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**Creative License and Historical Accuracy**

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, January 20, 2013, 7:09 PM

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.

This topic may seem like a simple one, but it is not. The issue cannot be well analyzed in a few sentences. Be sure to think carefully about what is being asked. Afterall, this is a HISTORY class.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

As in Forum 1, put something descriptive in the subject line of your post. 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](#)**America's love for Happy Endings**

by Whitney Stevens - Monday, January 21, 2013, 6:51 PM

Hello Everyone,

The first time I heard the letter Ballou wrote to his wife during episode 1 "The Cause", before knowing we'd be doing a post, I was sitting in bed watching the documentary on my laptop. I turned to my boyfriend, who was also listening and jokingly asked, "ah, you would write a letter like that, if you were drafted to war too, right?" And I believe most woman would agree, the letter was beautiful, romantic and I am sure any wife would be happy to hear this. Yet, at the end of the letter, the narrative of the documentary cuts in and tells you "he was killed the first battle of Bull Run" and the first episode ends. Instead of leaving the episode on a happy note, you leave it on a relatively depressing note.

In most cases, humanity loves a happy ending; we don't like to end a show, documentary, movie or book on a bad note. Ken Burns uses this "creative license" to make viewers continue watching the documentary; this creative way of leaving the audience on a sad note- also leaves us craving for more, because we want to reach a "happy ending". I think this was the point of Ken Burns, he made a documentary to inform people but he also needs to make income (as most people do) and he wants people to be informed and see all of the work he did in the documentary. To do so, he needs a way to keep the viewers intrigued in his documentary.

However, entertaining and accuracy don't always mix well. I feel I was misguided, by not knowing the facts about the arrival of the letter. Burns used photos of couples holding hands, photos of woman's scarves and hats and later on scenery photos to aide in the reading of the letter, to grasp an idea of what the wife may of felt or the husband felt when writing the letter. This gave way to thinking the letter soon arrived to the wife and felt the sentiment of her husband. He also talks of Future years and a photo of a family with two boys appears which adds to the sadness- knowing his sons never knew (until well after the war) the love he had for them and his longing to see them grow up. Ken Burns could have explained the letter wasn't sent till after the war to illustrate the disorganization of the war. This would of guided us in to the next episode, "A Very Bloody Affair" as they talk about the disorganization of the Battle of Shiloh. Episode two also discusses the disorganization of the soldiers and people not getting water to the wounded soldiers the next day. The second episode goes on to illustrate the countries lack of knowing how to handle the aftermath of a battle, with the bodies, the wounded, the personal items and to not drink the mud- that was saturated in blood of soldiers at the Shiloh battle. My point being, Burns would have a great way to ease in to the second episode in to the Shiloh battle if he had mentioned how the letter was not received till after the war in his personal suitcase. This would of allowed him to go in to the description, of other unorganized aspects of the beginnings of the civil war, with Shiloh battle being the most fatal example of this.

Whitney

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: America's love for Happy Endings

by Karen Jenkins - Tuesday, January 22, 2013, 11:25 PM

I never realized that the letter that Ballou wrote to his wife was inaccurate until you spoke of it here. Communications of the Antebellum Era were definitely lacking. Most folks didnot recieve there letters that were sent until weeks to months later. The Pony Express was in full force then and alot of the mail was carried by them and the Stagecoaches until the invention of the Trans Continental Railroad and the Telegraph. Alot of mis guided communications and misinterpertations of communications took place in the midst of the war. No telephone or internet or any way to really know if your letter was recieved was alot of the reasons that families never got to see each other for months or years and often would not hear from them until after the war was long over. Many times you didnt know if your family member was dead or still alive. It

is common practice still to this day in the military to write a letter that is to be given upon your death to your family members. But in that era it was commonplace for the soldier to write many letters as the video states and not receive hardly any from home. In the video "A Bloody Affair" video part of Grant being relieved of his duty, I was fascinated by the fact that Gen Grant welcomed the relief. I did not know he had literally "quit" or tried to and then was put in second in command of another's post.. I also would like to note how incredibly unconcerned, lazy and altogether a "loser" of a lazy General McClellan is portrayed as being. Able to put together huge well sanctioned armies but seems to be a "chicken" when it comes to incorporating battle against his adversaries and The Confederate Armies. I would say Burns did a good job of portraying the Battles that General Grant fought fairly well. I enjoy the narratives by Shelby Foote also. Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re: America's love for Happy Endings

by Whitney Stevens - Friday, January 25, 2013, 10:27 AM

George McClellan remained a heroic figure in my history classes through out history, until this document I'd been in the dark about his lack of motivation. Not to say he isn't an important person, but to know his flaws had quite an effect on the country is new information to me. I'm slightly upset about how my teachers never took the time to point this out!

In our first assignment, we got to discuss concerns we have or are worried about in history. And I remember discussing my worries about people being brought out as brilliant and wonderful human beings, when really they weren't. The fact that I never had a clue of people's dislikes for McClellan, makes me feel cheated out of part of the story part understanding of outcomes of some battles.

Whitney Stevens

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Honorable manhood

by Meleah Drews - Tuesday, January 22, 2013, 2:21 PM

The section of the film "Honorable Manhood" has a powerful effect with the reading of Sullivan Ballou's letter and the images of the couples and families. I believe that it is important and proper to remind viewers that the cost of war is not just about the number of soldiers lost. War, any war, leaves an impact on families when sons, brothers, husbands and fathers fail to return to their families and their communities. Or when they return, but they are not the same physically or psychologically as the men they once were.

With that being said, Burns chose to feature this letter out of chronological order to end the

episode with a tearjerker. I think this could have been done differently to either stay within the chronological order of the documentary, or Burns could have created a better section title that states more clearly his intention to demonstrate the personal cost of war. Had the narrator begun the section with a little intro such as, *the losses of 1861 were great on both sides, not just for the armies, but for the families and communities...* and then Burns could follow up with the example of Sullivan Ballou's letter to his wife. The issue of chronological order would not be as much of a sticking point and Burns could retain the artistic characteristic of the film.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Honorable manhood

by Stephanie Sheets - Sunday, January 27, 2013, 5:23 PM

Hi Meleah,

I agree with you that there is a cost to war that is associate with the relationships and emotional connections that can be altered or lost throught the trials of battle. I completely agree that this is a significant aspect of war as a whole, and worth considering its impact. In the case of the Ballou letter, I think the topic was handled poorly.

I am nearly convinced that the way Burns manipulated viewers is belittling to the letter's intentions. He positioned it strategically in the film to leave viewers on an emotional note. He showed pictures completely unrelated to the people in the letter, which leads viewers to imagine these couples are the subject of the letter. The piece was read out of chronological context, with little relevance given to the subjects that surround it in the film, justifying its placement.

I think, therefore, that the letter was used inappropriately. I think it could have been presented in a more respectful and less manipulative manner. Knowing how it was manipulated for the film creates an emotional barrier for me as a viewer to feel the emotional connection with the story that it initially triggered.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Ballou's letter

by Meleah Draws - Tuesday, January 22, 2013, 2:36 PM

My initial response to the letter written by Sullivan Ballou to his wife was what you might imagine any woman who is a sucker for chick-flicks might be. I thought it was beautiful and poetic, talking about patriotism and his love of country, his honor as a man and the love he shared with his wife and children.

I was not concerned with the fact that Burns did not reveal that Ballou's wife did not receive

the letter until the end of the war. I am glad she received it at all, and hope that it brought her comfort even years after his death.

I am concerned however that varying copies of the letter exist. Although I don't know how different the letters are, I am left to wonder if all of the poetic words of love, honor and patriotism were just created as part of the film script.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Ballou's letter

by Ryan Lundberg - Friday, January 25, 2013, 1:42 PM

Meleah,

I think it's interesting that not only are there multiple versions of the letter, but on Wikipedia, you can read a longer version of the letter that was edited quite a bit for the documentary. It seems that long before Ken Burns came along, people were already reinterpreting and influencing the understanding of the Civil War as it actually happened for those involved. This letter kind of symbolizes how historical understanding, in a way, is constructed from real events. I'm sure even the most accurate history books required a little bit of editing to best summarize whatever really happened. And while I think Burns has definitely taken quite a bit of artistic freedom in this documentary, his motives seem honest enough, and the facts he presents have been generally corroborated by our other source, Battle Cry of Freedom.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Ballou's letter

by Meleah Drews - Friday, January 25, 2013, 8:55 PM

Ryan,

I did check it out on Wikipedia earlier this week because I just couldn't let it go. Even though the version on Wikipedia was longer, I believe the edited version presented in the Burns documentary retained the essence of the letter. I also felt reassured because I did not find any additions or embellishments added to the letter presented in the documentary.

As far as historical accuracy, I think that is a fine line for any historian. I imagine doing the research and pouring over so many stories and documents, there are bound to be times when conflicting information surfaces, and the historian (or film director) must do their best to decipher the data and present their findings. Each may come to a slightly different conclusion. I think that that is the nature of recording history. Even if we could travel back in time and interview the people who lived through these times, these battles, and under the different political

leaders, the data we would collect would be incredibly diverse. One person's experience is their truth, but that does not mean it is the only experience or the only truth.

Professor Escobar brought this point about when discussing slavery and slave owners. Not all slaves were treated the same. Not all slave owners beat their slaves or worked them from sun up until sun down. Just because one slave may have been treated fairly well by their slave owner, it should not take away from the experience of one who was treated more harshly, and vice versa. Each person's experience is true for them. That's what makes factual history tricky. It is important to present multiple sides of the issue.

As far as the criticism of Burns not presenting information chronologically, I also am willing to give him a little leeway. The first episode stated that the Civil War was fought on 10,000 fronts. With so much going on throughout the country during the war, it will be necessary to do a little back and forth on the timeline to tell the stories. After watching the second episode, I thought the letter by Sullivan Ballou made a fairly good segway to the second episode. I just think he could have made a clearer introduction to the topic.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Ballou's letter

by Ryan Lundberg - Saturday, January 26, 2013, 12:53 PM

Meleah,

I think you bring up a good point about historical accuracy. It seems like any major event is going to inspire a myriad of experiences and interpretations. And, a historian is probably going to have to edit and summarize in order to write about any major topic. I think it is possible to get the general idea about whatever happened, even if that account has been edited. But if you're reading a book or watching a video, you have to trust that the historian has stayed true to the original events and though editing, has not lost the truth of whatever happened. I think you're right about the Ballou letter. Even though it's been edited, how it's presented in the documentary still captures the essence of it.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Burns' Creative License

by Julie Skinner - Tuesday, January 22, 2013, 7:08 PM

The scene at the end of "Honorable Manhood" in which Ballou is writing to his wife was especially touching to me. I am the wife of a career Marine, and each of the three times

that I have sent him off to war, I knew that he carried a letter with him, next to his heart, the entire time he was gone. I also knew that the only time I would ever receive this letter would be in the event of his death, and that it would arrive with his personal effects. This is a time-honored tradition that most military personnel adhere to. I have no idea when this tradition started, but maybe it was a possible response to the very difficulty that is alluded to in this segment. Mail during wartime is unreliable, even in the 20th century! This is most likely more the case with Ballou than that he intentionally kept the letter with his belongings for his wife to receive later. I know that my husbands intentions were that just in case he wasn't able to tell me himself of his feelings when he returned home, his letter would ensure that nothing was left unsaid. Thankfully I never got to read any of the letters!

I think that Burns placement of this scene was rather poignant. The music and the photographs lull the viewer into a melancholy mood. It is peaceful and beautiful and one wants to believe that all will be well with this couple. I think in the back of my mind I knew what was coming. Yes, it would have been better to place it in the correct chronological sequence to avoid confusion and ensure accuracy, but I think it is intended to lead into the next segment. It seems to be placed where it is to act as a hook to get viewers to tune in again. It definitely pulls at the heartstrings!

I personally don't have a problem with Burns' creative license in this case, but I am not a historian. I approach this film series from a different background, someone wanting to learn from it, but also enjoy it as well. As a student of history, I will need to get away from this feeling of just being a spectator, or I will not learn what I need to from this class, but as I am still adjusting, I am able to give Mr. Burns his creative license at this point in time. As we move forward, I assume it will begin to bother me more if there isn't more accuracy in the portrayal of facts.

Honestly, I didn't pay much attention to the scene being out of date sequence until Mr. Escobar brought it to my attention with the Forum 2 introduction. I had to go back and watch a second time in order to understand what had happened. This oversight on my part called to my attention the need for me to pay better attention in the episodes to come to make sure I don't miss something else! That being said, it didn't effect my understanding of chronological events, because I took it more as "fluff", a way to cement the fact that communication during this time was unreliable at best and that there was great emotional upheaval among the people involved no matter what side of the conflict they were on.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Burns' Creative License



by Whitney Stevens - Thursday, January 24, 2013, 4:22 PM

Hi Julie,

I was immediately intrigued by your posts as you talk and discuss your personal situation and understanding of war and letter. I wasn't informed that you can't receive

mail from the solidiers during the war- unless it was mail that they were killed in battle.

I wasn't upset about the letter being out of chronological order, however I have to agree with you- if the movie keeps having historical events out of order- it will start to get frustrating. According to articles and what Mr. Escobar said before we wrote this post, it can be expected that other aspects of this documentary will be out of chronological order. Yet, I remain ok with minor events being out of order by a little- it's more of a issue when they misguide a bigger aspect of the civil war, because then I feel like I'm not learning the correct facts.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Burns' Creative License

by Kirk Nikas - Sunday, January 27, 2013, 9:25 PM

Julie,

I completely agree with you, up there in parapragh No. 2 (of your innitial post), where you state the reason for the letter coming at the end of the show was to promote the having been watched succession of the series as a whole. Without some "hook", there is no reason for someone to tune in again for the next viewing, something particularly interesting must draw the viewers attention over the gap and into the new installment. Creative license of Burns' aside.

-Kirk Nikas

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Historical Accuracy in regard to Slavery Issues

by Karen Jenkins - Tuesday, January 22, 2013, 11:11 PM

As I have been reading through the book, finished watching the second video.. I now have gathered a more in depth realization as to how factual and historical the issue on Slavery was in the slave holding states. I have always thought of the Civil War's Cause to be that of the Slave trade act ever since high school history class. While studying the brutality of it from history books, I have now come to the realization that not all Slave owners were brutal and tortorous. I feel that Mr. Burns does miss a few historical facts in his creation of this documentary. Although he had to weave together alot of factual information and creatively make it interesting and theatrical.. he should have stated the true facts as a well known historian. It would seem that he was a bit biased in stating his ideas towards what a slave's life entailed. In what the slave did and wore. Most slaves were labourous on farms, factories or in the mansions of the Plantations they lived upon. I am not a historian but am learning a whole lot about the misperceptions and misconceptions about the causes of this bloody battle. Although it is hard to ignore how good the videos are in weaving the facts together it would be nice if he had not missed some very important historical facts and

stated that the war was not about slavery. A huge majority of Southerners never owned slaves. Before the War in 1861, the north had abolished slavery in most all of its states. The free states however did allow slavery in there states but alot of them were non slave owners. I have to wonder if Mr. Burns noticed his faults in not stating true historical facts or dates within the video series. Mr. McPherson was noted as being one of his partners in bringing about alot of the historical facts..both seem to be a bit biased in there creative opinions... What do u fellow classmates think of the way he weaves the story with incorrect facts as the critics have noted in there reviews? Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Historical Accuracy in regard to Slavery Issues



by Meleah Drews - Friday, January 25, 2013, 9:35 PM

I think that it is still common to present slavery in the manner in which Ken Burns did in his video. He is not the only one to present a one sided approach viewing all slave owners as cruel and brutal thugs, and all slaves eager to escape. This same picture was painted on the Scholastic website where we are to study the map. If you click on the tab "begin the journey" and click around each page, you hear stories of slaves, all of whom were mistreated. The stories of slaves who had it better were not presented at all, nor was it mentioned the idea of "relative slavery".

works cited:

www.teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground_railroad/map.htm

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Historical Accuracy in regard to Slavery Issues



by Karen Jenkins - Saturday, January 26, 2013, 1:09 PM

Yes I did notice this. I think that history has painted a grim past of the history of slavery for it is so cruel to begin with. But a lot of the slaves were not beaten or tortured as the slave owners had to keep there production up on there farms and were responsible for the care of there slaves. Many of the slave owners gave there slaves good care, clothes, food, medical care. Especially those that were house slaves or worked in factories or manufacturing. There were many though that did run away to freedom long before the war and secession were enforce. The underground railroad and the illegalization in the northern states due to Protestant religious beliefs and the President Lincoln stating that it was unconstitutional I believe helped the slaves. The brutal slave owners were the ones whom lost alot in production from there cruel tortourous treatments of the slaves. I enjoy the scholastic site but must say it also is biased in opinion based theories. Good post Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Inspired By True Events**

by Ryan Lundberg - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 12:13 PM

I'm a sucker for a good story. Maybe that's why I'm willing to be a little more forgiving of Ken Burns' creative license than I should be. Ideally, history should be an objective presentation of events exactly as they happened. But good luck achieving that ideal. I doubt Shakespeare himself could have captured the experience of Bull Run by utilizing only the written word.

Pictures, video, narration, they all can approximate an event, some more accurately than others, but there is no substitute for experiencing something firsthand. And even a single, personal experience couldn't possibly encompass the mind numbing chaos of a Civil War battlefield. Everyone involved had different perspectives.

That said, I think a historical presentation can be judged as more, or less accurate, and there's no doubt that Burns has displayed quite a bit of narrative freedom. But I think that's what he's going for; a narrative. A story to make sense of the near infinite events and interpretations associated with the Civil War. He's given meaning, perhaps his own, to America's bloodiest conflict.

And I think that's a perfectly human thing to do. Epic floods didn't just happen in the ancient world after all, it had to be the wrath of the Gods. People try to make sense of events by structuring a meaningful narrative.

It's not exactly accurate history though, and that's the source of a bigger problem I'm seeing with Burns documentary. I think the narrative location of Sullivan Ballou's letter perfectly summed up the personal cost of the war as Burns presented it in the first episode. It's a great story, a great idea, and tear-jerkingly meaningful. But the problem is that it's not entirely accurate, and somewhat disingenuous.

Part of the reason is because it seems like Burns is trying to present an authoritative historical understanding of the Civil War. This is the way it happened. There's not an instance where he indicates he's taken creative license, or that there might be other, more accurate interpretations of the events he presents. Maybe it would have ruined the credibility of the series, but it feels like he should have used the classic Hollywood title card that gives myth makers an excuse to run wild. "Inspired by true events."

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

[Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Inspired By True Events**

by Whitney Stevens - Thursday, January 24, 2013, 4:30 PM

Hi Ryan,

I absolutely love what you pointed out, "Burns is trying to present an authoritative historical understanding of the Civil War. This is the way it happened", it's as if he wants to give the documentary an authentic view, something different than the other documentaries. Well, I'm sure most people set out for that, yet, he really wants to give the viewers an authentic, new and more intriguing way of understanding the civil war. Perhaps that's more than half the reason Ken Burns is well known for his documentaries. On the flip side, he does lose credibility- as you also made note of. And yes, "Inspired by true events" is always a questionable statement to make at the end of story, movie, etc- but Hollywood sure does love it! Great post!

Whitney

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Inspired By True Events

by Karen Jenkins - Friday, January 25, 2013, 10:00 PM

I would have to agree with you on some very good points that you have made. I tend to side with Mr. Burns as he is a director of a film first of all and then he has to weave historical factual information of the era into a documentary that captures the audience attention. I am sure it was an incredible difficult task. One must remember that he visited several historical museums and libraries and places of the Civil War's occurrences. It was a very chaotic war, everyone had some excuse or another or none at all to kill, mame, steal and pilage from each other. Even the Politician partook in dishonest behaviors. Everyone fighting over their own beliefs of what they felt the rights of the states and freedom was, or how right or wrong the economical factions of slavery and the rights of what the constitution stated. It is very interesting to note that we as Americans are very contradicting when slavery was illegal in the northern states but many still practiced it even our own presidents. On one hand we fight for the Rights of the States, and on the other we fight to free the slaves and the oppressions of it. So many controversial issues within a matter of five years time is very hard to compress into nine videos and not make it mundane or worse yet even more controversial. History is just that.. a thing of the past that we try to recall and put into an order one can understand and grasp. How could Mr. Burns or Mr. McPherson be exactly to the historical faction when they did not live in that era. They can tell the story to the best of their ability stick to their facts that are known and state them in a way that everyday citizen can grasp. Great point you make when you discuss his creative license and his authoritative stand points on the historical facts. Although he mistakes a few facts it is only human to error. Look at War.. it is of GREAT human error.. for it may solve very little issues that get blown waaay out of control and it costs humans dearly. .. Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Burns, Ken Burns... License to embellish?

by Stephanie Sheets - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 6:06 PM

After reading the Forum 1 Feedback post in the [Announcements](#) forum, I began to reconsider my perspectives on creative license in historical documentaries. It became very apparent as I read Mr. Escobar's statements that I had fallen victim to emotional appeals (even in the very brief introduction video) that gave Burns more leeway in my opinions than the historians who were critical of his work. I do tend to believe that if we had been given some personal insight into their careers and motives, we might find more redeeming qualities in the writings of these historians. As humans, we are creatures of emotion and that can sometimes cloud judgment. I have since decided to alter my stance on Burns' creative license in his documentary procedure.

Reading the information in this forum, I have realized that there is little room creativity when one is relaying history. I begin to wonder if Burns is walking a fine line between historical accuracy and historical fiction when he embellishes and rearranges truth to meet his audience's emotional needs. When one presents a work as a non-fiction work of fact and historical accuracy, it should serve as such. It is quite challenging for those of us new to historical learning to keep up with and understand accurately the history of this war when presented in such an over-edited fashion.

In this specific case of Major Sullivan Ballou's letter to his wife, I feel a little betrayed as a member of Burns' intended audience. I am interested in history, true history, and feel that I have been taken advantage of. The story line presented in this documentary series is emotionally challenging. The fact that Burns is manipulating time and fact to place emotional significance on particular elements is almost "fighting dirty". This letter would have had a significantly different impact on me if I had known the truth about its journey. Both when and how it was received by his wife, along with the obvious omission of it possibly not being the original text are all factors that should have been given along with the text of the letter itself.

I think it was no accident that Burns filtered images of pain and loss with those of love throughout the reading of the letter. The subconscious messages were clear and effective. It was also intentional that this piece was placed out of context. All great filmmakers know to "leave them wanting more," and he did just that. Burns intentionally placed this segment out of chronological order to make this episode a more pleasing introduction to the series, and to elicit higher viewership at the expense of historical accuracy.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Burns, Ken Burns... License to embellish?

by Julie Skinner - Thursday, January 24, 2013, 9:51 AM

Stephanie-

I found your post to be exceptionally interesting. I am definitely of the same mind as you about the subject of creative license. I agree wholeheartedly with your second paragraph. There is very little room for creativity when one is trying to learn about history, but I don't think Burns really had a choice to present the information differently. He must have truly been walking a very fine line and I'm sure some of the decisions about content were extremely difficult. The bottom line is that he is trying to sell a series to an interested but largely uninformed audience and needs the project to be successful if he hopes to further his career. I guess that is why I have some forgiveness for the Ballou scene being out of date order and emotional. Like you said, he truly left us wanting more!

Julie

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Creative License in documentaries

by Jennifer Faiman - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 7:59 PM

I want to clarify my postings from last week a little. I stated last week that "I feel that there is a VERY thin line between a documentary and an [opinion] peice. I felt that Burns walked this line with grace." I stand by this statement for the most part for last weeks video and forum purposes.

In the posting that Professor Escobar did for last weeks forum 1 he mentioned an article(s) that talked about the historic inaccuracies of Burns' videos and even pointed out a date that he got wrong... somehow I missed this article. Can someone please tell me where to find it so that I can read it?

The reason that I say that Burns did a good job of walking this line is because it is obvious that burns was trying to send his message through the documentary or at least the first video. He did however have a lot of facts and some qualified historians speaking in the video providing information.

After watching more of the documentary I feel that Burns was more focused on telling a story rather than truly creating a 100% accurate documentary. While it is important to use images/sounds and stories to keep the audience interested, you cannot focus only on these aspects and forget to cover all of the facts or get the facts wrong, as according to historians he apparently did.

I believe that there is an area for documentarians to have creative/artistic freedoms. These freedoms do not present themselves in the facts of the topic. These freedoms are in the process of creating the documentary. *How* will the documentary be filmed? What techniques will be used? What music and images will be used? And what, if any, stories will be used to help support the facts or entertain the audience? Also for many documentarians there is a message that they are attempting to convey... Michael Moore is a perfect example of this. He has won countless awards for his documentaries that more often than not have a political or personal agenda and are very biased. I am not saying that the films

he has made are not accurate or that people should not watch them, I am saying that his documentaries are usually very one-sided and should viewed as such and not a say-all end-all for the topics.

According to Merriam-webster.com

“Fact-based film that depicts actual events and persons. Documentaries can deal with scientific or educational topics, can be a form of journalism or social commentary, or can be a conduit for propaganda or personal expression. The term was first coined by Scottish-born filmmaker John Grierson to describe fact-based features such as Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). Grierson's *Drifters* (1929) and Pare Lorentz's *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) influenced documentary filmmaking in the 1930s. During the World War II era documentary filmmaking was a valuable propaganda tool used by all sides. Leni Riefenstahl contributed to the Nazi propaganda efforts in the 1930s; the U.S. made films such as Frank Capra's series *Why We Fight* (1942–45); and Britain released *London Can Take It* (1940). Cinéma vérité documentaries, which gained notoriety in the 1960s, emphasized a more informal and intimate relationship between camera and subject. Television became an important medium for documentary films with goals that were more journalistic (such as CBS's *Harvest of Shame* [1960]) and educational (such as Ken Burns's *Civil War* [1990]).” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/documentary>)

I feel that Burns was trying to make a personal connection between the audience and the American Civil War. I think that he should have done a better job at making sure that all the information that he provided is accurate. I still feel that this series of films is an excellent companion to our text. Our text is very fact based and from what I have seen from reviews is accurate more often than not. However, there is not much personal attachment/appeal in the book. The film series pulls us into the people's lives that were experiencing this horrific time in our countries history. I think that when taking a course such as this one, it is important to have a personal connection, or at least feel that you do, to the topic. For me, if I do not feel that I will often get bored with the subject and loose interest.

With all that said, I believe that when you are making a documentary that is intended for educational purposes such as this film series is, it is more important to be historically accurate than it is to express your creative license. As I said before, there is a thin line between a documentary and an opinion piece... or to be more accurate a documentary and a film “based on actual events”. This is not a Hollywood film that is claiming to be based on actual events and then has every detail changed that the writers/producers wanted and embellished the you-know-what out of the original story. This is supposed to be fact and an accurate account of a very important time of our history and needs to be treated as such.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Creative License in documentaries

by Stephanie Sheets - Thursday, January 24, 2013, 5:57 PM

I agree with portions of what you've written in this post. I introduced the Michael Moore example in last week's forum, and I do agree that a documentary made by an

individual to promote their opinions should not be used as a "final word" on the matter. I have begun to wonder this week what the purpose of the Civil War series is.

As we use this film in an educational setting, and because of its connection to PBS, we assume its primary purpose is to be educational. This sort of agenda is best served with historical accuracy and limited embellishment. Since it is evident that we are subject to quite a bit of embellishment, I have to wonder what Burns' intentions were. I did some further investigation.

On the PBS website, I found a page titled "The Film, Past & Present". On this page is a statement written by Ken Burns with the heading "Why I Decided to Make *The Civil War*", I found it very interesting to hear his personal journey to the film and one particular statement stood out to me:

"We wanted to tell the story of the bloodiest war in American history through the voices of the men and women who actually lived through it. And, to the greatest extent possible, we wanted to show the war and the people who experienced it through a medium that was still in its infancy in the 1860s – photography" (<http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/film/>).

It seems to me that Burns' intention was to pull at the emotions of viewers. Not to elicit viewership or to skip the more boring facts, but because his interest in the film was in the human experience. Does this give him license to make outright errors, like the mistaken date? In my opinion, no. Another question, however, becomes more significant in my mind: Are we using this documentary appropriately?

I'm not sure this documentary is fit to be used as an educational material. As a supplementary tool, maybe. Much like watching the film *10 Things I Hate About You* in a Shakespeare class to reveal the themes of *The Taming of the Shrew* through a different perspective, this film series could easily serve as an asset to understanding the emotional toll of this event. As a standalone source of information, or presented as a trusted educational material, we fail to use this resource for its advantages.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Creative License in documentaries

by Jennifer Faiman - Saturday, January 26, 2013, 11:51 AM

I agree Stephanie. From what I have watched of the series thus far, I think that the main goal here is to get an emotional response from and connection with the viewers. I feel that as long as you use it for that purpose it is a fine, as you said, supplementary tool to our text.

I think that it is important that we learn about all aspects of the war, not just the politics and the facts but also the experience of the people that lived it and the impact that had on our society today. I feel that is what this series offers that the text does not, and possible cannot. It is very difficult to use the written word to

make that type of connection with a topic such as this. The visual context of the film fills in the emotional and personal gaps that the text leaves.

It's not just the battles, politics, and lives lost that has shaped us. It is the entire package of all of those things plus the impact that it had on moral, emotions, lifestyle, and mindset. If you do not take into account these human factors you cannot truly understand the impact and importance of the Civil War.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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A foreshadowing ending

by Brendan MacDonald - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 8:45 PM

I actually liked Ken Burns method of ending the first episode in this fashion. I think the main reason for showing photographs of other married couples along with battle images while Ballou's letter is being read is to give the audience the sense that his feelings about the war and for his wife were probably shared by many other soldiers alike that were fighting alongside Ballou. I believe that was one of Ken Burns main intents on showing photos of other married couples while listening to Ballou's letter.

Another reason I thought Burns possibly made this the final scene in the episode was to set the stage for the next event, "The Battle of Bull Run". After the letter concludes, the narrator states that Ballou died one week after writing the letter in the battle of Bull Run. So in a way, Burns might also have been using the scene as foreshadowing or leading the audience into the next episode of the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: A foreshadowing ending

by Ryan Lundberg - Sunday, January 27, 2013, 12:59 PM

Brendan,

I think you bring up an interesting point about foreshadowing. Techniques like this might be considered literary, or dramatic devices, but in this case, they're used in the telling of history. I noticed that Mcpherson does this as well. At the end of chapter 14, The Sinews of War, he teases some details of upcoming events, but says they will have to wait until the next volume in the series. Personally, I think human history is inherently dramatic. Even the driest accounts of historical events still involve epic human drama. Is it okay to play up this dramatic angle though? I think so. But the author could run the risk of worrying about good drama more than accurate history. It sure makes for a good read though.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply


Re: A foreshadowing ending

by Brendan MacDonald - Sunday, January 27, 2013, 4:54 PM

Hi Ryan,

I feel the same way regarding Mcphersons choice to add dramatic elements in the end of chapter 14, and in the case of this forum topic Ken Burns decision to end episode 2 with the same kind of dramatic element of giving the audience a glimpse of upcoming events. I know from my experience in watching other television series, the creators will intentionally end an episode using dramatic elements to make the audience excited to see what happens next. I would agree that when it comes to a historical series as opposed to a fictional series, it is possible for the director to worry too much about the drama part and in turn sacrifice the historical accuracy. I do not believe that Burns effectively does this with the "Ballou's Letter" scene. Even though the event is out of sequence, it is not historically inaccurate in my opinion.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re: A foreshadowing ending

by Windy Ficcadenti - Sunday, January 27, 2013, 10:42 PM

I didnt even consider that Burns may of placed Ballou's letter at the end of the first episode as sort of a teaser to the next episode. Kind of makes me think about Movie trailers, they are made to grab your attention and interest you, so that you will want to see the movie. In Burns placing the letter at the end of episode one he basically achieves the same effect. With Burns using techniques such as this, it is really easy to see why "The Civil War" series is one of the most popular ones ever.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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What let's us know Burns's sources from which he draws historical conclusions and (representations) are given by an accurate source?

by Kirk Nikas - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 9:03 PM

My opinion of the scene in reference (Ballou's letter to his wife, and its reading) is that it was a means of encompassing the greater vision "wives on 'the home-front'" were experiencing at the time the war was taking place and not to be perceived as a direct reference to a single individual's communication to his wife and the strict importance this single communication had to the progression/causations of the civil war, it was (in my opinion) merely a representation, an emotional interjection to give a greater sense of the Civil War's entirety. This decision made by Ken Burns in the filming of his depiction was enhanced by relating it to pictures taken during the era with direct reference to the topic at

hand (men and women together, holding hands), and the interjection of a moving melody that captures the tone held by the voice-overer's reading the letter. The enhancements mentioned in prior are a complete yet terse look at Ken Burns's creative license. Through the utilization of his creative license, Ken Burns leads the viewer through an experienced myriad collective scenes, all holding different perspective relations to the war. The historical accuracy of Ken Burns's presentation was held by the cinematic techniques "image, narrative, and music", each given its own importance factor. To reference the scene we are discussing (The Cause, Chapter 13, Scene: "Honorable Manhood" – 1:31:18-1:34:50) I would place narrative first as impactful part of the scene and film's overall message (at this point), without it we would be forced to read a probably illegible letter which's time on screen is probably no where near enough to have read it in whole, thus losing the reality gifted by the reading as done aloud by www.pbs.org/civilwar/film/credits.html. Secondly, I'd state image as the major conveyance of general meaning, though lacking the impact the letter being read in immediate has on the viewer. Lastly, the music plays a role in the viewer's experience, its overt subtle tonal guiding of the audience's emotional view of the film and scene is chosen; the creative license of Ken Burns being manifest fully in the presented form to what this response refers.

There is debate over the film's historical accuracy, the reviews in American daily journal or something has a long, wordy examination of specific inaccuracies that leads the viewer to question their first interpretation and realize several stated events did not take place while others were misrepresented. Creative license gives a malleability to the set-in-stone past we are sure of and used to. It can be a great tool in presenting something otherwise too lengthy or boring to want to be viewed, examined, or explained, but when it is taken too far the message (of the past) becomes distorted and is a new topic not analogous to the true topic of which the title promotes itself as being a conveyor of.

Creative license and historical accuracy have place together, but over-use of one can cause the other to be less tangible in the moment and brings about friction between stone-cold fact and entertainment, devaluing the both and supporting neither. Ken Burns's film isn't necessarily a depiction of this opinion, but most certainly is a depiction of the civil war. Is it a depiction of the civil war as it really had happened? I cannot answer this. Having watched the video I consider it to be a good idea to further look into the sources used by Ken Burns (amateur historian), and sources of index directly referring to the Civil War and its having taken place. Some people in the South still claim the south had won.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: What let's us know Burns's sources from which he draws historical conclusions and (representations) are given by an accurate source?

by Karen Jenkins - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 9:32 PM

Hey very well stated. I would have to agree that he does make full use of his creative licenses but then again it is a film and it is mean to entertain an audience. Although Mr. Burns may have made erroronous errors in his stating of historical and actual fact..I do have to question how do we know that on historians factual statements are for sure the fact of what really took place. As that historian was only goin off of communicative

gatherings and written scribes of folks that did the hand me down thing. Its kinda like the telephone line game .. where a statement is made in a circle of folks and what really was said or written or acted up never comes full circle.. With that being noted a historian is a human and humans error. This bloody war was controversial enough as it was but to have historian argue fact or fiction with there opinions, or emotional feelings or thoughts added..then whom is to say Mr.Burns was right or wrong just because the critics critiqued his every word or action. Documentaries are based on facts of the event but not all of them run from a factual base. As you have stated above, How Documentaries and Creative Licenses got started was many years ago. Well if we want to talk history look how the many communications, video, technological advances have changed society and how we communicate as a whole. Ken Burns had to weave facts, emotionally touching upon his audiences to keep there interests, creativity through pictorials, and video and letters or statements said to be of that era. I am NOT a historian and as a student to have me critique or judge that of a director/author of such a difficult era is unfair in that I donot have the factual knowledge of the era and am learning it. So to be historically factual and actual is hard for me. I see it from a student whom is learning about this era. It is human to trust at first in this case although just like with everything we must pick and choose what we choose to believe as fact or history. This is what makes history ..just that HISTORY.. because it is something of the past and of a era we did not live it..but are learning all about. Historically the book follows fact more than the movie but they compliment each other. I most enjoyed the narratives as they help to bring the story alive. Shelby Foote was a awesome historian and very well known for his writings and his research on the civil war and his own documentary books/audios written upon the subject. I really enjoy his insight and his statements...and coming from a true southerner too. thanks for the insights and the facts you have stated here..Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: What let's us know Burns's sources from which he draws historical conclusions and (representations) are given by an accurate source?

by Stephanie Sheets - Sunday, January 27, 2013, 5:34 PM

Karen-

I think you bring up a really interesting issue in this post. This segment in particular:

" I am NOT a historian and as a student to have me critique or judge that of a director/author of such a difficult era is unfair in that I donot have the factual knowledge of the era and am learning it. So to be historically factual and actual is hard for me. I see it from a student whom is learning about this era. It is human to trust at first in this case although just like with everything we must pick and choose what we choose to believe as fact or history. This is what makes history ..just that HISTORY.. because it is something of the past and of a era we did not live it..but are learning all about."

I have to agree with you on some of these statements. I have gone back and forth a little frantically on deciding who or what source is trustworthy in this course. I feel almost a little tricked. We are given these resources and expected to remember their teachings as fact, then asked to critique the creators and their ethics as a writer/director. I am not a professional historian by any means, and I have very little background information on the war as a whole to judge the qualifications of a writer/director. I am hoping that we can begin discussing elements of the war in depth, rather than the texts.

I will note, however, that I see the benefits of learning first to think critically. When we consider historical resources, it can be all too easy to assume that the department fact checked every word in the book, and just take it at face value. It's too easy to believe no one would get published with incorrect information, right? If it's in black and white it must be true! I think one of the most significant identifiers of a great college course is that students are not asked to believe blindly, but to challenge the information given to come to an independent decision. On that front, I believe this course is surpassing the expectation.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: What let's us know Burns's sources from which he draws historical conclusions and (representations) are given by an accurate source?



by Kirk Nikas - Sunday, January 27, 2013, 8:14 PM

Karen,

Thank you, first, for your thoughtful and well planned response to my post. You bring up several interesting facts highlighting my argument's positive aspects, or rather is "pro- my message", and that I can appreciate. It's funny that you brought up the "telephone game" as an example to use for the furthering and basis of your communications argument, I was just talking the other day with my friend about it and brought up the same words you'd used. I'll, as of now, most agree with your communications argument, and its changing through history, its growth until present (and continued growth), mostly on the basis of it being an interesting idea . . . although not solely relevant to the Civil War. It is a good view if historically, presenting the topic well. You have completely changed my view of history's progression by adding the element of evolution in specific aspects of the time as linked to the present.

- Kirk Nikas

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Ballou's Letter - Epsiode 1 Conclusion



by Ian MacDonald - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 9:27 PM

Well, I will start off by saying that even though this scene in the episode was out of sequence with the others (since it talked about the Battle of Bull Run earlier in the episode), I did not find anything about it that was historically inaccurate. Now, granted, the video did not mention the fact that Major Ballou's wife did not receive the letter until after the end of the war. Still however, I do not think that it **had** to bring that fact into the mix in order for the scene to be successful. I think that adding that scene in was actually a very clever way on Ken Burns' part to conclude the episode. It did somewhat surprise me to find out that Ballou's wife didn't get the letter until after the war was over, because when I watched that scene in the episode, I was left thinking that Ballou wrote the letter a week before the Battle of Bull Run just as it claimed and that he had died in the battle and that his wife obtained the letter just after Ballou's death. I was glad to have found that information out. As I stated before though, I don't think that it was vital that Burns had added that information. The photographs of the other couples shown while the letter was being read were also a clever touch. I think it helped reinforce the idea that that was probably how the vast majority of troops felt before going into battle. To of had the knowledge that that could have been their last moments in life, I imagine that most of them were probably thinking about their wife's and families, wishing that they could be with them.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Documentary film makers taking creative licenses



by Windy Ficcadenti - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 9:39 PM

In thinking about the first question that was posed "How do you feel about Ken Burns taking this sort of creative license" in regards to the ending scene when Major Ballou's letter to his wife is read. Well, I've given this some thought and I don't have a problem with a documentary film maker using whatever they feel is necessary to grab an audience's attention. I do think however, they should follow some sort of ethical and moral guidelines whereas taking creative licenses are concerned. Dates and facts of importance shouldn't be omitted, or changed in order to fit a film maker's vision. In the Honorable manhood scene Ken Burns slightly blurs the line in this. I don't take issue with him using photographs of other couples along with static shots of the Manassas battlefield, as it helps to set the mood for the letter to be read. However I do find it a little tricky of burns to place the scene out of sequence. Why he does this is a good question to think about. Chronology I feel should be accurate as far as History is concerned.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Documentary film makers taking creative licenses



by Ryan Lundberg - Friday, January 25, 2013, 2:04 PM

Windy,

I think Burns placed the Ballou letter at the end of the episode for dramatic purposes.

To me, it feels like the most emotionally powerful segment in the first episode. If the letter had been read the way it was at an earlier point in the episode, I think the audience would have been a little more emotionally drained before they reached the end of the episode, which might have felt a little anticlimactic compared to how Burns decided it should play out. But, I think that raises an interesting issue. Should Burns have been more concerned about dramatic impact instead of strict chronology? In an ideal world, probably not. But, regarding history, I don't have a problem with events being presented out of chronological order, as long as it's noted. And that's why it's a minor problem that it isn't noted that the letter is not only edited, but it's presented out of chronological order.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Documentary film makers taking creative licenses



by Windy Ficcadenti - Friday, January 25, 2013, 11:33 PM

The Ballou letter being placed at the end of the episode did definitely add a dramatic effect. After watching the scene I found myself wanting to see more, so if that was burns' goal he did accomplish it, and quite well. I do agree that if the letter was read the way it was at an earlier point in the episode it would have been pretty anticlimactic towards the end of episode one. Though, one could say he could have found a way to end the episode with a scene that delivered the same effect as the Ballou letter did, and of had it been in chronological order, or maybe that would have been asking too much? I do imagine making a documentary of this magnitude was a huge undertaking, so perhaps film makers should be allowed a bit of slack in minor things such as this...

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



What really happened to the Merrimack?



by Chance Cornish - Wednesday, January 23, 2013, 11:44 PM

Ballou's letter in my opinion did kind of represent what the other soldiers were feeling around him. From all the quotes and letters read it did all sound a lot alike. All of the men out there fighting missed home but knew/ believed in what they were fighting for. Like the quote that one of the men said in Episode 2 about the yankee asking the rebel (along the lines of) if he ain't got no slaves, then why is he fighting? And the rebel replied with because your down here. Everyone had their reasons and believed in them.

My question about McClellan is he really that bad of a field general? Or is he just getting portrayed this poorly? Because Burns and friends are making him look pretty bad. And if he was really that bad of a field general, then why did Lincoln wait that long to replace him?

I'm also curious about the C.S.S. Merrimack and why the confederates dumped her so soon? I understand that the Monitor put up a good fight but did was she damaged? I would

imagine it would have been more valuable to keep the ship and try to upgrade her and fix her even if the ship were damaged. The CSA lost probably one of their most valuable chess pieces.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: What really happened to the Merrimack?

by Julie Skinner - Thursday, January 24, 2013, 10:08 AM

Chance-

According to our textbook, chapter 12, page 377, the U.S.S. Merrimack/C.S.S. Virginia, was scuttled because when Norfolk fell in May 1862 she was stranded. "Too unseaworthy to fight her way into open water and too deep-drafted to retreat up the James River, the plucky ironclad was blown up by her crew on May 11, less than three months after she had been launched." One must assume that they did this in order to keep her out of Union hands. The union would have refitted and repaired her and she could have been used against the south in subsequent battles.

Hope this helps!

Julie

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: What really happened to the Merrimack?

by Chance Cornish - Thursday, January 24, 2013, 7:09 PM

Hi Julie. Thanks. That really helps. Unfortunately I'm not quite there in my reading yet. That whole situation makes more sense to me now. I just wasn't quite sure why the rebels themselves try to salvage the boat for their use or at the least scrap the ship for the parts and metal. Could have possibly gone a long way down the road or even towards a new ship.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: What really happened to the Merrimack?

by Karen Jenkins - Friday, January 25, 2013, 10:11 PM

Hi Chance: Very good points you make. Yes the Iron Clad ships were tough and survived alot during the war in the harbors and major rivers. The merrimack was damaged beyond repair, as it leaked water, the engines had troubles and it was altogether a not very sea worth ship although it did endure alot and was to slow when it moved, so the gentleman that created her turned her into a Iron Clad ship that was

faster in the rivers in movement and could maneuver a lot faster and a lot more sea worthy. I would say that definitely this war was like a big "chess game". The north would win over states only to lose it to the south. Then the south would lose hold on sections of the south and the north would take over. A lot of the military greats would side with their own states like General Lee did with Virginia during the Secession. Some Generals would remain only in their areas but the few that fought the whole war in all states were very well known. McClellan I believe was a good friend maybe of Lincoln's, as Lincoln seems to reassign him where he felt he was needed, although he could put together a great army he was too chicken or lazy to incorporate that army into confrontations and battles with the Confederate Armies. He became known as "MAC" to the other soldiers. I would have to say in his tactics he was more like a big Mac with no condiments on it..lol. Karen Jenkins

Sum of ratings: (1)

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Historical Accuracy

by Meleah Drews - Friday, January 25, 2013, 3:11 PM

Which source do you trust for historical accuracy?

We are currently discussing the accuracy of Ken Burns' Civil War documentary, specifically the letter written by Sullivan Ballou. As I was reading our McPherson text this week, I came across what seemed to be very familiar words. McPherson quotes, "I know...how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the Revolution," wrote a New England private to his wife on the eve of the first battle of Bull Run (Manassas). "I am willing -- perfectly willing -- to lay down all my joys in this life, to help maintain this government, and to pay that debt." (McPherson p. 309).

When I compared this quote to the letter written by Sullivan Ballou, the words are the same. McPherson lists several sources for this quote in the text. My concern however is the two discrepancies found between the McPherson text and the Burns documentary. McPherson states the words were written by a New England private the evening before the battle of Bull Run. Burns' documentary credits the words to Major Sullivan Ballou of the second Rhode Island volunteers, written a week before the battle of Bull Run. (By the way, Burns is not the only source who credits the quote to Major Sullivan Ballou). Perhaps the point of whether the letter was written a day or a week before the battle is not a big issue, but the difference between a private and a major seems to be a greater discrepancy.

So, I am left to conclude, either there was a form letter going around the camp and multiple people were writing the same exact words to their wives before the battle of Bull Run, or, that even academic historians make oversights and get facts wrong.

Works cited:

Battle Cry of Freedom by James McPherson

Civil War episode 1, Honorable Manhood by Ken Burns

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sullivan_Ballou

<http://www.historynet.com/sullivan-ballou-the-macabre-fate-of-a-american-civil-war-major.htm>

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Creative License and Historical Accuracy

by Colby Finnerty - Friday, January 25, 2013, 4:12 PM

I believe Ken Burns used the letter as a tool to lure us in with our emotions. To make us want to dive deeper into his docmentry. Just like how Hollywood creates there films to draw viewers in. The closer you make the film to your viewer, the more involved you make them feel. Thats why I believe he used a "fairy tell" love letter, instead of the more historicly accurate. He caught our attention, and made us involved. For instance, we are having a forum discussing it.

It brings me to believe that no matter where you go you will have false information. For one reason or anouther the facts will get warped over time to evolve with society.

Colby

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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More than one version of the Ballou letter is available?

by Windy Ficcadenti - Sunday, January 27, 2013, 2:34 PM

When I first read the original Ballou letter had been lost and there is more than one version of it available I found myself wondering why this is. Why has there been so much attention placed on this particular letter? Surely there are huge amounts of letters from civil war soldiers sent to their loved ones that would be available for us to reflect on. The Ballou letter was lost, and obviously has been rewritten if there is more than one version available. When we try to replicate something from memory or other sources it becomes quite easy to lose meaning in it; words get replaced, things get left out and the entire mood of the work "in this case, the letter" gets changed, which in turn can cause a result that the original author never intended. This can happen accidently, or on purpose. I can see how someone might want to manipulate something to fit their views or sway other views. I don't know if this is the case or not concerning the Ballou letter, but it certainly arises some interesting questions.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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(Creative License and H...) Next >

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