

« Forum 1

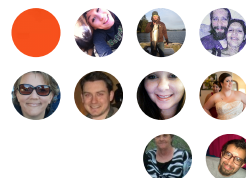


Joe Escobar

Meet Ken Burns

70 days ago

26 replies



Last 70 days ago



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: Meet Ken Burns

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Sum of ratings: -

26 replies

1



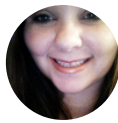
Post by Marcelo Rodriguez

Ken Burns video

67 days ago

After watching the short video of Ken Burns talking I found myself admiring and like him. I admire the fact that he approaches his projects with ignorance and curiosity, which means that he and his team are forced to do a thorough research and are able to discover something new that they didn't already know about the subject. I also like that while filming he doesn't just stop doing his research, he continues to research until he is done filming, that is how you know he does a thorough job doing his research. I also like that he trusts his team enough to go through the archives and pick the right photos to use in the films he puts together.

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Reply to



Marcelo Rodriguez from Bethany Hunter-Lehman

66 days ago

Thanks for Sharing!

Thank you for sharing!

I couldn't agree more with you in how much I admire him also. You can see all the passion that he has for this film. Like how you said in the ways that he approaches his projects in every aspect of the film.

You didn't say how the articles affected your view on the film. Just curious, did the articles enhance or hinder how you view the film now after watching the video?

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Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

3



Reply to



Bethany Hunter-Lehman from Marcelo Rodriguez

Ken Burns First article

66 days ago

Thanks for reading what I wrote. After reading the first article I still feel the same about Ken Burns because even the best filmmakers like James Cameron have their critics. One good example would be what one critic said about James Cameron's film Avatar which grossed more than a billion dollars worldwide who said "Avatar looks like the kind of gaudy, 1970s airbrush painting you'd see on a van owned by your stoner friend who sees too many Rush concerts. This is not, as heralded, "the future of cinema." Instead it's more like the old cliché: One step forward, two steps back" (Sean Burns). I like that he was trying to make history interesting to watch has he points out "[W]hat we were trying to produce is not a piece of academic paper. We were trying to speak to a very large audience ... and excite them and not be the last word or the first word" (Bedford). The reason why I like that he tried to make The Civil War interesting is because I like films that are exciting whether it's an action movie or a history movie, I don't to be bored to sleep while watching a film.

Cites;

Burns, Sean, "Avatar", Philadelphia Weekly. Web.
<http://www.philadelphiaweekly.com/screen/reviews/Avatar-79565587.html>

Bedford E. Karen "History on the screen: who speaks for the past? Ken Burns' fans and critics have their say", Article.

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Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

4



Reply to



Bethany Hunter-Lehman from Marcelo Rodriguez

Ken Burns Second article

63 days ago

After reading the second article I do not have any concerns regarding Ken Burns. The author of the article clearly had an issue with the fact he focuses more on the war than the social and political part of the Civil War as he list quit a few social and political things that Ken Burns didn't focus on such as, the conditions that black slave lived in as he says; "While Burns conveys the horrors of slavery effectively, he never intimates that slaves' working and living conditions varied enormously from plantation to plantation, farm to farm, and factory to factory. No human not insane would choose to be a slave. But had slaves the Hobson's choice of determining their owner, they surely would have preferred laboring for a master like Mississippi planter Joseph Davis (the brother of the Confed-

erate president) or Virginia planter John Hartwell Cocke than, say, for South Carolina planter James Hammond. Davis housed, fed, and clothed his slaves well, and provided them with medical and dental care, sometimes at considerable expenses" (Morrison & May). He also criticizes the way Burns finds a way to get people interested in the subject of history by having too many photos, quotations from letters, diaries, and speeches from Civil War era soldiers and civilians. I do not have any problems that he couldn't get every aspects of the war considering he only made 5 episodes for a total of 11 hours. In order to get every aspect he would have had to do at least 24 total hours.

Cite:

Morrison A. Michael, May E. Robert, "The Limitations of Classroom Media: Ken Burns' Civil War Series as a Test Case", Article

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Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

5



[Reply to](#)  [Marcelo Rodriguez](#) from [Kayla Janis](#)

62 days ago

Re: Ken Burns Second article

I have to say that after reading Morrison and May's arguments, I had a really difficult time finishing the review- mostly, because I found the argument about slavery ridiculous. I agree with the initial statement that Burns' appears biased in his portrayal of slavery. The Morrison and May review says, "Photographs of bare-breasted male slaves, a shot of a naked slave taken from the rear presented in conjunction with narrative commentary about slave auctions, and the photograph of the back of a slave covered with welts from whippings accentuate Burns' point that slavery was unrelenting torture." I don't think that Burns' is disputing the fact that slaves lived and worked in various environments, whether they were good or bad. I firmly believe that no person would choose to be a slave, even if Joseph Davis had a great medical and dental plan. (p. 44 in Morrison and May article). Morrison and May also state that Burns, "does a disservice perpetuating the old myth that all slaves picked cotton." I think that most people are aware that slaves operated in many different functions, from homes to fields, shops to factories. Because this is a documentary about the Civil War and not slavery, I don't think this is a fair argument in the context of the film. Had Morrison and May wanted to know more about slavery in the United States, I don't think Burns' film is the place to go to.

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6



[Reply to](#)  [Marcelo Rodriguez](#) from [Justin Wright](#)

62 days ago

Approach: Ignorance with Clear Directives & Trust Your Team

Yeah, I suppose with a film of this scope it is going to be hard (if not impossible) to please everyone. But certainly, approaching from "ignorance", or a slightly-informed ignorance, is commendable, and probably will help put the best product on the table.

Also, trust in your research team felt so good to hear. Sometimes Executives have a hard time letting go of the reins. This was encouraging. Quite excited to move forward.

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Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

7



Reply to Justin Wright from Trenton Bieker

62 days ago

It All Starts With Trust

That is a very good point about his statements on trusting your team. I didn't remember hearing that and does give credibility to a leader who listens and trust in his team. The guy does appear to be genuine and knowing that it is not a one man show but actually a team makes me more confident to approach this series. I just wonder why they stopped at only 5 films and didn't make more that went into the details of the broad scope this series is said to have.

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8



Post by Linda Hall

Forum 1

67 days ago

After watching the video, I did find myself admiring Ken Burns, I think that he took a subject and put his own spin on it. He gets the viewer "hooked" so that he wants to go and watch the entire series from beginning to end.

Yes I did feel the same way after reading the first article, I still felt like he was trying and succeeding in getting people interested in history. While some of the reviews from the first article was not to impress with his take on the Civil War, most were, and like he said he was not producing a academic paper, he was going for a much larger audience which I believe that he did.

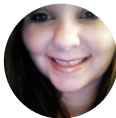
Even though the second article did find a lot of fault with the movie, such as leaving out very critical pieces of information, Burns was still able to get and hold the viewers attention and he leave it up to them to do further investigating on their own about the conditions he left out about the Civil War.

So all in all, I found the movie very interesting and informative and would most certainly be interested enough to do further research

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 Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

9



Reply to Linda Hall from Bethany Hunter-Lehman

66 days ago

Thank You for Sharing!

I also share the same views as you. When you said "Burns was still able to get and hold the viewers attention and he leave it up to them to do further investigating on their own" I felt the exact same way! I thought he did his job in getting the audiences' attention and now it was their job to look further into this subject so they can gain a better knowledge. I think that any history subject has so much detail, that it is our job to look into it further. We can't take every word as gospel, thus we must seek some view of the truth for ourselves.

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 Sum of ratings: 2 (1)

10



Reply to Bethany Hunter-Lehman from Linda Hall

62 days ago

Re: Thank You for Sharing!

You are so right in that we can't take every word as gospel, especially on the Civil War. There has been so much written about it and some of it is just plain biased. He (Ken Burns)

got my attention to the point that I would like to investigate further and read more books on the subject.

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11



[Reply to](#)  [Linda Hall from Rebecca King](#)

62 days ago

Re: Forum 1

I agree that Ken Burns was very skilled in getting the attention of the viewer and making them interested in learning about the civil war, but I do think that it is important to give the information that the articles said he left out. I think that it's not enough to make the audience seek it out themselves.

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12



Post by Kayla Janis

66 days ago

Reviews of Ken Burns' The Civil War

I appreciated how Ken Burns went about filming his documentaries. His "process of discovery" seems to allow the history to speak for itself. Using the imagery and documents to dictate the direction of the documentary makes for a less biased work. That doesn't mean that there isn't any bias present but I do think that his methods help to minimize that. I liked that he had a group- the "inner circle"- debating how to edit the film. In my opinion, this allows for a more complete view of history. In a book, you have one author and only his/her opinion. With Burns' approach, you see the end result of many minds painting the most accurate picture.

After reading the first article, "History of the screen: who speaks for the past?", I still felt that Burns' film is a good historical reference. The author of the article, Karen Everhart Bedford, writes, "The film raised scholars' concerns about how filmmakers represent the past, which stories of history get to be told, and who gets to tell them." While this is a valid concern, I don't feel that it should only apply to film. Books, internet resources, and other forms of media should have the same standards applied to them. I personally liked this article the best. Because this article addressed the praises and critiques of Burns' film, I felt that it forced me to think more in-depth about the film.

Historian and filmmaker Leon Litwack made a point that forced me to think back to what I saw in the first episode. He said, "it portrayed the 'essential passivity of blacks and women.'" While watching the first episode (I watched the first episode before looking at any of the forum information), I hadn't realized that most of the quotes and "voices" were from white men. I skimmed through my notes and realized I had quotes from Frederick Douglass and Mary Chestnut- one woman and one African American. Litwack makes an excellent point- where is the history from the women (both white and African American) and blacks (both slave and free)? These are valuable and important aspects viewpoints from history. While I don't feel that it takes away from the film as a whole, it definitely could have added a lot to it!

In the first article, Ken Burns is quoted as saying, "we were trying to speak to a very large audience... and excite them and not be the last word or the first word." Personally, I feel that to tell a detailed account of the Civil War would take a lot more time than the more than nine hours that *The Civil War* film takes. It provides a sweeping history of a very complex, complicated and detailed period in American history. For a documentary whose primary audience isn't part of world of academia, I think it's much more entertaining and informative than most Americans would choose to watch normally.

I found the second article, "The Limitations of Classroom Media: Ken Burns' Civil War Series as a Test Case," to particularly angry. The authors argue that "Americans fell for the series because Burns seemed to have discovered a way to make the subject of history much more fascinating than it had ever been in secondary school..." Isn't this Burns' objective? He's trying to make history entertaining to those who aren't concerned with the minutiae of historic fact. The first thing that pops into my head when reading this is the History Channel. It's very difficult to accept the History Channel as a reliable source of historical fact when most of their shows are about pawn shops, men who drive across America digging through others' junk and the lives of those living in swamps. This is entertainment and has little to no historical value. Why then, are Michael Morrison and Robert May so hard on Burns' documentary? With the trivial mistakes, he's still putting out a far superior product than Swamp People or Pawn Stars.

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Sum of ratings: 3 (1)



13



[Reply to](#)  [Kayla Janis from Marcelo Rodriguez](#)

62 days ago

Re: Reviews of Ken Burns' The Civil War

I agree with you that Michael Morrison and Robert Mays do seem angry that Ken Burns found a way to make history more entertaining, which is what he was trying to do. Although, I do think it would have been more informative if Ken Burns added more history of women black or white during the Civil War as you pointed, but he can only cover so much in the time had. Even now with the History Channel the history shows

that they do have not including the ones that you listed such as, How the States Got Their Shapes, Modern Marvel, and 10 thing you didn't know about are only an hour or two long and cover a small portion of the subject.

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14



[Reply to](#) [Marcelo Rodriguez](#) from [Kayla Janis](#)

61 days ago

Re: Reviews of Ken Burns' The Civil War

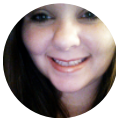
I think that if someone is interested in history from a woman's or African American's point of view, they'd need to study history specifically from that point of view. I think it's great that more and more of these points of view are becoming more easily accessible. But, Ken Burns' documentary isn't claiming to portray a point of view solely from their perspectives. You'd need to branch out and find those perspectives separately- which isn't a bad thing. I think it inspires us to learn more!

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15



[Post by Bethany Hunter-Lehman](#)

Ken Burns; Historical Genius or a Make Believer?

66 days ago

While watching the video, I saw how much passion Ken Burns had for his work. When you see someone with that much passion, it is hard not to admire that person. His message showed how deeply connected he was to displaying the story of the Civil War as well as the micro stories that compose it. Burns wanted to show that not one part of the film wasn't thought over many times. He gave each section, whether it was the voices or the music, tons of thought and preparation to create a wonderful interpretation of the Civil War.

After reading the first article, my mind hadn't changed. I still felt that Burns portrayed the subject as best as he could. Every film or form of art will have their critics and this is just one of them. Like the article said, "Some 39 million people tuned in when film debuted on PBS in September 1990, and re-broadcasts continue to draw large audiences." I think that fact talks for itself, 39 million people watched this film's premier. I think that if you are able to get that many people to see or watch your work, you are a success. Imagine the message that the viewers were able to learn and receive that otherwise they may have not been able to.

The second article just seemed like a hate letter. I do understand that there may have been some areas that Burns could have done better on, but in reality this was a series of 5 episodes. If anyone had the time and money, I am sure you could do 10 episodes in more detail. I feel that some people do not understand that most people, especially this age in time will not sit through something like that. I also feel that the critics forget that this film was meant for the public to get a basic knowledge of what happened in this part of history, not for historians who already know what had happened. The importance is to learn from our mistakes, not to know every date all those speeches were given.

Overall, I have confidence in this series. I didn't take this course to know the exact detail of everything that occurred in the Civil War. I am taking this course to have a better understanding of what did take place, so I know how we got to where we are. Ken Burns is a historical genius, not a make believer.

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Sum of ratings: 3 (1)



16



Reply to [Bethany Hunter-Lehman from Kayla Janis](#)

66 days ago

Re: Ken Burns; Historical Genius or a Make Believer?

I agree with you when you say that Burns was trying to encompass the entire Civil War in a comparatively short period of time. In any historical documentary (yes, I'm a nerd and watch documentaries for fun), I can always find a piece of information that I'd want to investigate further. Over the summer I read, "Confederates in the Attic" by Tony Horwitz. The author describes his experiences as he travels through the the big sites of the Civil War. It's incredibly fascinating! He covers a lot of ground concerning Civil War memory in the South. It's about 400 pages long and devoted to one specific aspect of Civil War knowledge. My point being that there's a HUGE amount of information to cover. I don't think it's fair to blame Burns for not including every little detail in his documentary. He does a great job providing an overview. If people want to know more about slavery then they should watch a documentary solely about slavery. If they want to learn more about the first half of the 19th century and the politics leading up to the Civil War then they should find resources covering that.

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Sum of ratings: [3 \(1\)](#)



17



Post by [Justin Wright](#)

Media Limitations & Evolution of American Civil War

66 days ago

I enjoyed the film very much and found it informative. I read all the reviews (which right now I can't seem to find) and found the most critical, lengthy one to be most helpful.

It was published by a Journal in response to the overwhelming enthusiasm for Ken Burns' film. Being critical of the limitations of teaching through film, the paper seemed to start out as 'sour grapes', perhaps frustration, and maybe a little jealous of the quick reward video offered. It seemed not just a critique of this type of teaching, but also an attack on Mr. Burns. The authors of the paper left an impression on me.

As I read through it, I began to see many great points they offered. The most enlightening was the clarity brought to the issue of just how muddled the race issue was in those times. How is that we look back and see Lincoln as this great liberator, when, in fact, he ran on a platform that promised the South he had no intention of abolishing slavery there? As the authors of the paper carefully observed, "The Emancipation Proclamation was written in 1863, not 1861."

I personally feel Mr. Burns did a great job of capturing many of the complexities of the issues. But I have to agree, at least up to this point, that the film has failed to highlight, or properly explore what appears to be a somewhat twisted and perhaps ugly position that even the North had on African-Americans.

However, I do really like the film, and believe that it has done the topic a very good service so far.

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18



Reply to [Justin Wright from Andrew McGarry](#)

64 days ago

Great post Justin

Hey Justin, you did a great job in the phrasing in your post. It leaves us with some very good questions as to what will be coming up in the different episodes of the series. You definitely thought from a different angle than myself, and after reading through your post its great to catch it from a different angle. The paragraph when you start questioning where the North really stood is where I found the discussion to be most interesting. That definitely awarded me with a new thought process as we pro-

ceed forward, thanks!

-Andrew

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19



[Reply to](#) [Justin Wright from Rebecca King](#)

62 days ago

Re: Media Limitations & Evolution of American Civil War

I agree that that specific review in seemed particularly biased against Ken Burns. It's interesting that you picked up on that too because it really felt like they disliked him more so than the film.

I also agree that the film should have touched more on the issue of race and the guilt of both the North and the South in that sense at the time.

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Sum of ratings: 1 (1)



20



Post by Jaime Baker

66 days ago

Ken Burns: Historian or romantic?

I admired Ken Burns and the way he portrayed the Civil War. I realize some of his critics criticized him for making it "too romantic" or not ugly enough. I personally thought the way the pictures were portrayed and the way he goes about presenting the war to us was appropriate. We all know it's a war and that wars are ugly, nasty and not "romantic" of all things. We don't need to have only negative, graphic images presented to us. We can use our imaginations and come to the proper conclusions of what went on during the war. After reading the articles my opinion of Ken and his presentation of the Civil War did not change. I have enjoyed the movie so far. I think the review given by Leon Litwack and Daniel Walkowitz were the most critical. I think for the fact they refer to a series on the Civil War as "upbeat" or "reassuring" was a bit disturbing. Wars are anything but upbeat social events. Even though the film so far has not been horribly graphic does not mean we don't understand the violence that took place during the war. I personally have a great deal of confidence in the Civil War series as our main source of historical information about the War Between The States. I am anxious to continue reading about and watching this series. I am also interested in doing more independent research on the war. I think a writer/entertainer who can present information to you in a way that you feel informed, yet yearning for more has done his or her job. I think that's what Mr. Burns has done here.

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Sum of ratings: 3 (1)



21



[Reply to](#) [Jaime Baker from Linda Hall](#)

62 days ago

Re: Ken Burns: Historian or romantic?

Hi Jaime

I liked the way that you point out the fact that we can use our imaginations and come to the proper conclusions as to what went on during the war. I to am anxious to continue reading about and watching this series. Again I have to say that getting the viewers attention and making you want more ,the writer and or film-maker has to be commended.

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Sum of ratings: 1 (1)



22



Post by Trenton Bieker

Highlighting War Before Politics With Ken Burns

65 days ago

After watching the video clip by Ken Burns I really got a sense of how much work goes into his videos. From his statements about not having a script or specific angle for videos I feel that his approach is a go with the flow approach. Before reading the criticism towards him felt that it would be a very non bias general explanation of the Civil war. Overall I like the clip and Ken Burns approach to the making of his videos. After reading the first article I noticed that when viewing his series he might be focused more on the battles and less on the social and political aspects that give rise to the war. Leon Litwack states this best "superbly produced history of war, not of the social revolution which the Civil War helped to unleash,". This article changed my perspective of how I will view his videos. I will be anticipating more war history than political and social history of the Civil war. Again after reading the second article what stood out the most to me was the criticism that Ken Burns caters to the public wanting to watch more entertaining history by focusing on wars than more challenging thought provoking questions about the politics and social impacts that affected the Civil war. A quote from that article that states this would be "We concede that the public shows more interest in general, battles, and campaigns than in political, economic, diplomatic and social history.". One thing that really stood out was the comparison to Battle Cry of Freedom "Still, Burns might have challenged public tastes instead of pandering to them. He could have modeled his time allotment upon the space allotment of the most authoritative recent book-length overview of the Civil War, James M. McPherson's best seller, Battle Cry of Freedom.". After viewing the clip and reading both articles, I would say we get a good balance between Ken Burns approach with video and McPherson's approach with his book. One will offer the political and social aspects leading up to war and one will highlight the battles.

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23



Post by Andrew McGarry

Ken Burns: Art of Filmmaking

65 days ago

Andrew McGarry

Joe Escobar

HST209 Forum 1

After watching the video clip about Ken Burns I was very pleased that this was going to be our main video source in the class. What I observed in the video clip was a director that really got in touch with the artistic side of filmmaking. Burns also displays a genuine interest in the subject at hand as well which can be a valuable tool when trying to hold a viewers attention, especially in a duration as long as the one this television series.

When reading through the first article after the video clip however I began to have a little bit of concern regarding the direction the series may go. The quality of the production was never really in question, but Leon Litwack said that it "failed to reflect the profound changes in the way history is recorded." This statement to me sort of seemed like maybe the film team might have missed some of the crucial points of the war, outside of the war itself. One thing I have always learned to try to do is maintain an open mind though when it is in terms of reviewing a particular subject, all people learn differently and experience visual learning differently; so one critical part for one viewer may be a very minimal fact for another. In the second article one thing stood out instantly for me as soon as I read it, it is the first sentence on page forty-eight that says "Ken Burns' analysis of the Civil War causation is, most apparently, a reminder of the limits of popular media." This statement for me was a big red flag as it has constantly been an issue through school about which sources can be deemed credible. Unfortunately in a topic that is as widely covered as the Civil War we often times just get similar key bullet points shuffled around and redelivered to us. While watching the video clip I was excited to see a filmmaker that was putting passion and detail into his work, this also gave me a little bit more hope that there would be great detail in this series. Hopefully the article was just written on the harsher side.

All in all I think this television series is going to be a great visual portion to the course, I feel like the director is going to deliver great detail along with accuracy. Although the articles that were provided this week have positives and negatives to both sides of the spectrum I am remaining optimistic that it becomes a very productive and informative source.

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24



[Reply to](#)  [Andrew McGarry from Justin Wright](#)

65 days ago

Re: Ken Burns: Art of Filmmaking

"one critical part for one viewer may be a very minimal fact for another."

I liked this point you made. I'd like to keep this in mind as I enjoy and scrutinize the work of others. Although I'm often in a hurry to get at what I think the meat of an issue is, it is still, after all, just a reflection of what I, myself, think is most important. Good to keep in mind.

"Unfortunately in a topic that is as widely covered as the Civil War we often times just get similar key bullet points shuffled around and redelivered to us."

This is an interesting thought. And may be a pretty good warning. I believe I read once that the American Civil War is in the top-five most written about subjects in the world. If that's the case, or even close to it, I suppose certain themes would get recycled.

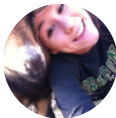
Lastly, you referred to the series as part of a "spectrum." I thought that was a good way to view it. May help us understand critical views better.

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Sum of ratings: 3 (1)



25



[Post by Janey Willis](#)

64 days ago

Meet Ken Burns

Did you find yourself "admiring" Ken Burns and "liking" the message he presented in the video clip? Did you feel the same way after reading the first article? What concerns, if any, did you have after reading the second article, which was the most specific, articulate, and critical of Ken Burns and his "historical work"? What level of confidence do you have in this Civil War Series, our main video source of historical information about the War Between The States?

I didn't necessarily see myself 'admiring' him, but I did find myself liking him and his message. I saw his dedication to his work and saw the amount of effort and thought he puts into his films and this really gave my faith him. After reading the first article, I was more intrigued to watch this series. However after watching the clip and reading the article I particularly could understand the critique about him 'insistence on beauty' After seeing him talk I could defiantly see him putting too big of a focus on the beauty.

After reading the second article I have the upmost confidence in this source. It is clear that Ken Burns is devoted to being historically accurate as well as interesting. I am a little concerned with how some things will be presented, especially the part about slaves being only portrayed as victims (which of course they were) but failing to focus on other things that had come out of slavery and the vibrant culture that they had. Despite issues like these I have no doubt that this is a solid and historically accu-

rate source.

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26



[Reply to](#) [Janey Willis from Trenton Bieker](#)

62 days ago

Culture in Ruff Times

I too found myself wondering about the culture of the slaves and how they managed through such ruff times. I notice in the first episode Ken Burns states they still had their own culture. Just wish he went into more of what exactly that culture was. I personally thought it was crazy how they changed the wording of vows from "till death due us part" to "till death or distance". I could imagine this pulled on the culture and families with all the other stress of those times.

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