



## Forum 2

Display replies in nested form

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[Move](#)**Creative License**by [Joe Escobar](#) - Monday, January 19, 2015, 1:25 AM

After studying the required materials, address the various questions. Make your initial posts by the Wednesday deadline (if not sooner) in order to start the discussion. Then, continue your discussions until the Sunday deadline.

To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

**IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES****BE SURE** to use an informative subject line for your post. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Creative License

Sum of ratings: -

[Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Initial Thoughts of "Honorable Manhood"**by [Kayla Janis](#) - Tuesday, January 20, 2015, 8:28 PM

Initially, I thought that Maj. Ballou's letters was Burns' way of foreshadowing the many deaths that Civil War would bring. I thought that the imagery presented with it was merely Burns showing the viewer how the war would tear apart families and leave them devastated. The previous clip ends with a quote from George Templeton Strong: "December 31: Poor old 1861 just going. It has been a gloomy year of trouble and disaster. I should be glad of it's departure were it not that 1862 is likely to be no better." In my opinion, I felt this this quote ended the first episode. In fact, I didn't write any notes for "Honorable Manhood." When Burns jumps from 31 December 1861 to 14 July 1861, I assumed it was his way of telling the viewer what to expect in Episode Two- more death and fighting. As such, I didn't think twice about the leap backwards in the chronology.

In watching the clip a second time, I felt like the letter illustrated two things: a soldier's devotion to his cause and the difficulty these men had in leaving their families. Ballou writes, "I have no misgivings about or lack of confidence in the cause which I'm engaged and my courage does not halt or father... I'm willing... to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government." In my opinion, Burns was merely using a primary source to illustrate how devoted so many Americans were to their side. When, Ballou goes on to say, "If I do not return, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you. Nor, that when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name," my heart melted a little. It was too sweet! But, when I read that the original had been lost, I have to question if it's too sweet because the original had been elaborated.

Learning that this is most likely not the original wording, it's hard to take the letter seriously. It also causes me to question ALL of the quotes in the film. To me, it's not a stretch to think that maybe the quotes are taken out of context to support an idea or claim. I'm hesitant to question the documentary as a whole. But, I do think I'm far less likely to take quotes at face value.

Sum of ratings: [3 \(1\)](#) [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Ending of Episode 1**by [Bethany Hunter-Lehman](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 10:30 PM

I also agree that the episode ended with George Templeton Strong's quote. It just seemed that he was summing up how horrible the year was and we needed to tune in to what would come next. It was interesting that you did not notice the leap backwards in the chronology, because I also did not notice at first either. Do you think that it would have been more effective if Burns had ended the episode with Strong's quote? Or with Ballou's letter?

I also noticed that you ended up questioning the quotes that will be presented in the film, while in your first post it

seemed that when historians were questioning Burn's you somewhat pushed aside the concern of the events in the film not being accurate. I was curious why the quotes made a difference in the film's accuracy and not the dates and events that the historians mentioned in the previous forum discussion.

You had a great point of view and I appreciate how you analyzed the ending of the episode! Your posts really create a great analytical view!

Sum of ratings: **2 (1)**

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### Re: Ending of Episode 1

by [Kayla Janis](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 5:16 PM

I think that the first episode would've been better if it had ended with Strong's quote. The fact that it was dated December 31st reinforces that it's the end of the year. The first episode is titled "The Cause (1861)" so I think that Strong's quote perfectly wraps up 1861 and prepares you for 1862. Your question made me wonder where I'd have fit Ballou's letter in. I don't think it would've necessarily fit into the section titled "Manassas" and I don't think it was the perfect ending to the first episode, either. I don't think that it would've fit well in the Manassas section because it felt like the focus was on the military movements of the Union and the Confederates. It might've worked in giving the viewer an idea about the emotional side of war and not just military goals and statistics. But, I think it would've been awkward- like it's just thrown in there. As I'm thinking about where to put it, I almost wonder if it's worth adding in at all. What do you think?

As for your second question, that's a tough one! I guess, in my opinion, dates are facts. You can't really argue with their meaning. And, there are so many significant dates in history that it's easy to mess up a day or year. For me, it's easier to overlook what may have been a mistake. But, the quotes bother me because they can be manipulated. If it's taken out of context, you can twist the viewer's perception of the meaning. To me, that's a bit more difficult to overlook. Had Burns somehow let the viewer know that the quote wasn't from an original letter but a copy, I don't think it would've bothered me as much. As a viewer, I want to hear the facts and perspectives and be able to form my own understanding. I don't want to be told, "this is how we see it and you should, too."

Thanks for the tough questions- it's getting me to stretch my brain a bit more!

Sum of ratings: **3 (1)**

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### To Add Ballou's Letter or Not To Add?

by [Bethany Hunter-Lehman](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 11:03 PM

I also do wonder if the letter is appropriate to add at all. I do see why the letter is an amazing device to grasp the audience's attention. It is full of emotion showing that it wasn't just a war but it was people's lives. I think the added touch of the voice who read Ballou's letter was great as well. Listening to the way he exposed his love for his wife in a calm demeanor really hit home I think for most viewers. Then again like you have mentioned, how much of that letter was really his? It does make you wonder if the letter is appropriate at all. I can see Burn's intent but maybe in a different episode would have been better. Overall, it was a creative idea to add in the letter but I think the episode could have done without it.

Sum of ratings: **2 (1)**

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### Re: Initial Thoughts of "Honorable Manhood"

by [Sherry Althaus](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 1:50 AM

Doing some further reading on Sullivan Ballou's letter, I have found that the original copy of the letter was sent to home to his wife in his trunk with his ashes and other personal belongings. This was one of a couple letters he had not sent because he was tragically killed within a couple days of writing them. Upon reading the letter, his wife had some handwritten copies made. "Many of those copies exist today, with slight variations from one to the other. The letter also appeared in publications shortly after the war. The location of the original letter is unknown." (Bessel, 1998-2015) This says to me that that more than likely the copy that Burns used in the making of his film was as close to accurate as possible. Days before he wrote this letter he wrote another letter to his wife saying he was making plans for her to come see him soon, unaware they would be leaving to attack so soon. I feel that burns having to go into the great amount of detail it would take to explain the situation this soldier found himself in, would take away from the emotion that the reading of the letter generated.

## References

Bessel, P. M. (1998-2015). *Civil War - Sullivan Ballou's letter*. Retrieved from <http://bessel.org/>:  
<http://bessel.org/sullball.htm>

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### A symbolic gestor from Burns

by [Marcelo Rodriguez](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 1:03 AM

To me I think Ben Burns was using that scene as a symbolic gestor showing that a lot of people lost their loved ones during the Civil War. I was, however taken aback after finding out that Ballou's letter didn't get to his wife until well after the Civil War, that there are more than one version of the latter, and that Burns never mentioned that information. I think it would have been informative with that information. It also confused me as to why it jumped from December 31st, 1861 back to July 14, 1861. I feel as though that the quote from George Strong at the end of the previous scene should have ended episode 1 because it just confused me a little, Ballou's letter would have better fit in the "Manassas" scene when they were talking about the battle of Bull Run. I actually liked the scene about Ballou's letter though, I felt like I could relate to Ballou, if I were back there during the Civil War or even now and I had to go into battle I would want my wife to know what I was thinking and how I felt about her.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### Re: A symbolic gestor from Burns

by [Jal Rial](#) - Friday, January 23, 2015, 11:38 AM

Marcelo,

I couldn't agree with you any more .I too also believe that burns was showing how much folks both north and south lost loved ones during the civil war.I also believe that he was trying to show us audience how brave these men where because it takes a lot of courage to fight for your country not knowing if you'd ever see your loved ones again. I think lot of people forget bout that and burns wanted us to keep that faucal point in our dome. I was disappointed to learn that the letter could of been changed or modified because there was more then one version. Burn is definitely wrong as a filmmaker to not state or let the audience know that there was more then one version. Maybe not to other folks but personally that would of made a big difference to me. Lastly I cant relate to you an Ballou i'm the type that if i'm at war an know something bad could occur I wouldn't want more my wife no kids knowing that i'm not returning or going through hell. It might be selfish but that is just how I'am.as a person.Great post marccelo and keep up the good work.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Re: A symbolic gestor from Burns

by [Matthew Wymore](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 4:27 PM

It is kind of shocking and makes you question the films a bit more, especially when you hear that the letter was delivered such a long time after it was written. It almost makes you wonder what else in the films has been altered in some way, and with how much validity can we as students view these films. I'm sure it wasn't Burns intention to mislead anyone, or to purposely misconstrue history, I'm sure he was just trying to make something that was emotionally and visually appealing to his viewers.

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### Re: A symbolic gestor from Burns

by [Marcelo Rodriguez](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 9:19 PM

I completely agree with you; it does make you question the film a bit after hearing that the letter was delivered after a long period of time and that it may not be the original writing, because how do I know now if the quotes he uses in the film are original or not? I also agree that Burns didn't intentionally try to mislead the audience, however I think Burns should have used a more reliable source to make his point. I'm sure there are plenty of letters out there that he could have used that could be emotional and visual appealing to the audience than a letter that has more than one version of it.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### letters

by [Roxanne Lindquist](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 12:50 PM

I felt that burns uses this scene as away to hit home for people by brining in Ballou's letter it makes it emotional and a better understanding of having to write a final letter not knowing if it will be the end. Also I felt that it was used as an opening for the next episode A vary bloody affair.

I think that burns also wanted to show the struggle between ones country and ones family during the war. In Ballous letter he states "my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me to you with mighty cables that nothing omnipotence could break; and yet my love of country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battlefield" to me this say's that he loves her with all his heart and soul and nothing but god could break it, but also loves his country and believes what he is fighting for and has a duty to follow it through till he can go no further. After finding out this was not the only version of the letter I did look up some other sources for this letter and read a couple and they seemed to include what is cited on the video but also included more in them. I also read more in to it regarding what happened to Ballou's body and the evidence that Sprague gathered regarding the desecration to Ballou. I think it should have been mentioned that there are other versions out there and the original appears to be lost.

I felt that the pictures in the video of other couples while reading "Sarah's letter" was nice and thoughtful because it makes it more sincere and is making it about the general loss of loved ones and family's and not just about Ballou and his family. Though burns uses Ballous words it makes it feel that these are words from others during this time to there loved ones and express their heartbreak as well.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### Re: letters

by [Marcelo Rodriguez](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 2:51 PM

I fell the same way regarding the fact Burns didn't mention that the original letter Ballou wrote was lost and that many versions exist. The reason why I think it's important to have that information is because than I know that it may not be the exact wording Ballou used in his letter. It may not seem important to some people, but factual statements are important to me because, I'd rather hear something that is true than something that is paraphrased or words added. The reason for that is because words can be twisted in to something completely different than what the person is trying to say. I feel as though Burns should have actually used a different letter from someone else that is similar to the one that Ballou wrote if he knew that it wasn't the original letter. It doesn't change the message Burns was trying to convey with Ballou's letter, however make me wonder if any of the other quotes are paraphrased.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Re: letters

by [Micah McJunkin](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 1:05 PM

I agree that the use of the pictures was a great way to make the audience realize that the feelings were not just Ballou's, but also that of many more soldiers. I struggle with the decision to include or not include the fact that more versions of the letter are out there. We know for certain that the letter was written by Ballou, and we know the reason why he wrote it. So wouldn't mentioning that in the video series be counter productive? I think the intended point of showing the emotions and motivations of the soldiers was made effectively by Burns and what he chose to use in the video.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### letters & emotions

by [Jal Rial](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 2:38 PM

I totally believe that burns used scene to show everybody that the solider didn't know when it would be over for them, Ballou's letter was just an example for burns to show us how scary and dramatic of time this was. Nobody knew when they could die or come home and the emotion of the letter was a prime time example in my opinion. I think that burns wanted us to know that these soldiers loved both there families and there homeland and that they would do anything to defend it. In ballou's letter he states that his love for his wife is deathless but also that his love for his country comes over him like a strong wind and I think that is very strong to say. Not only did his word support exactly what burns was trying to get at but it

also help us imagine how strong of feeling he had for both his family and his beloved nation. This kind of put an accurate thinking of the war perfectly in my head. Maybe not everyone wanted to fight or maybe they didn't agree with some of the stuff happening but personally I feel that it was obvious that no one wanted to see their side down fall whether it was the confederate south or the patriotism north folks. The men were willing to die for their country in a heartbeat and at the same time show enough courage to their loved ones to express exactly how they felt. To me that is just very strong. Not only did Ballou's letter make me feel his way but so did "Sarah letter" and the other married individuals who expressed so much overwhelming distress and just plain tragedy.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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#### Re: Creative License

by [Janey Willis](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 3:49 PM

Sometimes creative licenses do need to be taken, doing this can be helpful to whatever they are trying to bring to life and it can be helpful in making history more interesting. However, these creative licenses do bother me a little bit when it comes to accuracy. I am the kind of person who likes information about events laid out in the right order as it is easier for me to process and learn about.

In this case though I didn't feel confused or question the accuracy. I simply think that Burns was using this license to lay out the story in a way that flowed better and in a way that was almost more aesthetically pleasing. I saw him using the letter as kind of an emotional tool to show the fear surrounding this war and how the soldiers and their loved ones were feeling in this dramatic and terrifying time. The way it was presented showed a small part of a love story between two people, but also a love of country.

I was still able to understand the history and did feel like I had a better understanding of the letter when it was presented in the context that it was, even if it wasn't in the correct order chronologically.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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#### Re: Creative License

by [Kayla Janis](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 5:40 PM

I agree with you and disagree with you. I believe that Burns was using the letter creatively so that he could easily illustrate what families endured for their love of country. Reading through this forum's comments, it appears that he achieved that. People are commenting on how they were able to see the Civil War in a more personal way. For that, I commend Burns.

But, my concern is this: at what point do we stop calling it "creative license" and start calling it historical fiction? With this specific example, this is probably a stretch. But, how do we know how close or far off the letter read to us is to the original letter? With documentaries, I think it's important to allow the viewer to know your source. I think had Burns introduced the letter with, "In a letter reproduced from the original, Maj. Ballou writes to his wife, Sarah." Or, something along those lines. I think had he done that, the viewer would've had an understanding that the letter was not an original but still describes one's love of country and family, the emotional toll of not knowing when you'll die and the struggles of a soldier.

I think I would've appreciated some "creative license" somewhere else. Maybe, not identifying Ballou as a Confederate or Union soldier. I can't imagine that Confederate soldiers felt differently when writing to their loved ones. Had Burns left that fact out, I think he could have still portrayed the emotional aspect of the war and allowed the viewer to see that ALL the soldiers dealt with this, not just Union soldiers.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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#### Re: Creative License

by [Roxanne Lindquist](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 9:44 PM

I really like and agree with your statement that maybe if Ballou was not identified as a Union soldier that it would still put the same emotion out there. But to give it a more broad feeling of a soldier from this time whether it be Confederate or Union they still had the same fears and troubles of battle. I do believe that for most viewers it did make the documentary a little more personal, but on the other hand as you said it should have been stated that it

had been reproduced from the original especially since it is a documentary.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Re to Keeping Soldiers Allegiances Hidden

by [Alanna VanDreew](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 5:50 PM

I'm not use that keeping out what side Major Ballou was on would be beneficial to the viewers. If the show just started talking about an unknown Major and didn't discuss who he was I would be not only confused, but annoyed. I think any historical record should discriminate what person is on what side. Already in the first episode there's already been a great amount of loss on both sides of the war. I think many people can imagine that the south had soldiers missing their families like Ballou is. If you felt like there was any bias in the show I believe it would be more pertinent to have more than one love letter read aloud on the series. But then again, I think it might be conceived as redundant. In any case I think hiding what side Ballou was on would be distorting the facts. Which in my option, would be a bigger offence then a nearly made up letter expressing a soldiers longing for his wife.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Re: Re to Keeping Soldiers Allegiances Hidden

by [Kayla Janis](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 3:30 PM

I definitely disagree- supplying a document and letting your viewer assume it's the original is s much larger historical inaccuracy than leaving out which side of the war he was on. Viewing the episode, I assumed this was an original letter written by Ballou. Without an original copy, there's no way to verify that the words we heare are actually coming from Ballou. However, my original point is that the sentiments expressed in the letter can easily be felt on both sides. I don't think that saying he's a Union soldiers makes the film biased in any way. I just think the love for family and country were felt on BOTH sides.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Re: Re to Keeping Soldiers Allegiances Hidden

by [Matthew Wymore](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 4:08 PM

Like I originally said in my post, it's easy to forget that countrymen were fighting each other, and that the person you were shooting at may have a family just like the one that you are fighting for. The letter in this case was used as a tool for emotional appeal, and if the letters original context was lost long ago it doesn't entirely matter (in this context). Now if the letter was being used as a prime example of historical relevance, then yes the accuracy of the letter does matter.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Re: Re to Keeping Soldiers Allegiances Hidden

by [Agina Hale](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 9:36 PM

I don't even think that it mattered whether the letter was union or confederate, the emotional sentiment was the point of letter. I actually think that it would be better if that point was left out, because all the facts weren't even presented in the first place. It just seems a tad biased.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Making Sure You Keep Watching

by [Alanna VanDreew](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 5:21 PM

I think it's perfectly fine for Ken Burns to take a creative spin on an old love letter from a Major in the civil war. I think it's important to look at who the audience is for this history documentary. On the whole, the purpose of this show was meant to get the general public interested in the Civil War. People can relate to emotional ties and thus draw the audiences' attention. So I can understand its purpose. In fact, it's a powerful ending to the beginning of the war despite, being mildly made up and out of chronological order. I seems to me that there are other instances throughout the series that are more misinforming to the educational purposes of the show. In last week's reading by Michael A. Morrison and Robert E. May said, "The

documentary's narrated text... is so seriously flawed that the credibility of the series is brought into question."(*Limitations of Classroom Media*) There are numeral mistakes of misinformation and incorrect historical dates that bring a questionable eye to the series. And in my mind a little attention grabber like this love letter in the last chapter of episode 1 is of little consequence to me.

I find that the story of Union Major Sullivan Ballou did hinder my understanding of the war only a fraction. Because I was expecting the episode to go in strict chronological order. I thought throughout most of the reading of the letter that it had taken place during the end of the 1861. I can see that it was a way to encourage the audience to watch the next episode but, it would have served well at in order of events, and would have avoided any would be confusion about when it was taking place.

Souses

*Burns Episode 1*

*Limitations of Classroom Media page 1*

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### Honest Reflections of Loss

by [Justin Wright](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 5:24 PM

Often I find myself critical of creative license taken too far. I do not believe that Mr. Burns has gone too far here.

I don't think it's dangerous to assume many letters were written just like the one we're discussing. I also suppose that a great many of those letters were successfully sent off before the beginning of many battles.

Thinking about it further, I'd rather have the detail about the delayed delivery of the letter left out because it might distract from the more common occurrence of letters actually getting mailed before battles. Union Major Ballou's failure, or decision, not to send the letter may have been more of an exception to the general rule of soldiers letters being mailed or held on to. But of course, I can't be certain.

However, I thought Mr. Burns inclusion of the contents of the letter were appropriate given they most likely reflected the general sentiments of northern soldiers at that time, not to mention Ballou's ability to eloquently articulate circumstances that were, in many ways, indescribable.

I take no issue with Mr. Burns creative license in this scene, and I'm quite please he included the moving letter. It's possible that disclosing the letter wasn't received for several years would have distracted from the main point.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### Re: Honest Reflections of Loss

by [Justin Wright](#) - Friday, January 23, 2015, 1:46 PM

I'd also like to add that including the letter was actually enlightening for me.

As I've said before, I've struggled to understand the complexity of racism in the North and South and why both sides went to war.

Ballou's letter makes it clear why he was fighting, and what he was willing to die for, which was simply to hold up the grand institution that his forefathers fought so gallantly for only 85 years prior.

As the voiceover read the letter I began to understand better what an incredible feat the country had accomplished in winning it's Independence and setting up a form of government that is, in many places, still jealously regarded today.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Re: Honest Reflections of Loss

by [Micah McJunkin](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 12:27 PM

I completely agree with you about wanting to hear a first hand explanation of the reasoning for fighting the war. I

thought the letter was the perfect example of that. Before this class I had not really connected the North fighting because of the efforts in the Revolutionary War. I'm not sure why I didn't think about that before, because I believe that same motivation still exists today. Many people choose to join today's military because they want to protect what many Americans ahead of them fought for and died for.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Fighting for More Than the Union

by [Trenton Bieker](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 9:10 PM

I was surprised when I search online for Ballou's letter. I found one posted by Fox News and was much more lengthy than the one recited in the video. I notice that Ballou was seen here to be fighting for more than just the country. Ballou states "Our movement may be one of a few days duration and full of pleasure -- and it may be one of severe conflict and death to me. Not my will, but thine O God, be done.", indicating to me that he felt he was fighting for his God's will and not his own. Another line further down states "A pure love of my country and of the principles I have often advocated before the people and "the name of honor that I love more than I fear death" have called upon me, and I have obeyed.", again here I see that he not only fought for his country but also fought for honor. I wonder why these lines weren't presented in the video, I would think this would add a fullness to the husband, father, soldier, and country man known as Ballou.

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2011/07/28/major-sullivan-ballous-letter-to-wife-sarah/>

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### Emotional Appeal

by [Matthew Wymore](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 5:43 PM

In this case I can understand why Burns would want to use Major Sullivan Ballou's letter to his wife as a way to tug at the hearts of his viewers. Major Ballou's letter helps to paint a picture in the minds of Burns' viewers; that people were going to war against their own brethren, who had families just like their own. These men were all fighting and dying for what they thought and what they believed was right.

I don't really feel that Burns using the letter out of chronological order made my understanding of history inaccurate at all. I can see how someone might get confused based on the way that the letter was thrown in at the end of the film, but for me it was a way of tying everything together in a somewhat appealing way.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Re: Emotional Appeal

by [Roxanne Lindquist](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 10:49 PM

The fact that you brought up that the men were fighting against their own brethren I think is a powerful thought. I think when a lot of people look at the civil war or war in general they don't think of it as loved ones and family fighting against each other, and look at it more like one side against the other. Like with General Lee who according to page 281 (Battle Cry of Freedom) had devoted his life to the Union army and had made clear his dislike for slavery described in 1856 "as a moral political evil" and spoken against secession. But with Virginian's decision everything changed "I must side either with or against my section" and told his northern friend "I cannot raise my hand against my birthplace, my home, my children". He had sided with his family but now against his friends and what he believed in and the men he had fought along side of for so long.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### Re: Emotional Appeal

by [Micah McJunkin](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 12:44 PM

I am in the same boat as you as far as not feeling that it affected my understanding of the events in the war. I keep coming back to the same thoughts about Burns and his making of the series, and that is knowing your audience. The majority of the audience would benefit more by Burns using the letter in the way he chose to use it. It gives people a

great example of the emotions of the soldiers from a first hand perspective. The majority of the audience will appreciate that perspective and not even know that it is out of chronological order. Only a small few people in the audience will see it the other way.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Thoughts on Maj. Ballou's Letter

by [Gabrielle Jones](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 7:13 PM

What I got from the letter Burns used was that he chose that one letter to show us that the soldiers didn't know when the war would be over and when or even if they would get to go home to their families. I think the creative license he used was the right one. I strongly believe that he used it that way to show us how scary it was for the people in the war. Maj. Ballou was scared that he wouldn't make it home to his wife and two sons. Actually I'm pretty sure he knew he wasn't coming home. I think the reason that Burns didn't tell us that Ballou's wife didn't read the letter till long after the war was because he wanted to make us think that she read it right after the battle was over or got the letter before he died and then found out he had died and was heart broken. The other images of couples or families might have been to show us other men who died or even survived with their families. Burns using the letter out of order in the time line of the war could have been that way because Ballou's wife didn't receive the letter till after he died. It doesn't make it harder to understand the history and I don't think it made it inaccurate.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Re: Thoughts on Maj. Ballou's Letter

by [Jal Rial](#) - Friday, January 23, 2015, 12:10 PM

Gabrielle,

Nice response, not only is Burns trying to let the world know how hard and emotional it is to write a letter to your wife not knowing if its the end or not, but also the point you made of him (burns) showing the struggle between ones family and ones country. I could only imagine how scary and nerve racking it is to me the receiving of such a letter (ballous wife) or even to be the actual soldier fighting for his country. I don't believe that they choose there country over there family but more of the patriot living in there blood. That painted a clear imagine in my mind that no matter how much soldiers didn't want to leave there loved ones to fight they just had to much pride for there country to let it go undefended. I think it was awesome for burns to include other letter like Sarah's into the video because it helped us relize It wasn't just one soldier or family going through the pain but more of everyone involved an that brought a different level of emotion to the film and im guessing its audience also because it brought me to think a lot more deeply about how everyone was going through a very difficult time.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### What It's Like To Write Home

by [Trenton Bieker](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 8:39 PM

I think Ken Burns using Union Major Sullivan Ballou's letter at the end was a good way to wrap up the first video. I think this was used to have a heartfelt impact that stuck with the viewer to have them come back to watch the next video. The letter was needed in my opinion to bring light on the impact this war had on families.

I don't feel that this "creative license" has had a negative effect on my understanding of the Civil War. If anything this has made the history more "real", due to the fact I can imagine what this would feel like if I was writing home to my wife. Technically this is out of chronological order and if Mr. Escobar hadn't of made that clear there is a chance that I would have assumed that. I don't however think that this has majorly affected my understanding of events. It is a little concerning that info about the authenticity of the letter is withheld. If I the student am inclined to trust those who share with me history, then maybe this practice is one that should be stopped even if it doesn't adversely effect the history. I just think that it is a slippery slope to fabricating other things in an ability to prove something at the expense of true history.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### The Truth about History

by [Bethany Hunter-Lehman](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 11:40 PM

Trenton,

I really do understand that by being the student that we need to know the facts and truth about the subject matter that we are studying. But by being students, it is our job to learn. If we were just given all the information, would we truly be expanding our knowledge. I feel that in every subject, it is our job as students to put upon ourselves to seek out the factual information. In reality, we should take everything with a grain of salt and look into it further. I also wanted to propose the idea that if we really think about it, how truthful is the history that we learn no matter the subject. After all, we are taking someone's word, whoever side they may be on, simply because it was written in the book. Growing up, I always heard the saying, "The good guys are the ones who get to write/tell their stories." And who gets to decide who is right?

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Soldier's Letter home

by [Sherry Althaus](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 9:12 PM

Major Sullivan of the Union Army of the United States was not a soldier by trade, but a lawyer and legislator. He was educated at Phillips Academy in Andover Massachusetts, Brown University in Providence Rhode Island, and then attended National Law School in Ballston New York. (National Park Service, 2002) He was admitted to the Rhode Island Bar in 1853. He devoted his brief life to public service and was elected in 1854 to the Rhode Island House of Representatives, later serving as its speaker. When the war erupted in 1861, he immediately enlisted, and he became judge advocate of the Rhode Island militia and was 32 at the time of his death at the first Battle of Bull Run on July 21, 1861 (Burns, 2002).

The creative license that Ken Burns takes with the chronology that is depicted by the images that are shown during the reading of the letter from Major Sullivan to his wife Sara do not affect my accurate understanding of the civil war. The images of enlisted and officers of the Union Army helps me to realize that the war not only effected the soldiers, but also their wives and children. Every picture of a soldier and his family or a soldier with a wounded or amputated body part has had their life changed by the war. This was also the case with Major Sullivan's wife who life would never be the same after the war, and I believe that this was the point Ken Burns was trying to get across.

Sarah Sullivan was 24 years old when her husband died. She had her whole life ahead of her, and passed away in 1917 at the age of 80 years old, and she never was remarried. (Burns, 2002)

### Works Cited

Burns, K. (Director). (2002). *The Civil War* [Motion Picture].

National Park Service. (2002, January 10). "My Very Dear Wife" - *The Last Letter of Major Sullivan Ballou*. Retrieved from National Park Service Manassas National Battlefield Park: <http://www.nps.gov/resources/story.htm?id=253>

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### Ending Scene of Episode 1

by [Bethany Hunter-Lehman](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 10:40 PM

Did you think that the letter home was an effective way in ending the episode? Or since the letter was out of chronological order do you think some other scene should have ended that episode?

I found that it was hard to relate to the pictures, because I felt that the people in them were so stiff. I understand that in that era, emotion wasn't shown as much through pictures. It is awesome that the photos helped you see that connection between family, war, and life. For me, the music and the voice of Ballou really helped me get that deeper connection that you were able to see through the pictures.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Re: Ending Scene of Episode 1

by [Kayla Janis](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 5:48 PM

I agree! The pictures of the married couples weren't as powerful as the words themselves. Ballou's writing is very sweet and it's hard to realize that he's going to be dead after he writes it. The pictures of the couples are very stiff. No one is smiling so I keep thinking, "how happy was that marriage?! Geez!" But, what really spoke to me in the pictures were the wedding rings. I don't really know why. But, seeing the rings made it all very real. My husband hates wearing his ring- he's a mechanic and it poses a safety issue. When he wears it, it means the world to me. Maybe, that is why I found the rings so endearing- they hit a personal cord with me? Whatever the reason may be, the emotionless faces didn't hit home as much as the rings did!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Re: Ending Scene of Episode 1

by [Alanna VanDreew](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 6:27 PM

I like those pictures too and with them being shown while Ballou's letter was being dictated made my heart ache for those people who were lost in the war, who could never have their families back. However, it was stated in our resources for this forum that those pictures we saw were of six different couples. We don't even know if we saw a picture of Major Ballou and his wife or if we did, which one it was. I'm not sure if it's just me or the quality of the photographs but, I didn't notice at all that they were different couples. I thought that it was all pictures of him and his wife. In one instance Ballou says, "...See our boys grow up to honorable manhood." And the show displayed pictures of a man with his wife and two kids. It's apparent we don't know who those people are. I wish he had chosen something more concrete than a half true letter and pictures from unknown people at the end of the episode. I can't help but think that there is bound to be an existing love letter from a soldier to a family member, out on record that might have been more honest and factual to show the audience. I get the feeling the whole last chapter of episode one was pretty creative.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Wedding Rings

by [Bethany Hunter-Lehman](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 11:16 PM

Kayla,

I didn't even notice the wedding rings as much! I guess if I would have paid more attention, that also may have hit home for me. I am glad that you pointed that out!

Sum of ratings:(1)

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### Re: Ending Scene of Episode 1

by [Jal Rial](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 4:03 PM

Bethany,

I personally feel that episode 1 should have definitely been ended by another scene that made more sense or at least that helped it order wise. I think because the letter was out of order that really threw me and the ending of episode 1 off by a long shot!! I don't see how the emotionless folks in the pictures could have helped anyone connect the war with family and life in general. It's like saying a blank face can help you tell what they're thinking of how they feel. I don't think that is possible. Lastly I agree with you Bethany the music and the voice of Ballou's alone helped a lot more to paint a picture in my brain of how he felt vs the emotionless pictures. Glad you stated that Bethany. Keep up the good work.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Ballou's Letter Home vs. Strong's Quote

by [Bethany Hunter-Lehman](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 10:13 PM



As the end of Episode 1 came to a close, I thought that the letter was not a good way to end the episode. I can see how Burns was trying to get the viewer interested in the next episode but, I think the more appropriate ending would have been ending with the quote by George Templeton Strong saying, "poor old 1861 just going. It has been a gloomy year of trouble and disaster. I should be glad of its departure, were in not that 1862 is likely to be no better." I feel that that quote would indicate that more has yet to come. An even better ending would be a letter from a soldier talking about possibly something to do with the eventful year the war has caused.

I initially did not notice the misplacement of the letter until halfway through the reading. I think that it would be hard for the viewer to notice too unless they were taking notes also. If the date wasn't included in the reading as well as the battle, it would have been a great touch to ending the episode. Sometimes personal touches need to be put in to keep the viewer's interest, so I do understand why that letter was added. Since this was a personal detail, I do not think that it hinders my accurate understanding of the history of this war. This was just a letter expressing how it was for families during this hard time.

I do enjoy the music that was added to Ballou's scene where he reads the letter. The music creates the feeling of tragic and sad event. The voice for Ballou also has a sad depressing tone, which really creates the mood and feelings that he may have been really trying to convey to his wife. I think Burns chose great pictures to be featured in this scene also, because they show how the Civil War effected everyone. My problem that I had is I couldn't get the emotion that I was wanting in the combination of photos, music, and voice. I think that this had to do to the fact that in that era you typically did not have emotion in the pictures. Overall, I think the main purpose of this scene was to get the viewer to tune in to the next episode as well as show the emotional time the Civil War was, which Ken Burns accomplished.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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### ending episode 1

by [Marcelo Rodriguez](#) - Friday, January 23, 2015, 3:08 PM

Bethany,

I agree with you that the quote from George Templeton Strong should have ended episode 1 because it would have made for a better transition to episode 2 than throwing in the letter from Ballou. I understand the meaning that Burns was trying to convey, but it is just confusing when it's not in sequence with the rest of the episode. I also agree that it would have worked better if the date and battle was not included I wouldn't have a problem with it being at the end of the episode because it would of just been a letter from a soldier that fought in the Civil War; I wouldn't be wondering why the episode is going back in time just to make a point. I thought that the music fit right in with the letter and the pictures too, I agree that the music created a feeling of tragic and sad events. Does it bother you that this may not be the original version of the letter, since there are more than one version of the letter?

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### The Original Letter

by [Bethany Hunter-Lehman](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 11:11 PM

Marcelo,

Not knowing what the original letter really was does not necessary bother me in the fact of accuracy. I do how ever have a yearn to know what the letter originally said just because I am that way. I think it would be cool to have the original and compare what the differences were between the two. I have the feeling that the original letter may not be as romanticize as the letter that was read in the episode. I came into the class just knowing that some things need to be taken with a grain of salt. It is our job to investigate further to find out a bigger picture of the truth.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Relating To The Viewers

by [Micah McJunkin](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 10:34 PM

I believe that Burns used this letter to try and give the audience an opportunity to personally connect with the video. Nothing is more powerful in people than their emotions, and giving the audience this letter as an example is the perfect way for the audience to personally connect to a war that happened so long ago. The fact that the letter was used at the end of video one was certainly no coincidence. Using something like the letter to personally connect with the emotions of the audience will keep the series in their minds, and entice many of them to return and continue viewing the series. Personally, I liked seeing the photos of the couples in the video, I think it is important to see examples of the couples that were affected by the war.

I do not think Burns went too far with his creative license in this particular sense. I understand why he used the letter, and I think he did so effectively. However, I do wish he would have touched on the fact that the letter was never sent, and that it was found in the personal trunk of Major Sullivan Ballou. I would have also liked to have been informed that the original copy of the letter has been lost, and that there are now multiple versions of the letter in existence, but they have conflicting content. I think it still would have been possible to achieve the same connection with the audience while still telling them this information. If Burns had told the viewers that information, then the expectation would be set to be informed of all matters of the same likeness, and maybe that would have been too daunting of a task.

The fact that the historical chronology of the events is not accurate is certainly concerning, but it does not completely discourage me from believing what I will hear and see in the future of the series. Perhaps the reason I am not worried about it is because of the opportunity to discuss the events in this class, where the true events can be brought to light.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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### Re: Relating To The Viewers

by [Jal Rial](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 4:15 PM

Michah,

You are completely right and not only did I state a lot of the same things but used a lot of the same examples a few days back. Burns did indeed use the letter to show us the audience and other spectators of the video how important and powerful this war was. Not only to us as a country but also to the individuals fighting. This war impacted almost everyone in America and I think that is what burns wanted us to know. Michah you 100% right about emotions being very powerful and that is what is used to show us how strong this war and its results where. I personally don't think burns could of did a better job. I do believe that he shouldn't of used the letter at the end of the episode just because of the order but other then that it was awesome. I too don't think burns went to far with hi creative license in the scene. It was obvious he was try to get at something with the letter and he did so in a very very effective way so because of that I don't think we can say he went "too far". He did what he had to do to touch the bases he had to touch in order to paint us a clear imagine. If burns would of told us the letter was rewrote i think it would of still touched the same important bases he intended it to do. No it wasn't right to keep that out but it also shouldn't be a big deal in my opinion.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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### Not quite sure

by [Agina Hale](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 10:49 PM

I really am unsure of my opinion on this creative license. I think i'm a bit biased from the previous forum discussing all of the gaps of information that he chose to leave out of the first episode. The piece really doesn't make that big of a historic impact. I'm sure there were many letters from officers that reached their wives. I'm going to watch the end of the episode again tomorrow and see how I feel after what I know.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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### Re: Not quite sure

by [Justin Wright](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 1:02 PM

That was pretty much my feel. If it was even plausible that soldiers letters made it home after their deaths, I can accept the liberty taken in this scene.

And given that nearly 700,000 people died, it's a pretty safe bet letters were written shortly before death on the battlefield, and received by loved ones very shortly thereafter.

I think for me, I almost struggle to call it "creative license" as it probably more closely resembles the realities of those

times.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Re: Not quite sure

by [Agina Hale](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 11:25 AM

I think that is a good way to describe how this story is plausible. There probably was a large amount of letters that never were sent when they were alive. Actually that fact could have been used to illustrate how surprising the outcome of this war ended up being. The battle of Manassas obviously didn't turn out to be quite the picnic that they had first predicted.

On a side note: It would be interesting if they would publish a book putting the letters in chronological order so we can see how the sentiment changed over the course of the war!

<http://www.amazon.com/Civil-War-Letters-From-Battlefield/dp/0486484505>

I just found this and ordered it!

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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### Re: Not quite sure

by [Micah McJunkin](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 12:18 PM

You read my mind! When I was first writing my post I was thinking about how interesting it would be to see more personal letters from the war and how they changed throughout progression. Thank you for finding that book and posting the link, I too will be ordering the book!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### my post

by [Peng Xu](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 11:04 PM

These are important realities to grasp about the Civil War, but addressing them head on would muddy Burns' neat story of heroism, fraternity, reunion, and freedom. Watching the film, you might easily forget that one side was not fighting for, but against the very things that Burns claims the war so gloriously achieved. Confederates, you might need reminding after seeing it, were fighting not for the unification of the nation, but for its dissolution. Moreover, they were fighting for their independence from the United States in the name of slavery and the racial hierarchy that underlay it. Perhaps most disingenuously, the film's cursory treatment of Reconstruction obscures the fact that the Civil War did not exactly end in April of 1865 with a few handshakes and a mutual appreciation for a war well fought. Instead, the war's most important outcome—emancipation—produced a terrible and violent reckoning with the legacy of slavery that continued well into the 20th century.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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### Family and Country

by [Marcelo Rodriguez](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 2:02 PM

I do not question the accuracy of history regarding Burns' film I was just confused as to why he decided to wait until the end of the episode to mention Ballou's letter when he could have put it at the end of the Manassas scene and the meaning would have been the same. After watching the scene a second time, however I have a better understanding of why he decided to put Ballou's letter at the end. I think it was meant not only to show that people lost family during the Civil War, but to show the struggle to choose between family and country as Ballou writes in his letter to his wife "Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but omnipotence can break; and yet my love of country comes over me like a strong wind and bares me irresistibly with all those chains to the battlefield" (Burns). I believe he was also, trying to show that the soldiers knew they may not make it back to their families alive.

Cite:

Burns, Ken, "The Civil War". Film

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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### Not shocked

by [Justin Wright](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 12:55 PM

"Many students were shocked to learn this."

This is not the examination of one man's life. Our study here is about the American Civil War and its impacts on the peoples of that nation.

To leave out that there was a four-year delay in his wives' receiving the letter is unimportant to the insights we are trying to gain about the war.

If the omission substantially changed the meaning of the war in general, I might object. But as it stands, leaving out a tedious detail like this is keeping within the general spirit of the efficiency of the film.

I do not feel deceived or manipulated by the film-maker.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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### Re: Not shocked

by [Alanna VanDreew](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 7:34 PM

I wasn't surprised to learn that his letter was unsent. I think it would have made a much stronger emotional impact if the audience had known that for all this love and desire to be with his wife she didn't get his love letter that had him reflecting upon his death. I don't see it to be a necessary bit of information either. I do not think that using his letter was the best choice. There has to be more letters that were more accurate to historical fact.

At the beginning of this forum I didn't care that it wasn't the letter wasn't completely true, but now my opinion has changed. I think it would have been better to keep the contents of a historical documentary completely accurate. I can't call something true if its 10% false. I think greater effort should have been made to keep the integrity of the series intact. I think speculation of facts should either be omitted or at least stated as such in the show. No harm can come from saying that they don't know what the contents of the letter was but, had a very close account of it. Now that we know Ken Burns will add bits of misinformation into the show it's hard to take what we are learning as fact.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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### Shocked?

by [Trenton Bieker](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 9:30 PM

I too wondered how students were shocked. For me it easy to see that thousands of soldier's wrote home and that thousands died on the field. So it would only make sense that people would die before their letters were sent. On a side note, imagine being the postman in episode two. The thought of being the one who delivered the good and bad or even worse no news. I think your post has changed my view on when "Creative License" is ok and here is an example. It isn't a battle that's being made up or a political statement. Even if it was completely fabricated it is a telling scene to show an emotional impact of the war, that many people more than likely experienced.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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### I finally have something to say

by [Agina Hale](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 12:41 PM

Initially I really didn't want to post on this forum idea because I couldn't really figure out how to make any insightful statements. I was wondering why it was something to discuss, but now I think I get the main focus. The first forum was about how close to the truth this video series really is. We understand that even textbooks and professors should be questioned. Make sure that you know the background of the person you are listening to, and compare with opposing view points. I did some research on Ken Burns and his politics. He compared Obama to Lincoln, although I couldn't find any information on how he made that judgement. His politics might play more of a role in his presentation of the facts, I had mentioned that I have seen Lincoln get a "character adjustment" even within the last ten years. It seems that the further we get from the past, the more people seem to reinvent the stories.

This is when we bring in the idea of creative license. How does he decide to draw the line between making art, and presenting history. Obviously the music, narration and editing make for more of an emotional experience for a reason. It gets the attention of those who might not normally watch a documentary on history. We found out that large gaps of facts are missing, and now are finding out that facts omitted or slightly twisted. More and more scrutiny is required for viewing.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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#### Re: I finally have something to say

by [Matthew Wymore](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 3:48 PM

I initially felt the same way, I didn't really see the relevance in this forum posting, but I really had to sit and think about it (even after my first post). The way that Burns presents his films makes me not want to watch the videos because I personally feel he played too much into the artistic side of film making, than placing an importance in the historical events that took place. Don't get me wrong there is some good information to be learned from the films, but I feel too much effort was put into the films instead of appealing to the historical needs and demands that the viewers have.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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#### I Too Found It Hard

by [Trenton Bieker](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 9:21 PM

I found myself struggling to write on this topic as well. I want to talk/write about other things that happen in the video I found interesting. The Ken Burns comparing Obama to Lincoln was interesting to me. I could see the comparison going two ways. One comparing Obama to the strength and courage to lead a nation through difficult times. The other being the view of Lincoln being more like an emperor, like Obama with his executive orders. We see this side of Lincoln or this view people have of him in episode two. I would be interested to see how Ken Burns actually compares the two.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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#### Re: I finally have something to say

by [Roxanne Lindquist](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 10:19 PM

I think it would be interesting to see how Ken burns compares Lincoln and Obama. I agree that the further from the past we get the more things change from the facts and like you said reinvent stories. I believe that he put a lot in to making this film and I think if it is paired with other materials and sources it could be a good film to watch and analyze. The fact that he is a self-proclaimed amateur historian I think makes a difference in why his material is mainly used for high school students.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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#### conclusion

by [Agina Hale](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 9:52 PM

It's so easy to get swept up while you are watching it, and forgetting the issues that you have with the film, isn't it? As someone had mentioned the line between creative licensing turns to historical fiction. Well the problem is I think that if it's going to be labeled a historic documentary, then it's up to Ken burns to actually present it in terms of facts. I honestly think that it is his job to do this. We all know what "fan fiction" is, and we never get confused as to which is the original. That should also be the case with history. It's important enough.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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