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Week 2 Forum

Meet Ken Burns

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Meet Ken Burns

by [Joe Escobar](#) – Saturday, January 9, 2016, 9:39 AM

Make sure you have read [How Forums are Graded](#). All students should follow those guidelines. After studying the required materials (videos and web linked readings), address and discuss the various questions with your group members **throughout the week**.

DO NOT attempt to answer every question in a single post. In this class, forums are a place for sharing informed comments having analytical discussions. (Forums are NOT a place for students to publicly display full essays.)

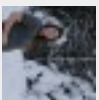
To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT – SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes which question(s) you are addressing . Do NOT simply leave it RE: Meet Ken Burns. This will help keep the discussion organized.

Sum of ratings: –

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Week 2 Forum: Group 2

by [Carissa Kernutt](#) – Tuesday, January 12, 2016, 12:50 PM

Hello everyone my name is Carissa. In the video clip I surprisingly found myself liking his message. I was very intrigued by how he ties in emotion with his music, which really grabs my attention.

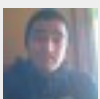
After reading the first article I felt the same about Ken Burns, and I am even interested in learning more from his films.

But, in the third article I felt a little confused and standoffish about the “anti-slavery myth”. I am shocked, because it is something so crucial in our nations history.

In the end of things I still feel very confident and excited to start watching more of his films. I feel that we will all be very informed and gain a lot of knowledge from watching his show, just like most Americans did in the 1990’s.

Sum of ratings: [2 \(1\)](#)

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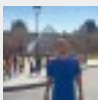
Re: Week 2 Forum: Group 2

by [Alexander Nonte-Clark](#) – Thursday, January 14, 2016, 12:13 AM

At first, once I had read the articles about Ken Burns, I questioned if the flaws that he had made in the accuracy of the history would possibly hinder the actual learning capabilities from the content. Although, after viewing said content, I found it refreshing and almost like a nice overview of what I had already read for the week which was nice for the quiz that we have this week. It also had a few parts that I don't remember seeing in the book which was also nice.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Week 2 Forum: Group 2
by Tyler Moffett – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 2:20 PM

Carissa, I am glad you mentioned the convergence of emotion and music that Burns sought for the narrative. I think this tells us a lot about Burns' artistic/filmmaking disposition and his goal to create a consistent "feel" or "aesthetic" for the Civil War documentary. I'm excited to watch the full documentary and keep my ears open for the music and how it affects the narrative.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Week 2 Forum: Group 2
by Jessica Mckee – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 3:10 PM

I do agree that these videos will help us be informed, and although I am worried about some of the reviews I think that overall it can only have a positive influence on us. The civil war time was a very complex period and so I believe that you should visit more than one source, but it does not mean that this one i, "bad" because it left some things out. I also think that everything has opposition and there are always going to be those who oppose what you are doing so we have to take what the reviewers say with a grain of salt as well.

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Re: Week 2 Forum: Group 2
by Sebastian Warren – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 6:05 PM

I also found myself liking the message after the first clip. Burns and his crew did a great job of matching pictures with music throughout the first episode. I was also sort of confused by the notion of the “anti slavery myth.” By my own interpretation, I believe this refers to someone to referencing the impact of slavery, when it is a key component of the argument.

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Feelings on this series
by Alexander Nonte-Clark – Tuesday, January 12, 2016, 11:44 PM

I found myself becoming interested in Ken Burns’ process of making his films as I watched the video clip. I liked how he talked about it like an art and how it showed all that went making into the episodes, like the music, narrations, and photos that they would use.

After the first article, I still felt that Ken Burns’ film sounded like a good thing in that he had said, ”[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.” I thought this was good because it would be something that anyone could watch and enjoy, and still learn about the past. I liked the end of that quote the most, because it showed that he wasn’t trying to make something that was like, “Okay here’s what happened exactly.” It made me feel like he at least knew that he may have not captured every important aspect, but that it was still a good representation.

During the second article I began to slightly question the validity of our use of the material for this class, because it began to point out some significant things like incorrect dates and info used in the film. “He provides an incorrect date for Abraham Lincoln’s speech on January 27, 1838.” and “Burns portrays a paralyzed president who never existed.” are two examples of inaccuracies pointed out in the document. I basically got the feeling

that maybe this video series may not be as reliable as I felt before reading about it.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Ken Burns week 2 forum

by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 3:06 PM

Ken Burns’s film about the creation of America’s national parks, was the spark that ignited my interest in studying history. This being said, after watching the short “Meet Ken Burns” video, my infatuation for his series was at an all time high. A former history teacher of mine always described the study of history as nothing more than a huge argument, and while analyzing other sources I have tried to keep this in mind. But for various reasons, while watching films by Burns, my ability to look at things critically weakens. I believe that this is partially to do with the level of beauty these films are crafted with.

After reading the criticisms I was brought back to my senses. Although the films do a great job getting people excited about learning history, they are not comprehensive to the subject. This is not to fault Burns, this is just one of the limitations of using film as a learning tool. The films strike an emotional chord with many Americans, this is one of the main reasons his films are so popular. His account of the Civil War much be somewhat simplistic to fit into an 11 hour timeframe. For many historians it is easy to poke holes in the historical accuracy of the film, of course there will always be some details that must be omitted to fit the timeframe. The film was created for a certain audience, which was the general American public. Not high brow historians. The film's intent was to excited people about learning about history, not educate them on every minute detail of the war.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Burn's view on filmmaking

by [Tyler Moffett](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 5:11 PM

I admire the scope of vision with which Ken Burns approaches documentary filmmaking. In the video clip he speaks about how he doesn't become an expert prior to the creative process, but rather becomes educated in the subject of his documentary while producing the actual documentary. Although to me he seemed more focused on the artistic representation of the subject rather than the historical accuracy of the content.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Burn's view on filmmaking

by [Alexander Nonte-Clark](#) – Thursday, January 14, 2016, 12:07 AM

I share the feeling that he was trying to be more artistic with his film instead of focusing on getting his facts correct. In the second article you can really see the bits and pieces that he was careless in explaining in his film, and as I watched the first episode, I immediately picked up on these because of this reading.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Burn's view on filmmaking

by [Tyler Moffett](#) – Friday, January 15, 2016, 3:53 PM

I totally agree Alex, it is very obvious that his mind and passion was not about the facts and more about the creative art side. I think it is very important to have a career in something you enjoy, not just do it for the money. It will also show in your work and make it more exciting for your audience.

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Re: Burn's view on filmmaking

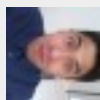
by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 8:45 PM

I also admire how Burns crew tries to go into each project without expectations. I believe he tried to make the film as historically accurate as possible while making the content digestible for a large audience. The care he

takes during the filming is very apparent while watching the movies.

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Ken Burns Watered Down History?

by [Miguel Perez](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 6:50 PM

I’m wondering why we are reading these articles. They seem to degrade the work of Ken Burns, at best is it as if the critics; Leon Litwack, Daniel Walkowitz are defaming his work to something anyone with a high school education and a camcorder can make. Litwack said of Ken Burns series that it was, “safe, risk-free, upbeat and reassuring”. (History on the screen: who speaks for the past? Ken Burns' fans and critics have their say, *By Karen Everhart Bedford*) The two critics basically go on to say that Ken Burns movie is nothing new or innovative. Professor Simon Schama of Harvard University gave Ken Burns a sort of backhanded compliment, "Quite good history was written in the 19th Century." Which essentially nothing new was done here, but nothing treasonous to history was done either.

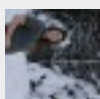
The second article was the more critical of the two, “In other words, for a long time to come, Americas Civil War may well be Ken Burns’ Civil War.” This was said because of the success of his series that educational aides were created as well; workbooks, text, etc. It was made clear that Michael A. Morrison and Robert E. May, did not believe this series was a helpful tool in the education of the Civil War. Saying its history is inaccurate.

I have a solid level of confidence in the Civil War series by Ken Burns from what I have seen, he seems to have a love of history judging by some of his other works. And seeing as his movies are not discredited to the extent Sigmund Freud’s psychology is, I believe there is something to be learned here. My only concern with this series, is the notion that the civil war was fought on a Good versus Evil ideal. Almost painting the picture that the war was fought solely for the freedom of Americans. While Ken makes a note in episode 1, that Lincoln while despising slavery did not want to abolish but rather contain slavery, I wonder what other watered down ideals I am being shown as I watch this series. James McPherson’s Battle Cry of Freedom, does well to destroy the idea that this war was fought for only one reason.

Miguel Perez

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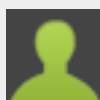
Re: Ken Burns Watered Down History?

by [Carissa Kernutt](#) – Thursday, January 14, 2016, 9:20 PM

I agree exactly with what you have said! Reading about his critics and what they thought of his show was a little degrading, even though 90% of America loved it. So many people tuned in to watch his first show when it aired, and he only got positive reviews from people who were trying to learn more about the Civil War, and our nations history.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Why History is Challenging

by [Woodrow Elsasser](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 9:22 PM

After both watching the video clip and reading the first article, I definitely found myself “admiring” and respecting Ken Burns quite a lot. He is a genuine guy who understands how to portray history in a way that can be easily followed and understood by a wide variety of people. When it comes to the history of anything, it is impossible to always tell the story completely accurately and portray everything that happened exactly the way that it did. The further back in time we go the less information we have about what exactly happened and why it did, and this is why everybody’s version of certain historical events can be slightly different. Emphasis can be put on the wrong events or left off of the right ones in the minds of each different historian. It doesn't surprise me at all that there are people who don't agree with the way that Ken Burns put his film series together on The Civil War. This is why when learning history, you must keep an open mind and learn from multiple different sources to understand history to its fullest. The Civil War is one of the most interesting and important pieces of American

history, and because of that, you could spend an entire lifetime learning about it and still not know everything. So to end my thought, from what I’ve learned about Ken Burns so far, and after watching the first video segment of “The Civil War,” I’m excited to see the rest of Ken Burns interpretation of the most important events of The Civil War.

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Re: Why History is Challenging
by [Alexander Nonte-Clark](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 2:26 PM

I also found it admirable that Ken Burns' made this series in a way that would reach out to a larger audience. It is also agreeable that we must not only have one source in educating ourselves on the subject of the Civil War, because in one source we may see something and in another something completely different. In which case, a bit more research can bring you to the correct variation and clear up confusions. After watching the first episode, I share in your excitement to see the rest of what Ken Burns has to offer us.

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Re: Why History is Challenging
by [Jessica Mckee](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 3:16 PM

I agree with you 100% especially in a situation such as the Civil War. It is even different then other wars because it was American vs. American. In other cases such as the Revolutionary War there are two sides of the coin. To us someone who was a patriot can be seen as a traitor to England, but we do not learn that way because we learn our side of events. With the Civil War however both sides were here. We have both sides with their differences of opinion and ideals of what happened. I think that it is admirable that someone tried to capture this. So even though he may miss some things it is a good place to start.

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Ken Burns, History, and the Inadequacy of Television.
by [Sara Baker](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 10:53 PM

Since the first introduction of Ken Burns was as uninformative as much of any historical television I’ve ever seen has been I had little opinion on whether or not I liked him, because I did not know him or his work. I was raised by a mother who loved history, and believed that watching things about history often led to understanding that person's biases, opinions and political agenda rather than the truth, or argued truth which occurred during “history.” So I did not like, or dislike his message. Because television then, and today, has become such an integral part of our society I could see the merit of discussing its validity at a conference. The part I did not understand, as illustrated by my earlier explanation of my youth, was why it was considered by many to be the “end of rational and holistic history.” Paraphrasing of course. If any concerns were made clear, it was that television merited such worry, rather than simply allowing it to be what it was, an aid to teachers as well as a warning and lesson to students and the public for what it wasn’t. Ken Burns Civil War may have not be entirely historically accurate, nor delved into much of the nuances and motivations occurring “behind the curtain” before, during and after the war, but it did create an interest and excitement, which is what I believed to be the ultimate, not the whole, intent. I did have concerns, but they were not for the lack of knowledge and depth that is impossible for a television series to convey, but for the historians and journalists lack of supporting the interest in history the series created. Instead, much of the material provided systematically destroyed Ken Burns, who is not a historian, effort to shed light and understanding into a tumultus time in America's history. Burns may have been incomplete and simple in his explanations, but if he had gone into the depth that the second article criticized him for lacking, would it have been as powerful, or become stale? Again, this is based on my belief that this was an introduction and overview meant to create interest and excitement rather than a detailed guide to every possible motivation and reason for America's tailspin into a civil war. The most critical, articulate and specific in their “rally” against Ken Burns work were Michael A. Morrison and Robert E May. After the definitive, and I believe somewhat overstated article, my opinion remains much the same, except when being skeptical of all parties not knowing the pitfalls and inadequacies of television to books and historical documents. The series historical “holes” should have been more expected, and the outrage and concern it drew was almost more

concerning than the series and the motivations behind it. Media of this sort should be an aid, and the magnitude of concern it was shown was given almost with the belief that teachers wouldn't be teaching, Ken Burns would replace them entirely.

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Re: Ken Burns, History, and the Inadequacy of Television.

by [Jessica Mckee](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 3:28 PM

When I was younger I loved reading these fictional books about real life characters, and I still read these now to this day. These books followed the story of Elizabeth Tudor or Mary Queen of Scots to name a couple, and although the details were fictional the general story line was accurate and they inspired a passion in me for history. They made me want to learn more; to pursue other source so that I could have the best understanding that I could about these times, and I believe that even if this video has some mistakes it is doing the same for many others.

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Re: Ken Burns, History, and the Inadequacy of Television.

by [Taralee O'Connor](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 11:37 PM

Sara,

What an interesting perspective you have given. The opening sentence of the article, “The Limitations of Classroom Media: Ken Burns’ Civil War Series as a Test Case”, it states that in our society we watch television to be entertained. I consider that to be true. Burns didn’t have the time to delve into the subject matter in and hour and a half and by trying to add more varied view points would have made the video much less entertaining.

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Ken's Voice

by [Taralee O'Connor](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 11:24 PM

I liked the message Ken Burns expressed in the flip clip. After reading the assigned articles, my opinion was somewhat altered. Burns expressed the desire to “tell stories” and stated he approaches the making of his films as a flexible process. The direction of his films can be altered as he uncovers something previously unknown to him. The article, Ken Burns’ Fans and Critics Have Their Say, has some criticisms concerning who is the speaker of our past and who's definition will we ultimately be told (www.current.org). These are very valid points. We are in fact viewing the Civil War from Ken Burns' perspective. His voice is his own and with it he will convey the message HE feels we should see and hear. While there is sure to be a lot we can learn from this video series, it should in no way be the only way we view the Civil War and should not be only his views we leave with at the close of this term.

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Re: Ken's Voice

by [Tyler Moffett](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 2:06 PM

Taralee, I appreciate your perspective that we must remember that the documentary does not deliberately attempt a completely historically accurate narrative of the Civil War. When I put myself in the shoes of a Civil War historian, as many of the critics of Burn's documentary are, I can sympathize with their concerns that the documentary glosses over important political and social implications/changes caused by the war.

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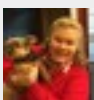
Re: Ken's Voice

by [Alexander Nonte-Clark](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 2:07 PM

I agree with what you are saying in how this video series should not be the only way we view the civil war,

because as you said it is just one interpretation (Ken Burns') and that would limit our understanding. I did, however like how it does hit some of the same points as our book and it was a nice refresher. Sadly, there is only so much you can cram into a video series and this makes it a wiser idea, in my opinion, to focus more on the reading and treat this as a secondary source.

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Re: Ken's Voice
by [Taralee O'Connor](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 9:18 PM

Alexander,

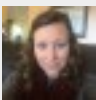
Most assuredly, we will not gain all the information needed to success in the course through the video series alone. The book definitely contains more detailed and thorough information. It is a bit tedious and difficult for me to get through due to it's length and subject matter. The video is easier and more palatable for most of us. I'm grateful we have both.

Thank you for your response!

Take care,

Taralee

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Re: Meet Ken Burns
by [Jessica Mckee](#) – Saturday, January 16, 2016, 10:25 AM

After watching the clip and reading the first paper my opinion of the episodes were very good. When watching the clip about Ken Burns you can tell that he has a lot of passion about what he does, and that he stands behind his work, which in turn makes me want to stand behind it. However I believe that not only with this, but with all pieces of information you must take with a grain of salt. No matter how hard you try to seem unbiased and open-minded, it seems to always work its way in. When we write papers we are taught to use more than source for our information and there is a reason for this because it is very hard to get people to agree with things especially over a topic that was the cause of so much dispute. Even back during the Civil War era people had different reasons for fighting, so how can we have one answer now.

I do believe that this is a good way to introduce the topic to some. In the paper by Morrison and May it states, “it was rare a student who squirmed restlessly or stole furtive glances at the clock.” And although it may not be something you entirely base your knowledge off of it is something to get you interested. As I read the second article however I was less inclined to believe that this is a valuable learning piece. As it lists fact after fact that the show got wrong, such as the incorrect date of one of Lincoln’s speeches or saying that James Buchanan did nothing when in fact they were wrong about even when he was serving. On top of getting facts wrong it seems that they just left out some events completely such as the Ostend Manifesto.

After finishing everything though I have to agree with one of the closing statements in the second paper, “Ken Burns’ analysis of the Civil War’s causation is, most apparently, a reminder of the limits of popular media.” I do not think this is a bad thing though, as I believe that it is a good place to start.

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Response in regards to the article
by [Tyler Moffett](#) – Saturday, January 16, 2016, 6:34 PM

I feel the same way after reading the article. I share the concerns of the historians/filmmakers Litwack and Walkowitz that the film focused on Burns' artistic representation of the Civil War aesthetic rather than the social changes/liberties that were consequences of the war. Burns, being a filmmaker by trade and not a historian, is less concerned with the details and more focused on igniting wonder of our nations past in the minds of the films audience. Considering the large audience that The Civil War documentary attained and maintains, I side with the historians who wish it more historically sensitive and careful. In my opinion, Burns should have built the narrative for the film prior to shooting it. Although he has the right as the filmmaker to, as he puts it, let the creative process teach him about what he is producing a

film about.

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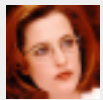
Re: Response in regards to the article

by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 8:23 PM

I agree that Burns intention was to reach a large audience with the film. This is why I believe that it is not extremely important for every fact to be accurate. The films intention was to excite people about learning about history, in the hopes that viewers would conduct their own research later.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Ken Burns Take on History

by [Andrea Douglass](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 2:12 PM

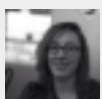
First of all, apologies for the late entrance.

At first it was tempting to idolize Ken Burns, especially after watching the video clip. He seemed so passionate about getting to the bottom of the truth, which he very well may have thought he was doing. But, from what I can tell from the first episode, the documentary much more focuses on romanticizing American history and making something "watchable" to a new demographic of video reliant people. On one hand, this itself deserves at least some amount of praise; whether or not the dates are exact (as the Morrison article points out), it is worth something to provide previously ignorant people, who otherwise would have never stuck to more accurate and dense material such as *A Battlecry of Freedom*, such an engaging tool to at least give them on a general sense/overview of the war.

That being said, it seems fair to advertise the documentary as "historical work", but not to go as far as calling it "historically accurate work". It feels as though the series will be nice fuel for discussion and debate throughout the term as a potentially contradicting source to *Battlecry* if nothing else. Also, the Morrison article did say that the first episode was the weakest, so here's to hoping it gets better.

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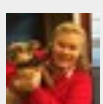
Disagreements and Additional Thoughts

by [Sara Baker](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 7:11 PM

I disagree with you. In terms of what it was and wasn't. Just because it wasn't historically detailed like *Battle Cry of Freedom* doesn't mean it was inaccurate, just lacking in the depth that many wished it to entail. Whether or not Burns was inadequate in his work and research, or what his thoughts were during the creation of his work doesn't change that it was accurate, just not detailed. Also, I'd like to see the dates of the beginning of the war in a document myself, because sometimes the start of a war (in an official capacity) versus the original start can be subjective, and vary based on location and which person is writing down the date. I do however agree that demographic and audience "trajectory" most likely had a heavy weight within the final decision of what or what may not have been put in the final film. In addition, I would have liked to see more "arguments" in favor and disfavor of Burns to get more of a holistic view of Burns. Also, I myself am looking forward to the "debates" the series will inevitably bring up this term. Interesting thoughts, and I look forward to hearing more of them this term.

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Difficult decisions

by [Taralee O'Connor](#) – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 10:46 PM

Rereading the “The Limitations of Media: Ken Burns’ Civil War Series as a Test Case”, I was stopped by the assertion that Burns missed a great opportunity more closely examine the Sam Houston quote regarding his “southern heart” and love of the Union as well. “The narration quotes Houston’s opinion that the Confederacy would lose in a war with the North, but it never probes Houston’s nationalist sentiments” (Morrison and May, p.5). This was extremely impactful to me as I am from Texas. Growing up, I remember lectures on the Civil War,

slavery, our state’s leaders of the time and Sam Houston. I do feel the South’s views and specifically this quote was, in fact, glossed over. Make no mistake, Southerners love(d) the South but they also love(d) the Union. This was not so clear cut an issue. These were not any easy decisions to be made by the South. I’m left thinking Burns took the easy and expected portrayal of the “cotton pickin’ South”. Please Do Not take my defense of this as support of slavery then or now! This is a deep shame we Southern still carry. I’m left feeling the series will need to be viewed with a grain of salt.

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Cicada sounds

by *Taralee O'Connor* – Sunday, January 17, 2016, 11:00 PM

Ken Burns state that 90% of the audio scoring was done before the filming begins. As I watched the video again, I realized I had been transported back to Texas, not by music however but by the sound of Cicadas and June Bugs. Burns captured the sound of summer in the South so perfectly! Litwack believes the series was “superbly produced history” (Bedford, p.2) and on this particular point, I agree. It’s great entertainment.

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