



Forum 2

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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: -

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The critique of Ken Burns.

by [Edgar Rodriguez](#) - Tuesday, January 20, 2015, 8:25 AM

First of all, I have been watching the end of episode one over and over trying to figure out what good ole Ken Burns was trying to do. I'm having trouble on this topic and I'm sorry if I sound like a Debbie Downer trying to explain my answer so that it might make sense with what the instructor of this class is asking.

Anyway, I think that Ken was trying to make the first episode more dramatic in a sense but then again I'm not a movie critic and I could be wrong. I think that it's pretty sad but I also think ole Burns was trying to tell the audience how hard the soldiers of that era had a hard time. More so I think it was done for the drama so that the person or persons watching shed a little tear.

For this particular question, concerning my accurate understanding of the history of this war; I have to say this I hope it's accurate and I hope it's on target with what we are being taught. I mean it's normal for some instructors to skip chapters and such but from my perspective I think everything being shown so far seems correct. Then again I'm in this class to learn about the Civil War and have a better "Accurate Understanding" about the subject matter.

I guess this comes down to anything, really, I don't know what the hell I'm talking about when it comes to this forum question, so please classmates help me understand. Oh and by the way this whole Ken Burns series is on Netflix.!

Sum of ratings: 2 (1) 2

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Reply to Edgar's post

by [Andrew McGarry](#) - Tuesday, January 20, 2015, 1:26 PM

Hey Edgar, I think this weeks forum is really supposed to kind of be a summarization of the materials studied this week. There is a link to the objectives in the requirements for the week, referring to this list of objectives really helped guide me through the writing process. Possibly look into that to potentially understand the discussion a little better? By the way, you are an absolute life saver, I watched the episode last time from my Macbook which is completely fine, but it was glitchy and at times kind of uncomfortable to watch. You're note about it being on Netflix made the entire thing much more enjoyable, hopefully everyone else can put that resource to use as well. So thank you very much for finding that! Hope this reply is of some sort of help to you!

Andrew

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Hey!

by [Edgar Rodriguez](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 2:00 PM

I thought this week was going to be about episode 2 and when I looked under the forum 2 section there is a question that the instructor has provided. Thanks for the feedback I'll have to post on episode 2 later in the week.

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Re: The critique of Ken Burns.

by [Jamie Mc Kinney](#) - Friday, January 23, 2015, 11:54 PM

I also believe that Burns included the letter for a little dramatic effect. I think it was meant to shed a little light on the sacrifices the soldiers endured during the civil war. I guess, the loss of their lives and the ripple effect it had on their families. I truly hope this letter was authentic because then it would succeed in its purpose at the end of this episode...to shed a tear 😊

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Re: The critique of Ken Burns.

by [Edgar Rodriguez](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 3:40 AM

Yes, this whole letter business is kind of boring and dramatic and does not make much sense. I really thought we were going to look over the key points of episode 2 not talk about lil ole Ken Burns again.

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Breaking down episode 2

by [Andrew McGarry](#) - Tuesday, January 20, 2015, 1:20 PM

Andrew McGarry

Joe Escobar

HST209 Forum 2

January 20th, 2015

I really enjoyed this weeks episode of 'The Civil War', I felt like this episode went in to much more factual detail and took more of an informative position instead of a more introductory style. This episode started showing the evolution of the war as it happened, mainly in the newer technologies for battle. I had no idea that the first "railroad artillery" was used during this era, though it does not surprise me since the fighting style was very different in previous wars. The other weapon that gained popularity that brought me some surprise was the order of ten repeater guns, the original variation or design of the machine gun. This episode also gave us the release of the rifled musket, which is obviously something that is perfected and used to this day. All of these advances came in a moderately short amount of time, but are all inventions or alterations that have changed the way weapons are designed today. So this was a very revolutionary period in that aspect.

During this episode there were some very interesting little things that I felt kind of gave some foresight in the way Grant and McClellan both led their armies. For example, it seemed like McClellan easily had the troops to overpower the confederate forces, and even had them retreating into the city of Richmond where McClellan then had his troops at a stand still instead of charging in and possibly defeating or at least dealing a crushing blow to the Confederate army. Grant on the other hand seemed to use different tactics and ploys to fend off the more powerful Union army, the one that stood out most to me was when he cycled his troops through in a constant circle, giving the impression that there were masses more than what he actually had. This was a very bold strategy in the aspect of being a fairly bold bluff, if it would have been revealed that his numbers were actually substantially lower in his troops they may have been charged and destroyed rather quickly. It also seemed like the morale and support throughout the Confederate troops seemed to change a lot through the war as far as supporting the overall cause of the war. There was a high morale and praise of the goal after Fort Sumter, but things started to change a little bit after the passing of The Conscription Act. One quote said it best in the film saying, "It's a rich mans war being fought by the poor." This to me gave a little bit of a hint that the morale was starting to shift and people

might not necessarily agree with everything in the Confederacy.

I was absolutely shocked when hearing that some of the youngest combat soldiers in the Union army had not even broke the age of fifteen, this must have sent a ripple throughout the society on both sides of the war. Women were then made to do a wide variety of things that once had been handled by the men that were now serving. All of these different trades would have taken time for someone to learn, and now the women in this era were given these tasks and expected to produce at a similar rate. The working environment in general must have been very stressful and hectic during this time and gives me a ton of appreciation for the work force we have today. We are lucky enough in present time to be able to chose the jobs we would like to do instead of being forced into them because of war.

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Creative License on the Cause

by [Linda Hall](#) - Tuesday, January 20, 2015, 5:07 PM

I think that Ken Burns was trying to garner sympathy for the people left behind after the War was over, I believe that he should have focused more on the destruction of the South as a whole, how many farms were lost. What about all the casualties of the war on both sides. Burns seems to just gloss over that, each side lost a lot of people, both free men and slaves. He doesn't seem to talk about that very much. He skips over a lot of the battles, if he does mention them he does not go into detail about the battles. Only in passing did I hear that the North thought it would only be a 90 day war, not until there were over 50,000 casualties did both side agree that the War was going to last longer than first predicted. Ken Burns does capture the viewers attention but after re-watching the first episode and then printing the transcript out so that I could go over it, I do think that he did take liberties with honestly telling it like it was.

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Better Learning from Battle Cry

by [Jessica Ballestrazze](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 11:44 AM

I agree with you that Burns seems to take a lot of liberties with his retelling of history. He definitely glosses over a lot of the battles, and seems to have a pretty narrow view of focus regarding the parts of the story he wants to tell. I think that as we get into later episodes, the casualties will probably be addressed much more. In fact, as I think back on the first episode, I find myself wondering, "What exactly *did* he talk about?" What I remember most is a lot of pictures with sad music playing in the background, and powerful quotes from abstract sources, many of whom he makes no effort to identify. Even though it is dense reading, I'm finding *Battle Cry of Freedom* far more intriguing than the television series. It is really interesting to read how each of the states determined whether to fight for the Union or Confederacy, or stay neutral. I'm disappointed that Burns has chosen to omit most of these details from the series, presumably because they don't support his stance that the Civil War was only about slavery.

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Re: Better Learning from Battle Cry

by [Linda Hall](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 9:50 AM

Hi Jessica

I have to agree with you when you said that he glosses over a lot of the battles. You really hit the nail on the head, when you said "what exactly did he talk about". He kept and keeps skipping around from one topic to another and I don't like that, I was really interested in at the end when he talked about the letter that the soldier sent to his wife, then very disappointed when I found out that he never sent it. The movie does make for interesting viewing but Burns I think should stick more to the actual facts of the war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Better Learning from Battle Cry

by [Opal Burdge](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 9:48 PM

I feel the same way, if you're looking for sap and emotion with what seems to be only little bits and pieces of the

history than Burns does it. But if you want the facts given to ya straight than Battle Cry is the way to go. I feel as though Burns over dresses up the history which almost takes away from it as a whole. I appreciated the parts about the soldiers lives in this last video, but the first was the same for me with the music, pictures, and random quotes I almost didn't even feel belonged in the thing. Still curious to see how it all plays out though.

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Re: Creative License on the Cause

by [Jamie Mc Kinney](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 12:05 AM

I, too, wish Burns would have been more detailed about the battles. It seems like he tries to fit descriptions of so many important people into one episode, that the actual "war" was lost in translation at time. Don't get me wrong, many of the people he mentions sound interesting and critical to the civil war; but it just felt like he tried to cram it all in, so that their prominence was diminished. I do enjoy tales like that of Ballou's letter, and I will remember him because of it. But at times I felt episode one was just full of name-dropping, which is more difficult to remember.

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Jigsaw Puzzle

by [Jessica Ballestrazze](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 11:28 AM

The lack of attention to detail in the chronology of events does make it harder to get a correct picture overall. It's a little frustrating that Burns would choose to use an excerpt from a letter from December 31st, 1861, and then jump back six months prior, to the letter from Sullivan Ballou. In my opinion, Ken Burns' first priority is making a film series. In any good writing or filmmaking, there is a meaningful and powerful climax at the end, and he chose an emotional crescendo rather than a factual conclusion. Nothing would have been lost if Burns presented Ballou's letter earlier in the program, and ended with George Templeton Strong's quote. What better foreshadowing for the next episode than by concluding with, "Poor old 1861.... It has been a gloomy year of trouble and disaster. I should be glad of its departure, were it not that 1862 is likely to be no better"? The fact that Burns chooses to present information out of order, even though the film could easily contain the same content presented chronologically, speaks to his arrogance as a filmmaker. I would rather have the information presented to me in order, so that I'm not putting together a puzzle with all the jigsaw pieces he weaves through the episodes. If Burns is not interested in presenting the facts without manipulation and tweaking, he shouldn't be producing anything labeled "historical".

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Re: Jigsaw Puzzle

by [Heather Reed](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 6:11 PM

I get what your saying about Burns putting stuff out of order and it can definitely be confusing to us all. However, if we really thing about it, it wasn't put out of order. While Sullivan Ballou's letter was dated July 14, 1861 his widower didn't even receive it until after the war. Even with that said I think Ken Burns was trying to get the audience to relate to the Civil War. Sullivan Ballou was in love with his wife and his country and was willing to die for either of them.

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Re: Jigsaw Puzzle

by [Opal Burdge](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 10:01 PM

Emotional crescendo, the most perfect way to put Burns creations. I knew after the first video this was how the videos were going to play out. These videos were made for tv, so they had to grasp more than the historian audience, it had to catch the everyday people as well. But to do that he had to dress it up. Which he could have done like you said by still going in order and maybe just toning it down a bit. Too bad he didn't, maybe I would be more fond of these

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Not enough groundwork

by [Jessica Ballestrazze](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 11:31 AM

I think that the target audience for Burns was not scholars, and so he treats the films as such. It is difficult as a student of history to ingest so much information, and even when presented concisely, it is impossible to keep everything straight. This creates even more trouble with a jumbled presentation of facts. What should be used as a learning tool, suddenly creates the additional workload of trying to sort out dates and events. The example of Ballou's letter to his wife makes me wonder how many other examples there are of slight discrepancies of timeline. Rather than simply ingest the information in the videos as fact and learn as much as I can, I feel it necessary to filter through them. I assume he would defend his presentation with an argument that he is simply trying to open up discussion and give a general overview and feeling for life during the Civil War. But in a scholarly and historical sense, I just don't think it's adequate. As an example, the film only briefly addresses any activity in Virginia, while chapter nine in *Battle Cry of Freedom* talks extensively about the events and struggle leading up to the acceptance of West Virginia as its own state. To me, this is actually some of the most interesting history we've covered so far, and it is virtually omitted from the Ken Burns version of history. In one of the reviews we read on the PBS series, it argued that the series leaves out far too much of the political reasoning and implications of the war, and I definitely noticed the discrepancy between *Battle Cry of Freedom* and the Civil War series throughout the first couple chapters and the first episode. (Although perhaps it will be addressed more in episode two, since they didn't actually achieve statehood until after 1861.)

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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Re: Not enough groundwork

by [Jamie Mc Kinney](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 12:32 AM

I certainly agree that Burns' target audience was not scholars. It was made for PBS, so it was meant for families to gather around and watch in their living rooms. I guess that is why he felt he needed to capture their attention, not just with factual events and a impeccable timeline; but to grab the families at home with what the families back then went through. From a student's point of view, I really wish he would have spent more time on gathering his information from noteworthy historians and less time with the scores and sound effects (although, I do enjoy them).

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Re: Not enough groundwork

by [Heather Reed](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 6:14 PM

I do believe that Ken Burns did spend a lot of time gathering information of this film. Mr. Burns stated that it took five years to make this film and that he worked with numerous historians. However, with that said did he put his information to the correct use. I believe that he did things the way he did to capture the audiences attention.

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Major Sullivan Ballou

by [Heather Reed](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 7:21 PM

I understand why Ken Burns would want to take "creative license" in the case of Union Major Sullivan Ballou. I believe that he would do this in an attempt to get the audience to want to watch more of the film. I myself felt for Sullivan's poor wife and it made me think about what these poor women had to go through at this terrible time in history. With this "creative license" he got exactly what he wanted, viewers plain and simple. Part of his job is to get people to watch the film or what would be the point of making it. I do have to say that it does upset me a little bit that the film conveniently left out that the letter was not sent to the wife until after the end of the war. However, does that particular piece of left out information have an impact on the war itself. I would say no to that but it does make me question how much other stuff will be "left out" of the film. It will make learning about the Civil War a little harder if things are being shown out of historical order. I am questioning the film a lot more every time we see a new part of the film. I am now find myself doing a lot of research to make sure I am learning about it the right way.

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Similar thoughts

by [Katelyn Rasmussen](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 3:56 PM

Heather,

I in my post have very similar thoughts about his creative license. Although, leaving out such great detail it doesn't completely devalue the video but it does lead many to believe that they are missing out on much other detail that may have not been included and that may lead to many people really misunderstanding the Civil War and what all happened and how it happened. I too have felt I need to research outside of his videos to feel like I can be able fully understand it all and make sure I am getting all the info I will need to comprehend it totally. I enjoyed your thoughts on this video!

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Burns: Scholar or Director

by [Samuel Moffenbier](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 8:47 PM

I'm not sure I would say that the selected letter enhances the documentary as a scholarly work. Documentaries inherently seem poorly suited as purely academic aids. They simply lack the time and content to give a rounded view of a subject. Whether it's a lack of deeper content or simply limitations in resources, documentaries are not ideal for getting the best historical perspective.

Ultimately, Ken Burns is a director and not a scholar. It seems that he wants to get the audience engaged with history. That is certainly a good thing. I believe that for all its faults I have been enjoying the series. The collection of music, letters, and photos from the time help to settle me into the period. If even for that the series has value. The viewer is saturated in these moments during the documentary. The problem is that building emotional engagement in a history subject doesn't always provide an unbiased and objective perspective. Romanticizing history weakens its understanding.

The letter and its accompanied media attempts to invest the viewer emotionally in the subject. If we're talking about the Burn's intention that seems to be keeping the audience engaged in the subject by building that emotional investment. Sullivan Ballou's letter was a heart wrenching pull on the audience. I certainly felt that way. Whether the letter that was read reached the widow before or after the war seems unimportant. If it was written then Sullivan wrote what he wrote. He felt what he felt. What does concern me is whether the letter was written at all. The fact that the original document is lost and we only have copies, and conflicting at that, casts enough doubt to warrant its removal. Getting more people engaged and loving a subject in history is a wonderful thing and in that goal Burns is successful. Unfortunately, he does so at the expense of the academic value of his series.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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Re: Burns: Scholar or Director

by [Jordan Hevern](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 4:38 PM

Samuel,

I would have to say that I agree with you on the ending of your forum, due to the lack of not having the original copy of the letter does raise questions. Why would you put something in a documentary that could potentially give you false information, and as much as many people want to believe all the things that Ballou said in his letter, it's hard to imagine that he said those things word for word.

I would also have to agree with you in the sense that no matter how well put together this film is, Ken Burns is not a historian, and even though he has put countless hours into searching for information, as a director he still has to do what is best for his film, and putting the letter into the ending of the film does not hinder nor vamp up anything of the Civil War except the emotional connection.

Jordan Hevern.

Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

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I vote for director

by [Jamie Mc Kinney](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 8:04 PM

I, too, believe that Burns is a director first, and an academic second. I think that he puts more personal efforts into the "experience" of an audience member than effort toward getting every detail of the civil war right. I think he does well as a director, putting the scores to the pictures, and creating a connection between the audience member and those featured in the film. I think his position as a director or as a "scholar," only need to be evaluated by the audience, in which have to figure out what they are looking for....casual knowledge of the civil war, then Burn's is your man; or if scholar accuracy is required, then you might want to do some fact checking on Burns.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Getting the Viewers Attention

by [Jordan Hevern](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 9:15 PM

I am not a movie critic, and with the Civil War episodes, they are new to me, so this assignment was somewhat difficult, but after taking some time to think about this weeks forum, I have came to one conclusion. That conclusion is this; Burns puts this information in the end of the episode because it makes the viewer want more. Many people have never had people in their life go off to war, or have never had to deal with that type of stress, but many people have been married. People can relate with losing the love of their life. They understand that pain, and it grabs the viewers attention in the sense that they actually can relate. If Burns would of put the letter that Ballou wrote to is wife in the middle of the episode, in chronological order, he would of lost his viewers emotional connection, because the movie would of continued and the sympathy and the grief that they would of had, would of been lost.

I think that it was a good "creative license" that Burns did, because he did not throw in another random fact about the war, he simply showed us how the war affected family and even though many men wanted this war because of their beliefs, they also had to give up so much for this. If Burns would of jumped in at the end with some random fact, for example, "26 people were injured during the Bull Run," than I think people would have lost sense of the movie and it would of affected peoples understand of the chronological order.

Having this letter thrown in at the end does not help nor hinder my accurate understanding of chronological order, merely because it has nothing to do with order. It correlates directly with emotion and getting the audience to really understand on a different level of the war. He sure could have mentioned it when he was talking about the Bull Run, he could of used a sentence for example; "this specific battle not only lost men, but destroyed families". Something that would of set the audience for the letter, but I think that do like how these episodes are more of a guide through the war, and not just a documentary that gives you random facts about leaders and certain battles. Having that order helps me comprehend the war to a greater extent.

Jordan Hevern

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I had the same thought!

by [Edgar Rodriguez](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 9:58 PM

I was reading your post and it sounded a bit like mine, I was asking myself "Why are we going into this whole Ken Burns business". Ken Burns is was not part of the Civil War, nor is he a powerful Hollywood director. I think that by trying to make his series like a movie say like "Saving Private Ryan" with this whole letter scene at the end it kind of stupid. I still think that we should be learning more of the Civil War and not focusing our time on little ole Ken Burns and how he makes his Civil War series dramatic. Great post!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: I had the same thought!

by [Heather Reed](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 6:18 PM

I feel like I am losing my mind. I am also having a hard time figuring out we are so focused on Ken Burns and not the Civil War it's self. I am confused to why we are watching a film that historians thinks have so much misinformation. I keep say that I believe that Burns put this letter at the end of the film to get our attention and to get viewers to connect with his film. By putting an emotional connection to the letter it did just that, it brought back the viewers.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Same here.

by [Edgar Rodriguez](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 8:55 PM

This war series is interesting but if there so much misinformation with in the series I wonder why we are spending time to watch it. I just think that the whole letter business at the end of the episode was just to get the viewer hooked as you said. I just wish we start talking about the Civil War and not about Ken Burns and how he

stuck a letter at the end of an episode.

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Re: I had the same thought!

by [Jordan Hevern](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 10:21 PM

Heather Reed,

I think that we are focusing so much on Ken Burns because it helps us know the movie better. As weird as that sounds, I believe that if we know more about the director its help the audience view the movie in a certain way. Say we were watching a different documentary on the Civil War, and the director was a moron who was a good director but did get any research himself, and had people to do for him, we might not completely agree with the film, making it harder to watch. Knowing the director and how he does his work helps me appreciate the film, even if sometimes the movie has random "Creative License."

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: I had the same thought!

by [Jessica Ballestrazze](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 10:24 PM

We are focusing heavily on the potential shortcomings of the PBS series in order to make us aware that in every historical source, whether video or print, there are discrepancies. Our instructor is simply trying to make us aware that there are issues with every source, so we need to be deliberate and careful in what we take out of them. The Burns series is widely used as learning material, and though it may be one of the best made, it still has its issues. The point is to make us realize, through conversation, that when we are looking at any history we can't just accept everything that's presented to us as fact. Though there may not be better historical sources for use in this class, the Burns series is not perfect. If we were simply told, "This isn't perfect, oh well," that would be poor teaching. By initiating conversation and opening our eyes to potential shortcomings, we are more apt to obtain a more coherent understanding of the Civil War. More importantly, we are more likely to be skeptical in the future when issues of a political nature are presented to us as "strictly fact".

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Re: I had the same thought!

by [Edgar Rodriguez](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 11:33 PM

You make a very good point but I think that keeping us focused on Ken Burns is pretty boring in my opinion. I understand the statement that you are trying to make though. There are many things that we could be learning about other than understanding what Ken Burns was thinking when he put the letter of the dead soldier at the end of episode 1. I'm not saying that Ken Burns doesn't have the correct information, I'm just saying that we shouldn't focus on him. Ken Burns wasn't in the Civil War, he is only a story teller and there for we shouldn't have to devote our time to figuring him out. The letter was just to make the end of the episode more dramatic so that the viewer stayed hooked on the series. Thanks for you feedback!

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Yet another good attempt Burnsy

by [Opal Burdge](#) - Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 9:32 PM

I watched the end of the Cause and didn't get a lot from the letter, sure Burns dresses it up with his nice music making it pull on the heart strings(does it make anyone else sleepy? The nice music?) anyways, I decided to look up the letter and read it thinking I would gain more from it. Looking up his letter I read and retread it, and can tell this guy was in a love triangle with him, his wife, and his country. Which I feel so many people of that time were in love with their country, it's why kids that weren't even 15, were out on the battle fields.

I think putting it in the end of the first video was a solid plan on Burns part, especially for his transition into the next video where he focuses a lot on the lives of the soldiers in the war. It reminds us that the soldiers fighting this war are more than just a body on a battle field waving a gun around. They're a son, a husband, a father, which I feel is key to remember in war

that the soldiers are still human! They still have feelings, fears, and someone addressing that is pretty great in my opinion.

It gives you a small glimpse into the non textbook parts of the war, more than the body counts, or battle fields, makes it seem incredibly real and alive, especially reading a letter/letters from soldiers of that time.

As for the historical chronologically I expected this from Burns, sure he seems to like his history, but like any movie maker if it doesn't quite fit how they want it to, they tweak it a bit. Which is fine in fiction, but this is history. Get it together Burns.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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"American Sniper" relation

by [Katelyn Rasmussen](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 3:40 PM

Opal,

I have recently just gone to see American Sniper and oddly enough your post somewhat reminds me of the movie. I love how you used the saying, "being in a love triangle with himself, wife and country. The soldier in the movie fits that saying perfectly and the movie being based on a true story and also having read the book I think that it would quite perfectly relate to the soldiers back then as well. I also agree with your opinion on Burn's putting it at the end of the first video and using it as a good, smooth, transition for the second video. Another relation to the movie American Sniper; they show pretty well that each soldier fighting has a life back home and they have family and friends waiting for them to return and some who count on them returning. They are someone other than just a fighter on the battle field. Loved your post and how it made me realize the relation to the movie!

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Re: "American Sniper" relation

by [Opal Burdge](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 1:59 AM

That's so funny I saw that recently to and thought of it when I watched this video! So far this is the first thing Burns has done I've actually liked so hopefully he progresses with it. I appreciate how he makes you realize how hard it is in soldiers than, because it's just as hard now; and I feel as though so many people don't realize that. So thanks! I had your same thoughts!

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Ballou's Letter

by [Jamie Mc Kinney](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 12:19 AM

I understand that Ken Burns used Ballou's letter to conclude "The Cause" with an emotional connecting point for the audience; but with all of the doubt surrounding this letter, I do not think it belongs in a documentary such as this. The audience is drawn to The Civil War for the historical value it holds, the actual events, and trust that the creator provides accurate information. With this letter Ken Burns takes this documentary to a level that only pours doubt into his already shaken credibility. Personally, I do not mind when the letter was read by his wife because that would not take away the beautiful words that he had written before his death. What I find deceiving is the possibility of multiple versions of this letter being read as a historical document because the original was lost long ago. Not knowing if those words were really that of Union Major Sullivan Ballou's pen certainly takes away from the initial impact, Burns' sought after response. It makes me question Burns' commitment and where it lies. I am not troubled by the placement of this letter in the episode because it would have been more effective at the conclusion, provided the letter was legit. I do not think a student would be jumbled chronologically by its placement because it is noted in reference with Sumter, so it is easily placed in our mental timeline when watching. With Ballou's letter, I now question what else may have been added for the sake of an audience response with disregard to giving the most accurate delivery and portrayal of the civil war. I would think there would be at least a few authentic letters from the civil war that survived that Kevin Burns could have chosen; but he chose Ballou's only to romanticize the civil war it seems. After doing this assignment I have decided to view Kevin Burns as an artist/director first and foremost and secondly as a historically accurate story teller.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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**Re: Ballou's Letter**

by [Jordan Hevern](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 11:56 PM

Jamie Mc Kinney,

I agree with what you have to say. Since this letter does not give us information on the civil war, the letter is not needed in the documentary, but it does help people more relate to this, which draws people to the film. Its hard to believe that the letter was even close to the actual one, but its even harder to believe that they wrote out a letter word for word. Its easy to doubt that they got this right, but sometimes you have to believe it, because back then they did not have a very good way of documenting things. Every information that we get from this film is questionable, but we have to believe that Burns dug deep enough, met enough people to give his audience accurate information.

Jordan Hevern

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**Re: Ballou's Letter**

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

I believe that this letter had no effect on the Civil War it's self. It was written to a wife from a Major not from a President. This letter would of had no effect on the war itself whether it was sent to Sarah right away or years later. What Sullivan Ballou had to say was about how he was feeling and about the love he had for his family and his country. There were hundreds of men that felt the same way. As for it being put i the film it was to let others try to grasp what these men were going through at a very hard time. Would Sullivan's letter made a difference either way. Was it the cause of the war, NO. Did his letter stop the war, NO! It was a personal heartfelt love letter to his beloved wife and that is it. Burns' film could have gone without and it wouldn't have changed history. He did it to get us to connect.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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**Just believe it**

by [Jamie Mc Kinney](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 7:50 PM

Sometimes we do just have to trust in what we are given, when it comes to history. Of course, everything that we believe to be true could not have possibly been documented word for word, event for event. We can take those authentic and documented accounts, and fill in the questionable accounts based upon them. I am sure that is how history books are written 😊 As I said, I hope these words were really Sullivan's; but since we couldn't possibly know. I will just take this one at face value.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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**Re: Ballou's Letter**

by [Jessica Ballestrazze](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 10:49 PM

I disagree with you about the importance of the timing of the letter. The reading of Sullivan Ballou's words comes directly after a quote from December 31, 1961, signifying the end of the year. To have it then jump back six months is a little strange. Also, it doesn't link to the firing on Fort Sumter, but rather to the First Battle of Bull Run, where Ballou lost his life. So if I were taking this film at face value, I would assume that the First Battle of Bull Run took place after the beginning of 1961, when it actually took place on June 21, 1861. In a four-year war, a six month discrepancy is significant. Especially considering the disclaimer stated in the forum materials: "By the way, as your instructor, I do require that my students have a correct understanding of cause and effect when it comes to the chronology of major events in the American Civil War."

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**The letter by Ballou's**

by [Katelyn Rasmussen](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 3:30 PM

I believe that Ken Burn's goal was to get the main point across about the letter and all the hardships the wives went through

and he just ideally wanted to show the main point. However, by only including the main point of the topic and leaving out much detail it also leaves out true stories of the Civil War. Im sure it was very hard for those wives who dealt with such grief of loved ones lost and not getting to say a goodbye nor be with them. Although Ballou wrote the letter, Burn's left out that the letter was not delivered right away and that to me makes the story much worse. Maybe some wife was still holding hope her husband was alive and out there fighting because she had not received the letter about him. Or maybe she had heard about his death and she had received no letter and not heard what he had to say to her which either scenario, would hold more grief for me. I think Ken leaving this out is a big mistake because it can really mislead people about some point about the Civil War. The fact that the letter failed to make it to his wife for quite some time leaves out more of the overall struggle during the time. It leaves out specific detail which can make it more understanding for some and also the full truth about the Civil War. Personally, it does not make my understanding more accurate. I feel as if I have been told a partial story when in fact the whole true story is known and should be told with the rest of it. I believe that if you are to talk about history, you should attempt to include every detail and fact for such an important topic. As well as having the historical topics out of order is very misleading. Im sure many people like me who have watched the video and have believed they are watching the video in chronological order on how the Civil War went in real life. I think having these scenes out of place can completely wrong the story about the Civil War and it as well as leaving out detail, changes the truth of the Civil War and something that is so important in history should not be jumbled up leaving out informative facts.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: The letter by Ballou's

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

I agree with you on a lot of this. It does send people off in the wrong direction when they probably very well think they are being given the information in the order of events they happened. He definitely could have gone about putting this together in a way that the presented information is more in the order when it happened. He definitely jumps around a lot, and while I appreciate the general historical accuracy, I do wish he gave it to the audience straight rather than doing all that jumping around.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The letter by Ballou's

by [Heather Reed](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 6:05 PM

Agreed Ashley, what harm would it have done for Ken Burns to simply say after having the letter read to us that Sarah didn't even see the letter until after the war ended. It would have still made an emotional impact on the view just the same. Maybe even more so because it would have been harder on Sarah to get a letter after her husband had passed away. Knowing that the letter sat in his "foot locker" for months.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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A Soldier's Letter

by [Ashley Jones](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 3:39 PM

I don't feel as though there really was any definite significance of the letter presented at the end of the episode. It seems to me that Burns may have only used it to capture the attention of the audience. People have a tendency, when watching something, to become more engaged when something takes a different kind of turn or tone. I think this could easily be the case here. He spends the entire episode jumping from fact to fact about the the beginnings of the war, and quote to quote regarding things happening during that time. It isn't until the end where he throws that letter in there, a moment to for viewers to sympathize and feel for soldiers and their families alike. I dont feel as though it hurts or helps the historical value of the documentsry. Is the usage of a letter of such necessary to the content being presented? Probably not so much, no. But for viewership and cinematic value? Then yeah definitely. I am rather disappointed knowing the original letter was lost and being left with the thought that what we heard may not be Ballou's own words entirely. And even more so to know that the letter wasn't read until after the war ...after his death.

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Change of pace

by [Katelyn Rasmussen](#) - Thursday, January 22, 2015, 3:51 PM

Ashley,

I agree with how you stated that he was changing the tone of the video with the letter. He shows lots of fighting and includes lots of action in the most of the video and it was a good change of pace how he changes his tone and begins to include some of the aftermath the war causes. It isn't all fighting and saving, MANY die on the battle field and that is important to include. It not only effects their life by entering a war but it also effects their family, friends and loved ones lives to not have them return. Or, to have them return extremely wounded and damaged. I also agree that it doesn't completely hurts the historical value of the video but I also feel that Burns should have at least stated there was more detail than included in his videos so people are notified that this video isn't 100 percent accurate nor does it include all detail.

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Re: A Soldier's Letter

by [Opal Burdge](#) - Saturday, January 24, 2015, 10:11 PM

I liked the letter at the end I thought it transitioned nicely into the next video since he decided to talk about the lives of the soldiers. But if its historically needed it could easily go either way. I think it rather depends on the person watching it what they personally want to gain from the videos, honestly if you just want the cold hard facts that 900 page book will do just fine; but to keep peoples attention (or try to) Burns adds that emotion; factor. I haven't met many people who don't sympathize with soldiers and their families, I mean how could you not? Tough life for the both of them. So it was a good path for Burns to take in that respect. Now if he would just stick to the history in correct order..

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Re: A Soldier's Letter

by [Heather Reed](#) - Sunday, January 25, 2015, 6:01 PM

I would have to agree with you on the disappointment of knowing that the original letter was lost. I wish that we knew without certainty that those were Ballou's own words. I also felt a little let down the the letter wasn't even found until after the war was over. However, do I think that Ballou's personal letter to the love of his wife had an impact on the war in anyway at that time, no. I don't think it would matter whether Ken Burns put the letter in the start of the film, middle of the film, or at the end of the film made any difference to the history of the Civil War. The only thing that concerns me about the letter is that he left out the fact that it wasn't seen until after the war had ended. Again, I don't think this had an impact on the war itself it just makes me question if anything else will be left out of the film.

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