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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.)

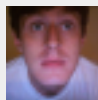
To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

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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Initial impression of Ken Burns

by [Timothy Eckley](#) – Tuesday, January 12, 2016, 3:15 PM

I genuinely enjoyed Burns' message that was portrayed within the initial video clip. The impression I got of Ken Burns is that he is very passionate about film making. He appears to have a strong work ethic and appreciates the fine details of film making. The perspective given to us about film really opened my eyes to how complicated and immense the process of film making could be.

The articles didn't change the way I feel about Ken Burns, but they reinforced the way I view history. It's important to remain open minded when learning history because the story being told is very likely from one perspective, whereas, there are multiple perspectives that a story can be told from. I think I'll definitely be aware of the criticisms provided by these articles while further watching the films, but I believe Ken Burns put his all into making these movies as well as he could for the general public.

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

2

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Nothing is perfect but most things have some value

by [Kyle Quinoveva](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 2:45 PM

Watching this video I did find myself admiring Ken Burns a bit for his enthusiasm for making his documentaries. Did the supplementary documents change this? No, not really, because much of the original video is focusing on how well he wants the documentary to be polished and his own personal passion in the

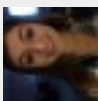
project. The following documents are more about the historical failings of his series, particularly how weak it is on the political side of the war which, except for the beginning segment, isn't very relative to the main message of the video clip.

No one in these articles are arguing that the series is lacking in its production value and technical presentation, they're concern is more with the factual content or, more specifically, what it omits and what it oversimplifies. However I still have a high level of confidence in this series; both articles still recommend watching it and the simple fact that we are aware of these flaws now allows us to compensate for the series imperfections and adjust for its inaccuracies.

As the Second Article states (page 40) "The Cause - 1861" is the weakest episode of the series and the article its self goes into great detail to rectify many of the mistakes cited in it. And as Toplin said on page 3 of the first article "Film is not comprehensive, it cannot be wallpaper history; it cannot cover everything." This is a sentiment I agree with and considering everything I believe that Ken Burns' "The Civil War" is a good framework, so long as there is plenty of supplementary material to make up for its shortcomings, both factual and inherent to film media (which, not doubt, this course will: the material in this form being one such example).

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Nothing is perfect but most things have some value
by Kayla Rogers - Friday, January 15, 2016, 11:24 AM

I agree with your statement that we should use supplementary material along with the series. Ken Burns is no less admirable because his series is "oversimplified". Ken never claimed to be a historian so the lack of depth in his film would primarily fall upon his historical advisers for they should know what factual information would best be presented with each segment of Ken's series. After reading the chapters in our textbook I realized how in depth it actually is, so we will not be missing out on vital information. The series, although it may not be very informational, will still help to give us guidelines on what we should be looking for in our textbook.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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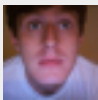
Ken Burns is worth watching.
by Kayla Rogers - Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 3:49 PM

After watching the video clip on Ken Burns I was thoroughly impressed. The passion he showed for his work was tremendous. The attitude of constantly having an open mind is admirable because starting a film with a certain bias definitely could lead to a very biased production in the end. The fact that he is willing to go through five different voices each five different times to find that perfect one shows his dedication to his work.

After reading the first article I felt the same way as I did when watching the video. Every creation ever made has encountered controversy, and just because there were a few bad reviews questioning the authenticity do not make Burns less of a producer or his video less impactful. Burns even says in the article, "We were trying to speak to a very large audience ... and excite them and not be the last word or the first word." Burns says himself that his series was not meant to be the sole bias of the viewer's perception of the Civil War. He never says it should be the only viewable option or that others should not make their own representation of Civil War history.

After reading the second article it does concern me that Burns' facts are off a little bit. You would think that having a team of "some of the most highly respected historians in the United States" as stated by Morrison in the second article, would prevent these mistakes. However, mistakes in dates are only a minor detail and do not necessarily take away from the impact of events. The second article critiques the stereotypical representations construed by Burns, but many of these stereotypes are necessary. Especially when talking about slavery. When depicting a slave as being a beaten cotton picker it hits home for a lot larger of an audience than describing the work of William Wells Brown who worked in a printing office and worked a press as quoted in the second article.

I am very confident about this Civil War series because although some of the information has been proven incorrect it is not our only source of information. Reading the textbook as well helps to give not only multiple perspectives on the events during and around the Civil War, but also gives us correct information and helps to keep the facts in check. This series has also proven itself to be worthy viewing material as it has been on television and in classrooms for over a decade.

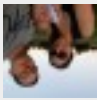


Agreed

by Timothy Eckley - Saturday, January 16, 2016, 2:19 AM

I had the exact same initial impressions of Ken Burns. He seems to work incredibly hard on his pieces and the organization of this series shows in that. It's important that we understand that Burns' portrayal of the Civil War is simply one perspective. There are multiple stories and points of view that the videos could have covered, but it's easy to spread yourself too thin and miss even more crucial details.

However, it is careless to make simple mistakes like misquotes or associating the wrong dates with certain events. Those things should probably not happen in a film such as this one. Perhaps the information that was available to him was inaccurate or incomplete at the time and lead to these problems within the film. Regardless, every film will have critics and there will always be someone that disagrees with a statement or representation of some idea.



filtration is critical

by William Branstetter - Sunday, January 17, 2016, 3:29 PM

I really like your perspective on Ken Burns efforts and possible reasons for his shortcomings. After watching the first episode i feel that as long as one stays open minded to all of the information we are given, then filtering out opinions and omissions shouldn't be too difficult. I am an advocate of thinking critically and always attempt to put extra effort towards this when learning history.



Open Mind

by Robert Johnson - Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 5:49 PM

The message presented by Ken Burns in the video clip had very little, if any impact on me, nor do his critics. Anyone can say anything; I will decide for myself after watching the full series.

I have only seen the first episode of the PBS series *The Civil War*, so really at this point I feel like it's too early to find fault with the series. For now, I will keep an open mind.

However, now because of, and after reading the second article, specifically the quotes by Litwack such as;

"celebrated the reconciliation of North and South while ignoring the brutal and violent racial repression on which that reconciliation rested."

I will be paying closer attention to this detail.



Re: Open Mind

by Justin Scott - Thursday, January 14, 2016, 3:38 PM

I agree with you that we shouldn't pass judgement on the series before even watching it, but I think these articles at least prepared us to view it with an even more critical eye. I think it's safe to say that the series, on it's own, will not portray the Civil War in the light most historians try to portray it in. I think it will, however, make a great supplementary resource.

Open mindedness is great, I agree with you. But I think we have to all be careful to not let that become a bias in of itself, and use what we've learned from the articles to watch the series with a critical eye.

Re: Meet Ken Burns



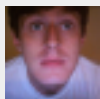
by [Mariah Marelli](#) - Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 7:44 PM

Did you find yourself "admiring" Ken Burns and "liking" the message he presented in the video clip?

I admired what he was trying to accomplish. I love that he was trying to bring history to life for people that don't just want to read about it. I think making a film about history is more complicated than writing a book about it. Making a film requires you to consider different aspects than a book would, and all of these need to match up to make a good film. I did like the message that he presented in the video clip. I took his message as being that every part of the film is important in bring the history to life for the audience. Every little detail needs to fit with the story you are trying to tell. You need to find the perfect pictures, voices, and music then hopefully it'll all just fall into place. I really liked the amount of work and detail he seemed to put into his filming and that is why I did admire Ken Burns in this clip.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Passion is his worst enemy?

by [Timothy Eckley](#) - Thursday, January 14, 2016, 12:48 PM

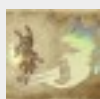
I agree that Burns' passion for film making appears admiral, considering the information from the clips in the first video. The fact that he doesn't trust other people to perform most tasks for the film and prefers to do a lot of things himself shows he has a lot of drive and work ethic. Have you thought that this could also contribute to some of the criticisms of this film series as well?

Perhaps his lack of trust for those who he has actually hired for the film has lead it to have some of its aspects of just a single story. Omitting political and social crisis that would add depth and clarity to the series. His desire to micromanage everything on set and in the film making process could have caused him to spread himself too thin and be unable to research other aspects of the Civil War, which lead him to leaving some things out that other historians weren't so happy about.

I am going to be keeping an open mind while watching the series, but this is a thought I had about why he might have left some things out. I doubt he had some agenda and wanted to leave out aspects of slavery or politics because he had an unspoken agenda he was trying to get across.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Is Ken Burns admirable?

by [Ryan OToole](#) - Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 7:56 PM

Watching the video and reading the articles gave very clashing views of Ken Burns. The video showed him as a passionate historian who prided himself on his accuracy, going as far as to personally pour through the archives himself.

The articles have some heavy criticisms of him, however. Both articles feature historians that are rather irritated with him over a failure representing or oversimplifying certain aspects of history, namely slavery and political context.

I find it unfortunate that his works are apparently so oversimple because judging by his enthusiasm during the video Ken truly does love his line of work. I personally, find such enthusiasm very admirable, but at the same time, he is a historian. Part of his job is presenting the facts as complete as possible. Simplifying or ignoring large parts of history is less than acceptable.

That being said, I'm sure that *The Civil War* is both enjoyable and very informative. It's just a shame that it doesn't seem to be as complete as it should be.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Is Ken Burns admirable?

by [Mariah Marelli](#) - Thursday, January 14, 2016, 7:17 PM

I agree with you very much. Its hard to decide my opinion of him when everything I read seems to clash. The video shows him as a very passionate and enthusiastic person. He just wants to make more people interested in history and goes through a great deal of effort to accomplish this goal. That being said the articles paint a very different picture. To many of his critics the films are overly simplistic. They seem to lack real depth and an understanding of the underlying issues that lead to the Civil War. I admire his passion, but feel that his films could use a little bit of work.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Is Ken Burns admirable?

by [Ryan OToole](#) – Friday, January 15, 2016, 10:24 PM

Yeah, I get what you mean. I certainly would enjoy a little more political context. I get that he probably wanted to focus on what he believed the audience would find exciting; that being the actual war, the battles, the conflict. But political conflict can be just as meaningful as content as physical conflict can be. More importantly, as I mentioned above, he is a historian, and as such it's his job to inform us with all of the facts, rather than just some of them. I kinda get the feeling that he puts his role as a filmmaker above his role as a historian, but maybe that's just me. Still, it's difficult to deny that his series is entertaining, and if it got more people into learning about the civil war, then I suppose overall it can be considered a positive thing.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Is Ken Burns admirable?

by [Thomas Brokaw](#) – Friday, January 15, 2016, 12:24 AM

When you say Ken Burns is a historian, I wonder if he would agree. I believe Ken Burns identifies as a documentary filmmaker. He won two Emmy awards for his Civil War documentary as a filmmaker. He has a bachelor degree in Film Studies and Design. He hires historians as advisers. I believe his passion is for documentary film making.

Film has always had to edit or otherwise shorten the story. I believe history was served well by the film's having been seen by so many people. Also, when someone is critical of Burns, maybe it's just because they like their version better and not necessarily because Burns is wrong.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Meet Ken Burns

by [Justin Scott](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 10:08 PM

I did indeed find myself liking Ken Burns after watching the video clip. To me, he seemed passionate about his work and willing to address any personal biases he and his crew might have. I think this is still true. Burns is not at fault for his documentaries "severe limitations as a teaching device" (Morrison & May, 39). I would argue that any educational limitations that it might would be due to the medium that the information was presented in, video.

For documentary to explore every single aspect of the civil war, it would have to be incredibly long. A medium such as a book would be better fitted, in my opinion, to discuss everything from the warfare to the social revolution that took place.

One thing that I will concede is entirely Burns' fault is the supposed lack of the voices of ethnic minorities and women (Bedford, 2). That would be the main concern, to me, that came in mind from reading the second article.

If we just look at what white men have done throughout history, we will get a very narrow view of what happened. Especially on the issue of black people in the civil war.

I still have confidence the The Civil War Series, but I know now that i need to take it with a grain of salt. I think so long as we use other sources, such as our textbook, in addition to it, it will remain a viable source for us to use.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Hard to find.
by [William Branstetter](#) – Friday, January 15, 2016, 9:02 AM

While I agree with you, i also believe that finding and complete source of history can be difficult no matter the medium. I think this is especially true when the historian or film maker is a citizen of the nation at topic. I am glad that the articles included pointed out that we had white non-slaveholders defending a system that was unfavorable to them, and northerners killing blacks in race riots. For some reason it rubs me the wrong way when people direct attention toward what "white men" have been responsible for throughout our history. If you dig deeper its usually a select group of elite white men that had any amount of control over what has happened. I just think its easy to get caught up in the race war discussion.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Hard to find.
by [Justin Scott](#) – Friday, January 15, 2016, 10:25 AM

The main point that I was trying to make was that we need to look at more than one source to get the entire picture. I just believe that, especially after reading the articles, that perhaps essays and books will be far and wide a better and more complete scholarly source. I agree with you that a complete source of history all in one medium would be near impossible to find.

Now, I know that it can make a lot of people uncomfortable when talking about what terrible thing their ancestors have done. And I don't believe that anyone is saying that all white people are of have been evil throughout history. But you have to keep in mind that we're not talking about an elite group of white men when we talk about the civil war. Slavery was the central institution of the Confederacy (Foner, 408). And in *The Civil War: Episode 1 – The Cause* it is pointed out that what drove the north and south to resent was, in a large part, slavery (Burns).

I don't think that including black people's and women's perspectives will shift the focus of what we study to how bad white people are. It simply gives the entire picture, which is, in my opinion, better than leaving their views and perspectives out of history. Especially when talking about the civil war.

Works Cited:

Foner, Eric. *Give me Liberty!* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012. Textbook.

The Civil War: Episode 1–The Cause (1861). Films On Demand. Films Media Group, 1990. Web. 15 Jan. 2016.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Meet Ken Burns
by [Thomas Brokaw](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 10:45 PM

The Ken Burns telling of the Civil War is, for me, just one story. There are many stories from different points of view on the Civil War. I've never expected any one perspective to be all inclusive and completely correct. I also note a correlation between those who are successful (like Ken Burns) and the number of critics that get media exposure by criticizing. It would be impossible to cover everything that happened in a video series. As for accuracy, when there is narration and I see an old picture of a couple of soldiers doing something, I never actually believe the people in the picture are the actual people being spoken of, rather I see the image as working with the narration in the telling of the story.

After the *Video Introduction of Ken Burns*, I saw him as a skilled, successful photographer who put together a series of still images, set to music, overlays narration, and attention to audience appeal.

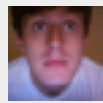
There is now software that will do what is called, "the Ken Burns effect." (Proshow Producer)

Ken Burns is selling a product and that product is story telling. If the Civil War had not produced thousands of images he would never have taken on this project. So yes, I admired his cleverness in finding a way to put his

skills together to create an entertaining and informative product.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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The whole story

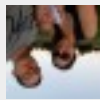
by [Timothy Eckley](#) – Thursday, January 14, 2016, 12:54 PM

Music, images, and narration are all tools to try and tell the story better. However, I agree with you that it's nearly impossible to portray the entirety of a story simply from one perspective. Although the series is not all inclusive in regards to all aspects of the Civil War, no portrayals anywhere of the Civil War are all inclusive. There will always be something left out or some story that wasn't told.

What's important for me to focus on, is whether or not the information being presented is truthful or accurate. Even if only certain parts are being covered, as long as they are accurate that is going to be valuable to learning about the events in our history. I'm confident that he has given us as complete of a guide as he could, considering how passionate he seems about making film.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Excited to watch.

by [William Branstetter](#) – Wednesday, January 13, 2016, 11:37 PM

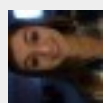
I suppose I found myself admiring aspects of Ken Burns and accepting the message he presented in the video. I personally am a skeptic of any information that takes a lot of money to produce. I worry that this can lead to far greater opportunity for hidden agendas, which is especially troubling when it comes to history. I did like how passionate he seemed to be about his attempt to convey this point in American history. To me he kind of seemed more interested in the artistic aspect of what he was doing more than anything else.

After reading the second article I didn't really have any more or less confidence in the civil war series. I could definitely tell that the writer of the second article seemed more like a real historian rather and a video documentarist. He seemed to have a chip on his shoulder and maybe rightly so with how easy and effectively a video documentary can solidify inaccurate or incomplete information in people's memories. The author also pointed out several pieces of information regarding the motivations for the onset of war, and the persistent belief that it was mainly anti-slavery motivated. I wasn't really surprised to hear the assertion that Ken Burns "Civil War" is "Swiss cheese history". In my experience it is just as important to get a second opinion on history as it is on medical concerns. Different perspectives can only increase understanding. For this reason I'm not concerned at all about this being the main video source of historical information for the course. I am grateful that we also have what I hear is an amazing and thorough historical account to use for our text. I must admit that I am behind on the reading and wish that I was up to speed at this point so that I could maybe draw more lines between the information in this forum.

Just judging by the variety of information given in this forum and the multiple sources used to assess Mr. Burns I am not concerned about receiving incomplete history. I definitely look forward to watching the docu-series. I have seen adds for it in the past and it seemed like something i would enjoy.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Excited to watch.

by [Kayla Rogers](#) – Friday, January 15, 2016, 2:18 PM

I agree having our text will be very valuable to go along with the series. However, I do believe Ken Burns had all of the best intentions while making the Civil War series. No matter what movie it is, it will be incomplete compared to a book. Every movie based on a novel ever made has been lacking information, sometimes even important details that define a character. This is why I believe Burns did do his best to portray the war, even if it is just an overview because if he were to put in a lot of detail, hidden agenda or not, the length of the series would be so long very few people would be willing to watch it.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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As am I

by William Branstetter – Saturday, January 16, 2016, 1:26 AM

I guess while you could say that films are not as complete as books. You could also just say that it’s a narrowed perspective of the story being told. Often in book to film productions parts of the story are changed, added, or subtract. This is done for many reasons in order to make the story fit the directors’ vision. I feel that when dealing with history this is a liberty that should not be enjoyed.

After letting it all soak in a a little more the issue of incomplete or inaccurate information is bugging me a little more. When you take a novel and turn it in to a film, I assume the directors try to leave out parts of the story that they feel serve no purpose to their vision, or take too much time. When making a film for enjoyment I believe that this is okay. I feel that when it comes to history the most important thing is to give an accurate portrayal. Doing this would require you to leave out contested or opinionated bits of information, or at least make sure that you make the time to inform of the other perspective or opinion. I also think it’s worth mentioning that “Ken Burns, The Civil War” is not just an hour long documentary. It is a docuseries which gives it plenty of time to explore issues like this. I think this is critically important when dealing with things like war motivations for the Civil War. By proposing that slavery was the motivator he is actually using the "hidden agenda" in place of historical fact. I can see how overlooking, omitting, not knowing would lead to critique and concern. I myself know that i will enjoy the series and learn from it. I know that I will see a lot of interesting photographs and hear many interesting Civil War accounts.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Meet Ken Burns ►

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