measures to free slaves, they did so in part as a means of aiding the Union military cause. By sidestepping the matter of northern racism before and during the war, by portraying the northern people as more liberal on racial matters than they really were, the film squanders an opportunity [...] For had moral outrage over slavery truly caused the war, as Burns has it, it would have translated into a sustained and articulated commitment to racial equality and civil rights for African Americans after the war" (page 47).

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: What was the "Cause" of the Civil War?



by Karen Jenkins - Friday, January 18, 2013, 7:09 PM

thanks for clearing all that up.. you did a good job..considering how confusing it can get. I enjoyed your post in your description of the cause of the civil war and what side was doing what. I really appreciate your help in it. thanks Karen

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



An Opinion of Ken Burns

by Stephanie Sheets - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 4:53 PM

I did find myself really admiring Ken Burns in the video clip. I made my first documentary on the Battle of Wilsons Creek (a Civil War battle) and employed a similar process and many of the same filming/narrating techniques he utilized in this series. I especially enjoyed how he goes about selecting his resources. He stated in the clip that he's not sure where each piece will fit, or even if it will be used in the piece, but you film it all and see how it fits together. As a documentary fanatic, I believe the best pieces come together that way. This clip also portrays him as such a likeable and relatable person, that I find myself "liking" him as a character as well.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Documentary: Art or Science?

by Stephanie Sheets - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 5:00 PM

After reading the first article, I do feel the same respect for Ken Burns as a documentarian that I felt before. I think that each documentarian has the right to steer their creations in the direction they feel best conveys their feelings and thoughts on a matter. No matter what the opinion on a documentary is, I think we can all agree it's an expression of someone's art. It seems the most significant critic complaint in the first article was:

"The Civil War was "safe, risk-free, upbeat and reassuring," Litwack added. It portrayed the "essential passivity of blacks and women," "perpetuated the notion that 'This need not have happened at all,'" and "celebrated the reconciliation of North and South while ignoring the brutal and violent racial repression on which that reconciliation rested."

Just because the critics didn't appreciate his perspective on the matters doesn't mean he is any less ethical of a filmmaker. The most significant aspect of learning history is hearing many different sources of evidence, and then forming some emotional reaction to what you have learned. In the matter of "historical fact" (often considered an oxymoron) I think we must look at the issue as a matter of art or interpretation, rather than science and black-and-white perspectives. It cannot be helped that he looks at history through the "lens" of his opinions and that as we watch the series we are also peeking through that lens.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Documentary: Art or Science?

by Jennifer Faiman - Thursday, January 17, 2013, 4:03 PM

I feel that there is a VERY thin line between a documentary and an opinion piece. I felt that Burns walked this line with grace. He does obviously have very strong opinions

about the Civil War. This is to be expected, most documentary film makes have a passion for their subject. It is nearly impossible for one person/group of people to work on this type of film without leaning in one direction or the other.

I personally do not have issues with this type "bias". Burns still includes facts about the war, the battles, the cause, etc. You could ask a dozen different historians about what caused the Civil War in America and they will all give you a different answer, some may be very similar... but there will be differences.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Documentary: Art or Science?

by Jennifer King - Friday, January 18, 2013, 11:57 AM

Jennifer,

I agree with you, there is a very thin line between a film which is supposed to be a documentary and one which is based merely on the creator's opinion. Generally one expects a documentary to be educational and based on fact. I also agree that Burns walked the line quite well. While this is just the first episode, I don't see him leaning too far one way or the other. He included facts about both the Union and the South and does not paint one side in a better light than the other.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Documentary: Art or Science?

by Stephanie Sheets - Friday, January 18, 2013, 12:54 PM

To be honest, Jennifer, I'm not sure I even believe there is really a line between a documentary and an opinion piece. I'll grant that there are many different forms of documentary, but consider the works of some of the most famous American documentarians, like Michael Moore. I'll admit I'm not a huge fan, but his works (which have received both critical acclaim and disapproval) are thoroughly doused in opinion.

That is an extreme example, but I think opinion is the lens through which each of us view life, history, and ideas. I think it is unreasonable to ask any documentarian to remove his opinion from a work, because it simply cannot be done. There is no such thing as being without opinions. We might seek an unbiased approach at historical film-making, and a work that expresses both sides of an issue, but it is up to the whims of the filmmaker to produce a piece that meets the needs of both himself and his audience as he sees fit.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Documentary: Art or Science?**

by Karen Jenkins - Saturday, January 19, 2013, 7:52 PM

I am not sure if Mr. Burns is really stating his personal opinions but it would occur to one the subject matter of slavery that he leans towards in a more biased manner that he would be siding with the north. I still say he did a wonderful job of enertaining his audience while attempting to tackle a very controversial subject of what the cause of the war was. A bit confusing to me to say the least but I enjoyed the way he theatrically put it together and it made it come to life a bit more than a standard boring textbook manner or old reel to reel film would.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Documentary: Art or Science?**

by Whitney Stevens - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 11:53 AM

Hi Stephanie, Jennifer & Karen,

You all have insteresting points, I especially like the line about the possibility of a documentary ever being able to have an unopinionated view. I mean you have to get the information, from a source, that source had to have some bias- even if they tried there hardest not to and that source had to recieve their information from someone or something that also had to of had a bias. In regards to this film, I believe its fair and lacks inputting a bias with the facts. Yet, it's impossible to completely disregard all facts. The important part is, are the facts, the statistics, the quotes, the people all correct? And is it explained with the least amount of bias? Perhaps not, but I'd say it's pretty darn close.

I visited a small town in Georgia, Chickamauga, near the border of Tennessee yesterday. One of the stops included the mansion of Gordan-Lee, a congress man at the time of the civil war. A sign talked about the owners and the son who had a personal companion/personal slave, who fought for the confederate's. I found this interesting, because he went to war in 1861 a year after the war had started. Yet the video said in the begining they were very strict on not allowing blacks to fight- even the Union was.

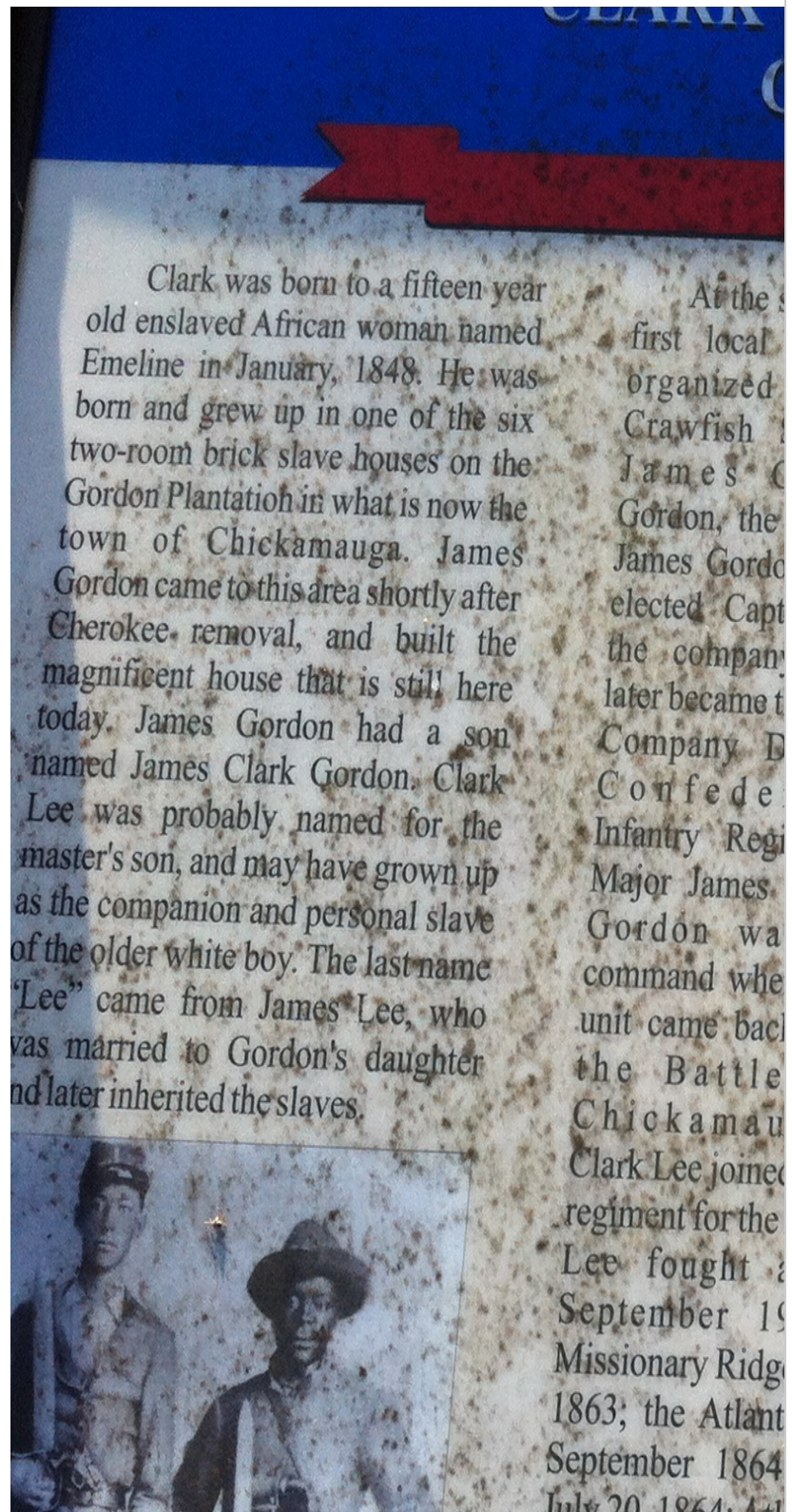
Whitney

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete |
Reply**Re: Documentary: Art or Science? Photograph**

by Whitney Stevens - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 11:59 AM



Sum of ratings:2 (1)
[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) |
[Delete](#) | [Reply](#)


The Many Causes of the Civil War..

by Karen Jenkins - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 4:31 PM

Wow that is incredibly interesting and very cool to read about this man Whitney. thanks for sharing this. I have been reading alot in the book and I find it interesting that the Civil War effected everyone in the USA. Although there were the northwestern states and the far northern states that didnt seem to get to involved in the war, It in my opinion was very controversial. Even in the South not all Southern States were slave states. The upper Southern states were union of all things. The deeper south was always contending with them to come into the confederate states. Everyone in this war seem to have some reason be it polictical, militarial or that of commerce trade acts, slavery to fight over it all. If it was the abolishinist it was the states secession. No wander why I got a little confused at first. Two Presidents, Two

different armies, people stealing, pilaging farms, federal forts, arsenals and common areas fighting for there rights and there lands even before the secession or war was in full force. Slavery issues seem so minut compared to all the issues for the Cause of the War. Very Fascinating and Informative the video and book is. I enjoy this class alot.

Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#)
[Delete](#) | [Reply](#)
**Re: Documentary: Art or Science?**

by Micah Young - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 8:06 PM

Wow. I was in Medford yesterday, and that seemed like a significant trip to me. Thanks for the picture and history; it is very relevant. While reading history from this era and about the war I always wonder what the lives of these men were like when they returned to their homes. It is interesting to learn about Clark Lee who, though he was a slave in the South, chose to fight for the Confederacy. I knew that blacks fought for both sides during the war, but I think this short story is the first that I have read outlining the life of one who fought for the South. A couple of post war aspects of his life seemed unexpected to me. From what I had read about reconstruction and the continued prejudice against blacks, I thought that it was difficult for a freed slave to find good work, especially where he or she would be paid very well. However, it sounds like Lee found work when he returned home, and I'm glad that he did. Also, this is the first time that I heard about the Confederate Military Pension. I found this explanation about he pension's guidelines on the Tennessee state website: "In 1891 Tennessee established the Board of Pension Examiners to determine if Confederate veterans applying for pensions were eligible. Eligibility requirements included an inability to support oneself, honorable separation from the service, and residence in the state for one year prior to application." It seems like these documents are currently used a lot for genealogies, however, I still have not discovered much about the history of the pensions beyond this site. Thanks again for the picture.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#)
[Delete](#) | [Reply](#)
First Burns Video



by Courtney Merrell - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 5:51 PM

I can tell already I'm going to love this class. Everyone is taught the mere basics about the Civil War in grade school, but I love how much detail the readings and the documentaries pair together. One fact that interested me was that General Lee was actually a part of the regular army until his state, Virginia, decided to secede. He decided that he couldn't fight against his native state and so he resigned. Shortly after, the mayor of Virginia asked him to become commander of Virginia's militia. And the rest is obviously history. I also enjoyed how Burns uses a lot of numbers and quotes. I didn't know the magnitude of the battle, nor how many Americans fought and died. It was really intriguing and I am ready to watch the next episode!

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: First Burns Video

by Robert Stimpson - Saturday, January 19, 2013, 6:14 PM

I feel the same way you do about this class. We all know the basics of the war, but getting into the little facts that really make history interesting is what I am really looking forward to in this class.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: First Burns Video

by Karen Jenkins - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 4:41 PM

I like your posts.. I also enjoyed reading about General Lee and how he was one of Lincoln's best soldiers. Of my favorite characters of the war I would have to say would be a few of the Generals. General Thomas Stonewall Jackson and some of those that served under him. There were some very good soldiers and generals that served in this war and made it quite interesting. I have seen many videos in regard to this war but none like this one that is by Ken Burns.. very descriptive along with the book.
Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings: (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Burns "The Cause" episode

by Whitney Stevens - Wednesday, January 16, 2013, 9:11 PM

Hello everyone,

I've spent time reading the posts and have grasped a sense that most people relatively

enjoyed the video but as usual there are some complaints. One of the complaints being that it addresses too much about the battles versus the other important topics surrounding the conflicts at the time, like economic and political issues. However, I actually got a great sense of other information that related to issues on the starting of the civil war and other conflicts going on at the time. The use of quotes throughout the video and the talk of people's diary entries also added a great deal of understanding to the thoughts of the people during this era.

Burns does an excellent job of being objective to both sides, while he explains the confederate beliefs to elements other than slavery, for example how they became broken off from the Union (what events slowly lead to that & then to war). The build up to John Brown's hanging really captured the feeling of the south bringing the slavery "over-board" to a point where as a watcher of this film you knew right then, that the Union had to step in and change something.

I especially enjoyed the quote, "That which is not just is not law" by William Lloyd Garrison. This portrayed the morality and ethics of a growing number in the North as they come to realize the need for "social justice", to stick as a country and to work toward the end of slavery. Although not all northerners were against ending slavery, many thought of the war as saving their government.

Another description of the movie that pulled my interest in, was the description of Jefferson Davis receiving a telegram, stating he'd been elected president of the confederate. His wife described his look as being terrified for his family and great sadness falling over his eyes. I enjoyed this description, so opposite of happiness, because it showed the political figure to be smart and knowing the truths of the events to follow. Perhaps this arose from his previous fighting experience in Mexico.

Another interesting aspect, that I didn't know till watching this video, is the amount of time's Lincoln did work he was not authorized to do. He also won by only having 40% of the vote along with and if a few of his facts are off as the articles/critiques leaned towards pointing out a general idea of the cause of the war was easily portrayed.

Thanks,

Whitney

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Burns "The Cause" episode

by Courtney Merrell - Thursday, January 17, 2013, 12:07 PM

Whitney,

I saw the complaints about the battles as well, but I personally didn't see a lack of other information. I felt Burns gave us a great sense of the time in general, not just the war. So I agree with you, and most in the class that Burns highlighted all the important points while giving us facts about the time, which leading up and during the years of

1861, were the Civil War. Another point that you bring up would be Burn's way of showing us both sides. He jumps back and forth throughout the video, telling us not only the white soldiers point of view but the wives, common folk and even the slaves. He is truely showcasing everyone's side and the mood of that time. I think seeing the feelings and thoughts of the people in that day is what makes this documentary so addictive.

Another part of your discussion that catches my interest is the aspect of Lincoln. Throughout my whole life I have been told that Lincoln was the greatest president. But it seems that throughout this film, the people of his time constantly doubt his abilities to perform. Lincoln only winning with 40% shows that and I think we'll see a lot more hostility towards him, as the battles continue, from his own congressmen and generals as more blood shed occurs. I always knew that the Civil War was about the solidarity of America, but it was interesting to see what each demographic saw the war as. The Union wanted to abolish slavery, the Confederates did not. Therefor they secede, thinking Lincoln wants to control every man, but in reality just wants to stick to the Declaration of Independance in that EVERY man has a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. War then breaks out. The slaves of the south now see the war as freedom, for if the Union wins, slavery will be abolished throughout all of the Unites States. And even though Lincoln states that this war is not about slavery, it is about seccesion, the heart of the war is slavery itself and the failure of the southern states to want to give it up. I found that whole concept very interesting.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Burns "The Cause" episode



by Whitney Stevens - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 11:37 AM

Hi Courtney,

The aspect of Lincoln not being a perfect man, shocks all of us who have believed the build up of him being this extremely fair and ethical man. However, perhaps he still is, but realized that he had disobey the law at specific times to address the moral and ethical disaster our country was going through. I also agree with you, that's its likely we will hear more critizing news about Lincoln. Recently, the movie Lincoln was featured in theaters and although it relates to a completely different topic, the movie showed the deal makings- that we try and pretend don't occur in politics. Although, they clearly have been existing since the "early" days of our country.

Whitney

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply

**Re: Burns "The Cause" episode**

by Micah Young - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 9:28 PM

Hi Whitney. I also like the quote from William Lloyd Garrison and think it is a good example of the abolitionist debate at the time. I watched the movie "Lincoln" several weeks ago with my dad. He had wanted to see it since it came out and by the end he was less enchanted; I think that's what happens when someone starts off with too much excitement for an historical film documenting the passage of a constitutional amendment. The movie showed congress debating natural law and the republicans defending the proposed 13th amendment. Those debates, and the scenes discussing justice, slavery, and the constitution were my favorite parts of the movie.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Still Confident**

by Julie Skinner - Friday, January 18, 2013, 2:46 PM

While I found the two articles for this forum very interesting, I don't think they have raised any real concerns for me about the validity or the relevance of the information that Ken Burns included in his film series.

I appreciate that there are serious flaws and holes in the information included and suggest that, as students, we have a responsibility to not take everything we see at face value. One must be sure and weigh the facts and endeavor to stay informed of all sides of an issue. That being said, I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to read the opinions of experts in the field of history regarding Burns' films. Still, I found the first installment of the video series quite enjoyable and easy to watch. I definitely learned about the topic and am better informed for watching it. In no way do I feel that the information I obtained was intentionally false or misleading. I do agree that it has limitations as a teaching device and that it should be augmented with additional materials and points of view, but if Burns' purpose was to educate the masses, then he has definitely achieved his goal. And hasn't he addressed the issue of accuracy by marketing the tapes with related instructional materials, (Teacher's Instruction Manual and handouts)?

As I stated above, I found the articles interesting and informative. I appreciated that they presented an additional point of view and critique of the information, but they haven't done much to sway my confidence in the information that will be presented in Burns' series.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**"The Cause" First Impression**

by Robert Stimpson - Saturday, January 19, 2013, 6:10 PM

Just after watching the first episode in the Civil War series we are assigned I felt that it is

going to be a great supplement for the book we have. While the book seems to focus more on politics and some military tactics, the videos seem like they are going to focus straight on military and the soldiers' testaments of the war. Being a beginner to Civil War history, but loving to learn about history, especially our American history, I learned a ton from this film and cannot wait to continue watching and reading throughout the term.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: "The Cause" First Impression

by Jennifer Faiman - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 3:38 PM

I agree with you Robert, the video and book seem to be a great pairing. Both have the basic facts included and they each take a different approach to teaching the history. Another book about the civil war that I purchased a few years ago that I really enjoy is called *Eyewitness to the Civil War* by Kagan Hyslop. This book includes a lot of photographs and a lot of first hand accounts to the battles and life during the Civil War. If you are interested in learning more about these topics you should check it out.

I like that we are using sources that look at different areas of the war from different angles. I think that because there are so many different stories that have/can be told about this tragic and fantastic time in our country's history, it is important that we have more than one perspective to consider.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: "The Cause" First Impression

by Jacob Pusey - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 7:33 PM

Regarding the book and the movies being wonderful compliments to each other, I agree with you both. I appreciated the reviews that gave the positives and negatives for the both as well. It sounds like where one may fall short the other will cover the information. So far I have found the McPherson book to be a fairly easy read despite the thickness and the first episode of the series was excellent and left me wanting to jump ahead. Also, thanks for the recommendation of *Eyewitness to the Civil War* Jennifer. I am always looking for more resources and as you said, you really cannot have too many perspectives especially with a topic of this magnitude.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



How the Series was Made

by Micah Young - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 9:30 PM

I am glad that we got to see a short description about how the documentary was made. This helps me imagine Ken Burns and his team develop the series behind the scenes while

looking for film footage and music and debating what material to use. My favorite part of the short film was early on when it showed about seven people in a small room who appeared to be debating either the film's material or how the narrative of the story would be portrayed. The fighting comes off of the field to indoors where Burns admits to "huge battles" in the editing room and one woman's critique is recorded "but the fact is, he's invested in a certain interpretation of the history, I mean, that's what his career is." To this another woman offers what seems to be a rebuttal before the film moves on to another scene. In this week's forum questions still exist about the type of historical perspective that is manifest through the series. Is the film documenting the facts of history? Is the documentary opinion and history as seen by Ken Burns? Is it possible to make an objective historical documentary free from the opinion of it's producer? I think that the very short example of the editing debates displays part of the process that the film's historical development went through. And, if we can take Burns at his word than we will understand the way the series was developed through his personal presentment:

"We approach our projects with ignorance and curiosity. This allows us to have a process of discovery. We don't know until it's over. We have certain biases and sympathies which we try to expose to ourselves and we allow the consultants, mostly academic historians, to help us root them out. At the same time we have a kind of joyful relationship to the process of learning something new."

To answer the forum question directly, I did find myself liking the message presented in the video clip and I guess that admiration is a fair term to use for Burns. Of course there is opinion in the series, especially since it is put together as a narrative and someone had to decide how to tell the story. That doesn't, though, discount the objective history that is described by the series. I read one comment mentioning debate about whether or not history can be termed objective; I'm curious for more input about what is meant by that because, with a disposition to defend the few and fading places the label can be used, I think that history can be termed objective.

My favorite image from the film was the first one where Burns is manually adjusting the lens on his video camera. The camera reminded me of the era (not so long ago) in which the film was made.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

(Introducing Ken Burns) Next >

You are logged in as Joe Escobar (Logout)

 Moodle Docs for this page

