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Another Documentary

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, February 16, 2013, 11:33 PM

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Civil War medical care, and the influence of Florence Nightingale.

by Stephanie Sheets - Tuesday, February 19, 2013, 5:52 PM

Each of the sources we're using to examine the topics of this week's forum had one central opinion of medical care during the Civil War: it was nowhere near adequate to deal with the injuries and illnesses presented. As we know from the Burns documentary, 2 men died of illnesses for every 1 killed by a battle wound. In *The Divided Union*, we learn that because Union soldiers tended to hail from areas with higher populations and an exposure to a variety of germs, they were generally less susceptible than Rebels to die from disease.

In addition to the vast number of deaths by disease, there were an incredible number of wounded soldiers. All of our sources agree that medical technology and development at this time was simply not up to the task of dealing with such a vast number of injuries. At times, according to *The Divided Union*, the treatment for an

injury would be far more life-threatening than the original injury itself. “If a man was shot in the arm or the leg and a compound fracture resulted, amputation was almost automatic.” Episode 6 of Ken Burns’ *The Civil War* describes the amputation process as being quick and dirty, one after another without anesthesia. Field surgeons were overwhelmed by the volume, and after one amputation, would wipe their knife on their apron and call for the next patient. By today’s standards, it was a grotesque and inhumane practice, but at the time, it was the best medical treatment they could offer. On this subject, all three sources tend to enhance and complement each other.

There is, however, another major aspect of medical care during the Civil War. The introduction of hospitals is a major development of the time and is represented through three unique perspectives which at times contradict one another. *The Civil War* describes the lack of organized hospital facilities at the beginning of the war, and their numbering in the hundreds by the end. It claims 350 northern and 154 southern hospitals in operation at the end of the war. Though the documentary does mention the significant impact of groups like the Sanitary Commission in advocating for increased quality of patient care, *The Civil War* completely fails to mention the impact that Florence Nightingale’s recent activities had on American women during the war.

The Divided Union pointed out that civilian bodies like the United States Sanitary Commission were “modeled on the British agency established during the Crimean War by the legendary Florence Nightingale.” Even this mention seems to pale in comparison to the image *Battle Cry of Freedom* paints of her example. McPherson calls Florence Nightingale “as much a heroine to American Women as to British Women,” saying that her example of selfless service inspired many of the American women’s ready volunteerism (McPherson 478). It seems to be evident that Nightingale had a significant impact on the increasing standards of medical practices, which is a point completely missed by Burns’ audience.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Divided Union

by Jennifer King - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 10:18 AM

After viewing “Divided Union” and thinking about our text and Burn’s documentary, I feel like the three sources work well together. While each one has a slightly different angle, the information presented in all three is of use. I don’t feel like if we were just watching “Divided Union” we would have an adequate compliment to the text however. I have to agree with the review in the New York Times, in that I found the piece we watching confusing as well. What bothers me more is what we watched was just a small piece of the whole film. In the Times review, the author stated “Divided Union” was being as an educational tool. Based on the clip and review of the film we viewed however, I would feel on its own “Divided Union” would not be a great source for information. It only touched on the battles, citing them as horrible, but yet with few details other than the great impact on the Confederacy. The subject

of medical care seemed to be overly condensed, however it did reinforce that disease was a huge obstacle for the troops. Using the film in unison with our text and the Burn's documentary I feel like it holds up and complements the other two sources. I would not like to have it as my only source of information however as I feel it would fall short.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Divided Union

by Stephanie Sheets - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 4:17 PM

I have to disagree with your analysis of *The Divided Union* as a documentary with few details, merely skimming the surface of topics. I agree that we did only see a small snippet of the piece, but I think that piece glimpsed a great educational documentary. You wrote that "on its own "Divided Union" would not be a great source for information. It only touched on the battles, citing them as horrible, but yet with few details other than the great impact on the Confederacy." In actuality, *The Divided Union* referenced not only the battles, but also the impact of Lee's style of military leadership. It discussed how southern leaders tended to be only masters of textbook-style military maneuvers because they tended to be from a well-educated military background. The clip went on to point out how Lee was the exception to that generality. He was an innovator, using trench-warfare, which would become the bread-and-butter of wars to follow. To quote another of his strengths listed in the film, "he could split his army and get away with it."

The discussion of battles seemed equally detailed with Burns' *The Civil War*. *The Divided Union* described the confusion and chaos at The Wilderness, the great loss of life (26,000 casualties) and Grant's unique unwillingness to retreat. At Spotsylvania, the documentary discussed its defining feature as being the most vicious battle of the war. In fact, I found there was even more detail, because *The Divided Union* mentioned how much easier Union soldiers could be replaced than their Confederate counterparts and the impact this had on the events to follow. It was because Grant understood that he was wearing down the Confederate troops, which could not be readily replaced, that he kept the pressure on, which was a great tactical move against the opinions of his fellows at the time.

You also stated, "The subject of medical care seemed to be overly condensed, however it did reinforce that disease was a huge obstacle for the troops." I would imagine that these topics would be elaborated on in more depth throughout the entire documentary of which we only saw one short segment. I must mention, however, that on the topic of medical care, specifically the role of women, I found *The Divided Union* to be more descriptive than *The Civil War*. It covered the same basics, but added that after a major battle, all nearby buildings would become commandeered as makeshift hospitals. It mentioned that the best care was often provided by civilian bodies (like the Sanitary

Commission) rather than government-run facilities. Furthermore, *The Divided Union* mentioned the role of Florence Nightingale's previously established British agency as a model for these newly founded American agencies. This element was covered by the textbook as well, and completely overlooked by *The Civil War*.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Death better than injury?

by Brendan MacDonald - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 6:36 PM

I felt that all three sources complimented each other pretty well, in the fact that they reaffirmed certain facts that I had forgot after reading in *Battle Cry of Freedom*. The topic of disease and medical care playing a major part in fatalities throughout the war was one thing that got briefly mentioned in one of the previous episodes of Ken Burns' *The Civil War*, but was explained in greater depth I think in the clip from *The Divided Union*. I thought it was interesting how it addressed the fact that treatment for an injury would generally be more life threatening than the actual injury, and that if a soldier had sustained a compound fracture then amputation was pretty much how they immediately responded to it; and the instruments used in the amputation process were not sterilized in between each one; as *The Civil War* episode stated that surgeons would simply wipe their knife on their apron before dealing with the next patient. I thought all three sources complemented each other quite well on the medical/disease issue.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Death better than injury?

by Adam Coutts - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 7:36 PM

I agree to what you laid out. I also believe that all three (the textbook, Ken Burns and Divided Union) work in conjunction together rather than apart. One or two of the listed materials does either a very brief overview whereas the third does a more in-depth look and certainly you get that from Divided Union.

I also agree with your view on the medical practices. Truly with their almost archaic at least to modern practices, it might have been better to have been killed outright on the battlefield than to be brought back to the medical tents where they would sooner hack off a limb than dig a bullet out of your arm or leg. With blood, tissue and only perhaps whiskey or some form of alcohol anesthetic or biting down on a hardened piece of leather, I can't even image what the men went through. And then on top of everything if the amputation didn't kill you, likely the infection would or some form of disease.

Anyway you made an excellent point and I just wanted to add to it.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Medical Care and Soldiers



by Robyn Stevens - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 7:21 PM

When I first read chapter 15, section IV of McPherson's book I tried to imagine walking over dead bodies or the smells that were discussed. I could not do it. Then when watching episode 6 of Burn's The Civil War and the clip The Divided Union, I have to admit I was still surprised. I was thinking from a present tense instead of a past tense. The sanitary conditions, the disease, the wounded and dying must have been very overwhelming to the people who dealt with this on a day to day basis.

Women like Dorothea Dix, Clara Barton, Mother Bickerdyke, and Sally Louisa Thompkins changed the way the men were treated in the war. The Sanitation Commissions and relief services worked on developing better ways to deal with the wounded, dying, and already deceased soldiers. Keeping them disease free and caring for them in their recovery was of the utmost importance. At the war's end there was more than 350 hospitals in the north and 154 in the confederacy. This must have been a huge undertaking. These changes came about with the hard work of these women. These women would basically give up their lives to help complete strangers have a little comfort while healing or dying. This is one of the most courageous acts of the war.

When you have numbers like 1 in 7 dying of wounds received in battle and 1 out of every 2 dying of disease, you have very poor odds of surviving the war unscathed. The lack of medicines available at this time in history was very important; this is the reason the death rate was so high. The medical staff did not have the knowledge we do in the present. Medical care made the difference even at that time.

I thought that all three subjects tied together. Talking about major battles, the men who lead them, the good decisions and bad decisions that these leaders made, and the many lives it cost in the end. It is all about war, how it was fought, what was won, what was accomplished, and who suffered. When you have a statement like more men died from wounds received in battle than those on the battlefield, that is something that will stick with me and make me think of the mistakes made in the war but also all of the accomplishments we made during this time period also.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Medical Care and Soldiers



by Jennifer King - Friday, February 22, 2013, 8:27 AM

I agree with you that all three sources tied together nicely. I also agree with your point about the bravery of the women who cared for the soldiers. What they did and gave up to help out is truly admirable. I took a women's history class a few terms back, and we went into more detail about the war from their point of view. It was really interesting and inspiring to learn about these women who worked

so hard and broke the ground that they did. The statistics about death in this war are also very shocking, especially looking back at it from this point in time. It is hard to imagine the conditions they were dealing with as you pointed out.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Medical Care and Soldiers

by Robyn Stevens - Friday, February 22, 2013, 5:46 PM

Jennifer,

I really think that the medical, sanitation, and industrial advances were the most important things to come out of the war. Yes, it was great that the country came together as one again and the advances in military strategies were important, but I feel that in some small way, the war, terrible on every level, did help us grow our nation even stronger on many levels.

The medical care, the people who performed it, and helped with it, really have a huge amount of respect they are owed. If not from the people in that time, from us now for all they did and accomplished. There was more good than bad in my eyes. The medical staff worked with what they had. Little or no medicines, lack of clean sheets, clothes, bandages, and amputations right on the field where battles were going on. To me this was very brave.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Comparing Sources

by Ian MacDonald - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 7:33 PM

Even though I didn't much care for the manner in which "The Divided Union" presented the information, I believe that this series along with the information provided in the Ken Burns series worked well together. "The Divided Union" seemed to be pretty brief in a lot of areas where it could have gone a lot more into depth and elaborated. For instance, there was not nearly as much said about the similarities and differences between Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee in "The Divided Union." I happened to take notice of the point where Wilson Greene is explaining the Battle of the Wilderness and claims that that was the very first battle Grant and Lee met each other. It may have been the first battle in the Civil War that they met, but as the Ken Burns video states, Grant and Lee first met and worked together during the Mexican-American War in the late 1840's. Both series do however portray both Grant and Lee as being great military leaders. They both talk about Grant and Lee's roles in the Battle of the Wilderness. The fact that Grant lost 7,000 troops in the first 30

minutes of the battle, but decided not to retreat and instead keep attacking Lees forces was a main area of focus in both videos. Another thing that "The Divided Union" didn't mention was that when Grant had almost broken through the Confederates center, the Texans had to move in to drive them back.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Comparing Sources

by Jennifer King - Friday, February 22, 2013, 8:31 AM

I did not really care for the way "Divided Union" presented the information either. Although I suppose if we had seen more than just the short clip, my opinion might change. I also agree that the three sources worked well together. I think "Divided Union" complemented our other two sources well. I took notice of the fact that the video stated that Grant and Lee did not meet until the Wilderness as well. I am assuming that the reason it was presented this way was because they were focusing on just the Civil War, however that makes it confusing for people who were not aware they actually fought together in a previous conflict.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Another Documentary

by Courtney Merrell - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 8:08 PM

It was interesting to watch this new documentary (at least new to me). It worked well with our other two sources by giving us an even more rounded picture of the Civil War. In both our regular class material and this documentary clip, Grant and Lee are made out to be top generals. When it came to the hospital and medical care, It seemed that *Ken Burns: Civil War* just skimmed the top of a lot of morbid, tragic issues going on. Whereas our text book and the clip from *The Divided Union* go into more detail about the conditions, the toll on the community and the actual processing of the wounded after the battle was done. *The Divided Union* goes into detail and points out the massive amount of death and goes further by discussing the wounds and how they end in death or amputation. Giving details like there was no form of anesthesia and that there were piles of legs and arms gave the documentary a more tragic sense to the Civil War than the *Ken Burns: Civil War*, in my opinion.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Another Documentary

by Brendan MacDonald - Thursday, February 21, 2013, 1:24 PM

Courtney,

I agree with your analysis of these three sources and the way they gave the information. Both *The Civil War* and *The Divided Union* express Lee and Grant as being very good generals although I think Ken Burns' series went into quite a bit more depth in explaining the two generals battle tactics; for example Grants flanking maneuvers that forced Lee south towards Richmond.

I also agree that *The Divided Union* went into deeper detail on medical care. One thing that made Ken Burns' series interesting though was the use of actual photographs of the wounded and diseased soldiers whereas *The Divided Union* used reenactments of the time. I think in terms of what gave a more realistic description of how wounded soldiers were tended to, *The Divided Union* offered the best. However in terms of giving an accurate display of what it visually looked like, I would have to say *The Civil War* did that.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Comprehensive Care

by Ryan Lundberg - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 9:09 PM

Regarding medical care during the Civil War, I think all three sources compliment each other in the sense that they generally agree with that medical practice during that time was borderline barbarous by our modern day standards. Also, *The Divided Union* brings a little bit to the table with those “pesky reenactments” and Burns documentary with its superior production values and dramatic power. However, if I had to decide which single source seems to be the best, I would have to choose *Battle Cry of Freedom*, followed by Burns documentary, and then *The Divided Union*. One main problem is the amount of content presented. We only get twelve minutes of *The Divided Union* versus six full episodes of *The Civil War*, and nearly a thousand pages of *Battle Cry of Freedom*. Considering the general agreement between all three sources, from a purely factual standpoint, it's hard not to choose McPherson simply because of comprehensiveness.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Comprehensive Care

by Brendan MacDonald - Friday, February 22, 2013, 12:25 PM

Ryan,

I thought you brought up a good point regarding the amount of information provided by the three sources. *Battle Cry of Freedom* offers a lengthier insight into the medical issues with wounded soldiers. It is also gives quite vivid descriptions from personal experiences of soldiers themselves of the brutal carnage and aftermath. I went back and found one example in specific from pg. 477 of *Battle Cry of Freedom*, a Union cavalry officer describes the gruesome scene at Malvern Hill, "Over five thousand dead and wounded men were on the ground...enough were alive and moving to give to the field a singular crawling

effect." It goes on to give more similar descriptions. Another that stuck with me was a Yank stating that you could see Hogs from a farm building being used as a hospital, eating amputated limbs and other body parts.

I think one can easily obtain a very clear image of just how brutal the medical procedures of the time were through all three sources. And each source contributes something in their own way. I appreciate each one conveying the same information in various ways.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Military technology outpaced military strategy.

by Jacob Pusey - Wednesday, February 20, 2013, 10:48 PM

It is difficult to compare a twelve minute clip to the six episode series we have seen by Ken Burns. There is really nothing wrong with the content and as the article points out, it is somewhat difficult to obtain cinema footage of the actual war. Watching those twelve minutes really makes me appreciate what a monumental task it must have been for Burns to put together that many hours of footage and not use reenactments that are almost always terrible. *Divided Union* is informative, but basic. It was clearly made for an audience that was likely studying social studies in grade school. Again, without watching the whole documentary, it is hard to compare. Many good points were brought up in the clip that make basically the same arguments as McPherson's book and Burn's series. Military technology surpassed military strategy and medical technology. This was a bloodbath because it was the first large scale "total war" that was fought that used modern accurate rifles and artillery. Commanders quickly realized that standing in formation and running toward a stationary enemy was going to cost a tremendous amount of lives. Most did not know any other way to fight which could explain why guerrilla tactics used by Nathan Forrest were so successful. Once the world saw the devastation that was the American Civil War, nations developed even more destructive weaponry and strategy would almost always adapt afterward.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Military technology outpaced military strategy.

by Stephanie Sheets - Thursday, February 21, 2013, 11:55 AM

I completely agree that it is not quite apples to apples as we compare a very short clip to our documentary series. In your post, you mention how difficult it was to obtain photos, reports, and the complete lack of cinema footage of the war. I thought it was very interesting that many of the photos in *The Divided Union* were some of the same photos used in *The Civil War*. In the case of medical facilities, especially, I imagine that there is an extremely limited number of stock photos available. I agree that Burns took on an incredible feat by creating such a thorough series.

While I agree that military technology FAR outpaced medical technology, I disagree about your opinion of military strategy. There were many innovative weaponry advances such as the ironclad, the rifled musket, and the mini ball. I think, however, that it's also easy to overlook the numerous military strategies that were innovated during the time. In addition to the guerrilla tactics you mentioned that Forrest infamously implemented, Lee's trench warfare and Grant and Sherman's unrelenting flank maneuvers are also notable military advancements.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Military technology outpaced military strategy.

by Jacob Pusey - Sunday, February 24, 2013, 1:28 PM

There were certainly brilliant achievements made by military commanders during the war. Robert E. Lee arguably being the most brilliant American leader ever to lead troops. The South in general had better trained leaders while the North was forced to make do with whoever they could find. They ended up using many amateur soldiers as who were known as political generals. Many of these men were incompetent military strategists because they lacked any formal training. Because of the new technology, both sides were forced to reevaluate the way war was fought. The combination of the technology, inexperienced leaders and stubborn officers who may have unintentionally wiped out entire legions of soldiers, by doing what they had been taught in military academies. Pickett's charge for example was predicted by Union forces and unnecessary. They walked directly into artillery fire in a wide open field. This was not brilliant military strategy. The successful generals in the war were the ones who were able to adapt and use the technology that was available to their advantage. It was the shoulder to shoulder, march toward the enemy at a specific time of day and hold the lines at all costs that led to the deaths of over 500,000 Americans.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Military technology outpaced military strategy.

by Ryan Lundberg - Sunday, February 24, 2013, 3:08 PM

Jacob,

I think you make a good point about outdated and stubborn leadership/tactics combined with advancing technology led to countless unnecessary deaths. But, I also wonder how much of that responsibility lies in the hands of the soldiers themselves. There are numerous accounts that we have gone over so far where it's stated that multiple masses of soldiers attacked targets without orders in the

heat of battle. These assaults sometimes swayed the momentum of battle and even lead to massive victories. At times, soldiers were frothing at the mouth to charge into seeming suicide regardless of their orders. Of course at other times, they also retreated without orders.

I think part of the reason for this were the attitudes of the time. It seems like most combatants viewed a frontal attack and face to face battle as glorious and honorable. The guerrilla tactics that you mentioned were often frowned upon by the majority and any "bushwackers" unlucky enough to be caught alive were not treated with "kid gloves."

One incident really stood out to me. It was the soldiers at Cold Harbor who were certain they were going to die, even pinned their names to their clothes so their bodies could be identified, and went ahead and marched to their deaths anyways.

Yes, advancing technology played a huge role in the massive numbers of casualties, but I think the attitudes and beliefs of society in general played a bigger role. A famous incident, the charge of the light brigade, had occurred almost a decade before the start of the civil war. The soldiers involved charged straight into suicide. And for the most part, what people focused on, and were even proud of, was the unflinching bravery of the soldiers.

I think it was just a different time back then. Most everyone involved, generals, politicians, and the average footsoldiers, saw the types of battles they were fighting as a glorious statement of their courage. Individual lives were not as important as bravery.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Military technology outpaced military strategy.



by Jacob Pusey - Sunday, February 24, 2013, 10:44 PM

You make a great point regarding the attitude of the average soldier. Throughout much of the war, both sides were waiting around and doing nothing. An opportunity to fight would probably have been a welcome change of pace. I also agree that the mentality of the men was very different from today. To die in battle was considered heroic and was seen as an honor. I am not saying that modern soldiers are not brave, they just try and not get killed a little harder.

I agree that the "bushwackers" probably were not treated kindly if they were unfortunate enough to be captured. I think they were

seen as despicable barbarians who did not have the honor to partake in a fair fight. During this time, war was seen as a gentleman's crusade. However, the guerrilla tactics were successful and Forrest's strategies were copied by both sides during the war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Medical Care in the Civil War

by Ian MacDonald - Thursday, February 21, 2013, 1:44 PM

All sources that I have seen, the text and both series, seem to express how severe a role that disease played in the Civil War. "The Divided Union", in my opinion, went into most detail about the effect that wounds and disease had on troops in the war. The video states that more people died of disease and sickness than of wounds from battle. It went so far as to state that the chances of someone surviving a wound in the Civil War were about 1 out of 7, and that some troops would go for several hours after receiving a wound before being attended to. Both series did pretty well in describing the types of hospitals and other places that victims would be taken to for treatment. I found it quite interesting that some of the wounded had to be taken to places like the Senate and House chambers, when the very few hospitals that stood were full. Most surgical operations like amputations would be carried out in tents set up right on the battlefield. This was definitely one topic that I felt both series when compared to one another, complimented each other. The information that the Ken Burns episode left out was provided in "The Divided Union" and vice-versa.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Medical Care in the Civil War

by Robyn Stevens - Friday, February 22, 2013, 5:26 PM

I do agree with you on the point you make that you feel "The Divided Union" went onto more detail about the medical care and how it effected the soldiers. The 12 minute clip was very informative. I feel that the clip went into killing and death a bit more in depth. With the reading, documentary series, this small clip, articles, and photographs, I have learned so much more than I ever knew about the civil war. The death rate alone in this war, would be unheard of now, in the present.

I was also very surprised and found it quite interesting that alot of Washington D.C. buildings were used as makeshift hospitals. I should not be surprised considering this was still in the day and age when the White House was still open to the public and you could just go in. I find myself asking the question would I have opened up my house to let hundreds of dying men have a bit of comfort? I know I would have because it would have been my duty. I think alot of people felt that way at that time.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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The Most Terrible Battle(s) of the Civil War

by Ian MacDonald - Friday, February 22, 2013, 1:05 PM

Although both series went into quite a bit of detail on the Battle of the Wilderness, the Ken Burns video described it better than "The Divided Union", in my opinion. It was described as being the most terrible battle of the war because more men fell in two days than during the whole battle of Chancellorsville and the climate was so dry that the lint from wounded men would catch the fallen leaves on fire. And then the fire would burn the wounded troops before they could be rescued. The area that they were fighting in was also so overgrown that it was hard for the two armies to see each other until they were in very close range to each other. The Battle of Cold Harbor in June of 1864 (which I mistook for the Battle of the Wilderness in my first forum posting) I noticed was described a little differently in both videos. The Ken Burns video stated that about 7,000 men on the Union side fell in roughly 7 minutes, while "The Divided Union" claimed that the same number of troops was killed in the first 30 minutes of the battle. Both resources did however state that this battle was when Grant made his worst mistake in the war. He sent about $\frac{3}{4}$ of his regiment in only to be shot down by the Confederates. The battle at Kennesaw Mountain was talked about in much the same way in both documentaries. The only thing that "The Divided Union" happened to mention that the Ken Burns episode did not was the fact that Sherman lost more men in this battle than in all previous battles of his campaign.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The Most Terrible Battle(s) of the Civil War

by Courtney Merrell - Saturday, February 23, 2013, 9:50 PM

The Kennesaw Mountain battle was one of the most interesting to me. Sherman led his men up the mountain, where the confederates had the upper hand because of their high ground advantage. Even though Sherman's flanking technique wasn't getting them much ground, I wondered what compelled him to switch to a frontal assault and lead his men into an almost suicidal situation. In the end the union suffered 3x as many losses as the confederates, leading to yet another Union defeat.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Most Terrible Battle(s) of the Civil War

by Ryan Lundberg - Sunday, February 24, 2013, 2:30 PM

Courtney,

If I recall correctly, I think in Burns documentary it's stated that Sherman was on his Atlanta Campaign, and with his ultimate goal in sight he became anxious and abandoned his series of flanking maneuvers that had worked well up to that point. I can't go back and watch the videos right now to confirm this because the library site is down yet again, but Burns interpretation does make me wonder a little bit. At least according to Wikipedia, his motives may have been different.

"He could not continue his strategy of moving around Johnston's flank because of the impassable roads, and his railroad supply line was dominated by Johnston's position on the top of 691 feet (211 m) Kennesaw Mountain."

So in this case, it seems like Sherman was not impatient, but rather, in order to continue his campaign there was no other viable choice than a frontal assault. Because of this, it kind of seems like Burns interpreted Sherman's mindset rather than just reporting his actions.

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

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Generals



by Courtney Merrell - Saturday, February 23, 2013, 9:36 PM

This weeks *Ken Burns: Civil War* episode went into depth about the background and history of both Lee and Grant, discussing their education, families and how they came to be such heroic figures of the Civil War. I loved the personal details that were included like how Lee was called Granny Lee and was known to take good care of his men and how calm Grant always seemed to be, and was called Uncle Sam by his men. I believe that *Civil War* shined a better light on the lives of these two generals. *The Divided Union* did not delve into much detail on these men's lives, but only skimmed over a section the years 1864/1865 . I also noticed that *The Divided Union* didn't use personal quotes from people of that time, the documentary clip only used experts to discuss the issues. I like the fact that Ken Burns shares letters, poems, songs, and thoughts of the people throughout his *Civil War*, this gives us, as the reader, a better understanding of the tone and mood of that era. I think that *The Divided Union* works good WITH *Ken Burns: Civil War* but I'm not sure it could fully stand alone and teach me as much information as Ken Burn's documenatry has.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Generals



by Ryan Lundberg - Sunday, February 24, 2013, 2:19 PM

Courtney,

I think you bring up a good point about The Divided Union relying more on historical experts to discuss Lee and Grant. I agree that adding the words/thoughts of the subjects themselves adds more to understanding these people than just the summarized testimony of someone trying to define the character of these generals. However, I also wonder how accurate or true to character some of the sources used in the Burns documentary are. Do the subjects accurately describe their actions or state of mind? I wonder if the letters these people wrote were as objective as possible. I thought it was interesting to see what McClellan's viewpoint was of his grand role in the war and the buffoons who stood in his way. In a way, even though McClellan didn't seem to accurately record what happened, his letters did provide an insight into his psychology. So, what I'm trying to say is that I agree that adding the personal words/actions of these people fleshes out their characters to a greater degree, I wonder just how true those words or thoughts are.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Generals



by Ian MacDonald - Sunday, February 24, 2013, 3:11 PM

I too agree that the Ken Burns series is more informative then "The Divided Union." The thing that makes the Ken Burns series better, in my opinion, is the way that it was put together. The narratives and letters by the soldiers that actually fought in the war combined with the music and old photos of the war really keep me focused and interested in each episode. "The Divided Union" was informative yet boring in term of how the information was presented. I found myself having to go back several times and re-watch certain scenes just to fully get a grasp on what they were saying. With the Ken Burns series, I can watch an episode all the way through and retain most of the information the very first time. Never the less, however, I believe that these two series and the McPherson book all complimented each other for the most part. I believe that it was helpful to watch that clip from "The Divided Union" because it covered certain bits of information that "The Civil War" left out.

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Battle Tactics



by Adam Coutts - Sunday, February 24, 2013, 3:07 PM

Of course when each source whether it be the book or one of the two documentaries is by itself you don't really have all the details. There could be more of those details that was omitted or removed. However I personally believe that all three materials work well in this instance. In regards to the three battles in the 1864 Overland

Campaign, all three battles are considered Confederate victories however Grant kept pushing his forces deeper and deeper. Grant's strategy was to grind down the Confederate army by waging a war of attrition. During the battle of Cold Harbor, another bloody battle and Confederate victory held no strategic advantage to really compensate the heavy losses of Union troops. And finally the battle of Kennesaw Mountain a significant Union tactical defeat, another Confederate victory a sizeable boost in morale and after the battle the Union troops were now very close to their prize the city of Atlanta. So while these three battles essentially are Confederate victories the Union especially General Grant pressed his advantage every time and did not withdraw his forces like so many of his Union counterparts. I believe without these three source materials we wouldn't be able to fully see the greater painted picture.

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