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Week 3 Forum

Creative License

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Creative License

by [Joe Escobar](#) – Saturday, January 16, 2016, 10:36 PM

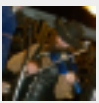
To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

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: Creative License.

Sum of ratings: –

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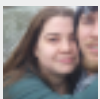
A Different View of the War

by [Jake Beckwith](#) – Monday, January 18, 2016, 8:42 AM

I can absolutely appreciate Ken Burns’ method of storytelling. History can be fairly dry when it is presented to us from a purely scholastic standpoint. While chronology is important, I appreciate being entertained as well. I felt like even though it was out of sequence, Burns’ presentation of Ballou’s letter did a great job of summarizing the mood and feeling of the period. The fact that his wife didn’t receive the letter until after the war doesn’t change the sentiment behind what was written, nor does the actual date of the letter. Ken Burns used his creative license to effectively set a mood and give us a new perspective on another side of the war. To me, this last message in the episode was encouraging us to view the war from the point of those that were left behind, which is something I may not have considered otherwise.

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

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Re: A Different View of the War

by [Mychal Hilario](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 11:21 AM

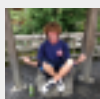
I also really appreciate Ken Burns way of storytelling. As you said history can be very dry and though it is a serious and emotional subject it can be hard to feel a real connection for words on a page. The way Burns presents the story draws in all kinds of people even those not necessarily interested in history and helps create emotional attachment. It also for me at least made it a little more "real" for me, with the use of photos, letters, paintings and news clippings it gave me a much more personal connection as well as creating a dynamic view of the time period.

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

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Re: A Different View of the War

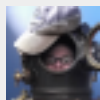
by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 7:43 PM



I agree that Burn's use of his creative license added was totally valid. The reading of Ballou's letter was the perfect way to end episode one. Even though the letter did not fit in chronologically with the rest of the episode, it added a strong emotional touch. Without the reading of the letter, it would be easier for viewers to look at war casualties as statistics, opposed to individual tragedies.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Burns' Creative License

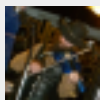
by [Ashley Ramos](#) – Monday, January 18, 2016, 11:28 PM

I don't have too much of a problem with the way Burns' presented the information. It makes the film more entertaining and thus I find it easier to stay interested in the topic. I think it's better to have a film that is captivating and sparks people's interest in the Civil War. In an ideal world , we wouldn't have to sacrifice historical accuracy for a movie that's more compelling, but some of Burns' changes made a better story, which suits his goal to create interest in the Civil War.

Most likely anyone watching Burns' series as a student would be utilizing other sources as well like we are. For someone watching it casually it's ok if it isn't 100% historically accurate as long as it's close enough and not actively misleading people.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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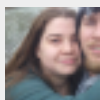
Re: Burns' Creative License

by [Jake Beckwith](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 11:05 PM

I really like that you pointed out that Burns isn't actively misleading people. The message is still the same, and it is close enough. We will be able to gain enough accurate information from the series to have a higher understanding of the causes, effects, and the entire timeline of the war. I really appreciate the small facts that I was unaware of previous to viewing these films, particularly the nicknames of the important players. I knew about "Stonewall" and a few others, but I had never heard Ulysses S. Grant referred to as "Unconditional Surrender" Grant. I thought that was pretty neat.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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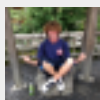
Re: Burns' Creative License

by [Mychal Hilario](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 11:30 AM

I think you made a good point about this film being more about captivating peoples attention and sparking interest in the Civil War. I had the exact same thought that if someone were studying the war as a historian or student of history they would certainly be using other resources and hopefully even then would be encouraged to question and verify as we are. As you said it is not actively misleading and was not made to be completely academically accurate but made to accessible to many people and spark a deeper interest.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

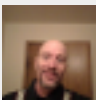
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Re: Burns' Creative License

by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 8:02 PM

I also was happy he included the letter. I like how you pointed out it improved your understanding of the war. Without the letter, it would have been harder for audiences to grasp the emotional struggles soldiers and their families endured throughout the war.



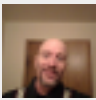
Sense of Reality

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Tuesday, January 19, 2016, 11:12 PM

Using authentic photographs and film are in my opinion, an effective way to illustrate your story with a sense of reality.

I think Ken Burns taking "creative license" in this specific case, with the use of Union Major Sullivan Ballou’s letter in the scene“Honorable Manhood”, is a powerful way to broaden the view of the Civil War reality.

The series anthem, “Ashokan Farewell”, accompanying the voice-over was I think an emotional additive.



For All We Know

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 10:05 AM

My accurate understanding may not be affected much, as far as the Civil War goes as a result of the Major Sullivan Ballou letter. However, the accuracy of this specific event in the scene “Honorable Manhood”, is questionable.

I feel like if the letter is not genuine, and has been rewritten, then something could have been changed. For all we know, the letter Major Ballou actually wrote wasn’t really quite as honorable, romantic, or even as detailed as the letter being read in this scene.

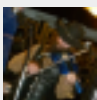
Our instructor has said he usually waits before telling students that the letter was not discovered, or delivered until after the war, and especially that it was actually rewritten. I consider this very important information, and as a result I wonder how many other letters in this film have been rewritten.



Re: For All We Know

by [Mychal Hilario](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 10:55 AM

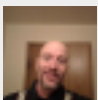
I think that is a very good point that extends well beyond this film series. How many letters or diaries and such were rewritten? Much of what we read of the past does seem quite romanticized and it is certainly something to consider that not all of what we are presented is original just because it says journal or letter of a person.



Re: For All We Know

by [Jake Beckwith](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 10:59 PM

It's unfortunate that we will never know the extent of revision these journals and letters have gone through. I like to think that if they were actually revised, it was only to make them sound prettier. I imagine many of the farmhands and similar people who were out there fighting didn't have the benefit of an extensive education. I don't suspect that their letters would be as fluid and flowery, but it makes them nicer to read. Using proper English is also an effective way to express the sentiment contained within these letters more powerfully.



Re: For All We Know

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 3:43 PM

Jake

I think your absolutely correct, and since there’s no telling the extent of revision, we can’t really

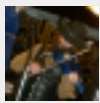
assume it's only to make them sound prettier, I don't think. Without a doubt, the persons revising these documents, word them the way that sounds best to themselves.

Even changing words to make it sound prettier can change the meaning, and understanding for some people, therefore perhaps even skewing individual realities, in terms of what a person believes to be real and true about the Civil War.

Finally, I wonder since there's no telling, should we just automatically assume most of these old letters and journals have been revised to some degree?

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: For All We Know

by [Jake Beckwith](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 3:55 PM

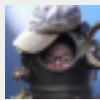
I've actually been fairly curious about the authenticity of the letters since we began this discussion, so I did a little bit of extra research. Apparently there are quite a few existing original copies that can be used as comparisons for letters like the Ballou letter, and it sounds like the information contained is believably accurate. I also found a pretty neat fact on this website:
<http://teachinghistory.org/best-practices/examples-of-historical-thinking/25048>

"The letters to home have a much greater survival rate than the letters from home to the front. The letters from home don't survive because soldiers have nothing that they can do with them. Also, before battle soldiers are likely to destroy any personal letters that they have on them. Their fear is if personal letters are found on them that the enemy will somehow use that information."

This is actually a very interesting website if you have time to check it out. It sounds like the majority of the letters and journals are authentic and not rewritten.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: For All We Know

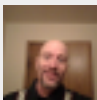
by [Ashley Ramos](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 12:32 PM

Hi Rob,

There were some things I found questionable as well. We know that his series isn't completely accurate, so I find myself having to double check all of the notes that I take from the series.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: For All We Know

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 4:23 PM

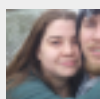
Hey there Ashley,

Well to tell you the truth, in terms of the “creative License” taken by Burns in The Civil War, I’m not really questioning its effect on the accuracy of Civil War history.

In regard to the accuracy of this film, comparing its information with other sources is the safest bet I think.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Creative License

by [Mychal Hilario](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 10:14 AM

I am a very lineal thinker and even more so when taking in information. I personally prefer to know just how things happened from start to finish. That being said i do understand this is not 100% historically accurate and

is made for mass entertainment consumption with that in mind the placement of the letter and how it is presented are compelling and help drive home the feeling of how uncertain the time was. As well as provide an emotional and dramatic point to end on. For the dramatic and emotional effect on the film I can see why Burns would want to include the letter toward the end of the first episode in this series. It does demonstrate the desire for closeness and connection to family the people of all parts of the families had to be feeling. I do not think it is necessary to infuse more drama into an already highly dramatic story and i dont think that is really what Burns set out to do or did. I think in this case anyway he used the real drama present and shaped how it was presented to something a little more dynamic for an ongoing video series. I do think he made the right choice to include it where he did, it had a candid relatible feeling and i feel helped wrap up the situation and feeling of the time presented in the first episode. The music that accompanies it and the other pictures certainly all serve to help create the emotional connection I believe Burns was going for and found it a tasteful way to end the episode that really left me wanting to learn more.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Someone Could Fall Asleep

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 4:56 PM

Mychal,

I agree with your position on the “Creative License”, used by Ken Burns in his film *The Civil War*.

I do not think he was trying to add extra drama, or mislead his audience. Like you I don’t think he did either. The viewer can take it anyway they choose, but I haven’t discovered any outright lies actually told in the film.

Just imagine how boring the film might be to an audience without Ken Burns driving it home with this approach, someone could fall asleep.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Someone Could Fall Asleep

by [Ryan OToole](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 2:03 PM

Hey Robert!

While I agree with you that I don't think that Ken Burns was attempting to mislead his audience, I think that adding extra drama was exactly his intent.

There isn't much educational significance to the letter, I feel. You can certainly argue that it helps viewers put themselves in the shoes of the common soldier back then, as well as sums up the civil war itself (I've done this myself in an earlier post, actually!) But if that's true, then why take it out of chronological order? Like you mention, it's more exciting this way. Dare I say.... dramatic! 😊

That being said, I think that the rest of the episode was still very interesting without the letter. I should hope that the letter itself wasn't the only thing keeping people from falling asleep! It's incredibly effective and very interesting, but the rest of the episode (and so far the series itself as well) stands on its own pretty well!

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Someone Could Fall Asleep

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 6:19 PM

Ryan,

The Ballou letter in the scene “Honorable Manhood” at the end of Episode 1, is only one single example of Burns taking “Creative License” in his film, just happens to be the example assigned for this discussion.

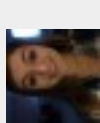
As for the rest of the film, I feel like there are other parts or scenes, where Burns took creative license. Take the note John Brown passed to a guard just before hanging in “The Meteor” for example. Not as

Compelling as the Ballou letter by any means, but a good, and simple example of the Creative License, Burns took in this film.

Could the note have been altered, and if so, would it change our accurate understanding of the Civil War? Could the note, and or the Ballou letter have been withheld from the film altogether? If so, would the film be as interesting? My point is here that, while I agree with you that the rest of the film was interesting like you say, the “Creative License” taken by Burns throughout the whole film sure helped.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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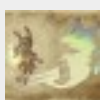


A Producer's Effect
by [Kayla Rogers](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 12:31 PM

I believe Ken Burns did what any producer would do. He ended the episode with a heart wrenching letter that left you with a feeling of both sadness and admiration. I believe the letter gives you a more accurate representation of how the soldiers felt while in the war. The man in the letter says how although he loved his wife, he felt he needed to protect what others had shed their blood for before him. This is similar to today’s soldiers who leave their loved ones to fight for their country. Infusing more drama is not really a bad thing as long as the drama isn’t taking away from the true message trying to be put across. Adding an emotional twist helps the viewer remember what they had just learned because it is easier to remember something if you have a connection with it. Although he left out the fact that the letter was not sent until after the war and that it is not the original copy, I would like to believe that the letter is still fairly similar to the original maybe just with different wording. Finding another letter similar to that one may have helped to paint a better picture of the soldiers thought process.

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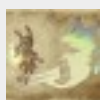
Re: A Producer's Effect
by [Ryan OToole](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 2:12 PM

To go off of what you said earlier, "Infusing more drama is not really a bad thing as long as the drama isn't taking away from the true message..." I would argue that not only is adding drama not detrimental to the piece, but it's even beneficial! This letter grabbed the hearts of the nation, they bought replicas of it, heck, they read it at funerals! But it wouldn't be so popular if it didn't have the historical background.

I feel like people don't love this letter for the person behind it. Ballou is essentially, just as anonymous to the general public as any common soldier in the civil war. No, people love this letter for what it stands for; The deep familial connection, the willingness to fight and die for something greater than yourself. It screams of emotion, of heroism, of sacrifice. People tend to latch on to stuff like that, and it's an excellent way to introduce and interest people to the real grit of the civil war.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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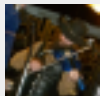


Creative liberties with history
by [Ryan OToole](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 8:23 PM

Judging largely by the articles that we've been reading, it's becoming increasingly clear that Ken Burns is more entertainer than historian. There's nothing particularly wrong with this, of course. *The Civil War* has, so far, struck a very unique and interesting balance between entertainment and education. While the way the Ballou letter was handled was a little misleading, considering that the video leaves out that the letter was never sent and indeed never read by it's intended recipient until after the war ended, but at the same time I feel like the letter wasn't included for historical reasons. Quite the opposite, actually. It summed up the more human side of the conflict. The letter itself has no significant impact on the civil war as an event at all, so leaving out certain details, while not admirable, isnt important to the greater picture. I think that Ken put this at the end of the film to give the reader some insight on the lives of those who fought in the war, what they believed in, why they fought in the war. Ballou used this last letter to embody himself as a person, but what he unintentionally did was embody the war itself.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Re: Creative liberties with history

by [Jake Beckwith](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 11:15 PM

While I agree that Burns is very much an entertainer, I don't feel like that really detracts from his sincerity. I gathered from the "Meet Ken Burns" film that he took history incredibly seriously. He definitely views his films as entertaining, but I feel like he also understands how important it is to use media to continue getting people interested and informed on certain subjects.

I also really liked your last statement. Even if they weren't his exact words, the letter from Ballou absolutely embodied the war itself. Knowing that his wife didn't receive the letter until after the war actually makes it an even sadder story. I imagine she already realized he wasn't coming home and had begun dealing with that, when out of nowhere comes a letter that brings it all back up again.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Creative liberties with history

by [Ashley Ramos](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 1:45 PM

You may be making too many assumptions here. Ken Burns is really good at creating that wonder about the Civil War. He has convinced you that this letter which has been rewritten and he then doctored to suit his 20th century film, is the embodiment of the Civil War.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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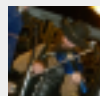
Re: Creative liberties with history

by [Ryan OToole](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 5:57 PM

Perhaps, but I might argue that whether the letter is rewritten or not is irrelevant, though I'm not positive if it is, considering that there's an entire library of these letters that he could have chosen from. The letter is purely for entertainment purposes, rather than educational ones. I don't see anything particularly wrong with this, honestly. It would be very, very disappointing to learn that the letter was fake, but if so, it doesn't really have an impact on the historical accuracy of the larger conflict, I feel.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Creative liberties with history

by [Jake Beckwith](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 12:06 AM

“Of the tens of thousands of letters written in the days leading up to the First Battle of Manassas, certainly none is more famous than the last letter of Major Sullivan Ballou. As poignant as it is prescient, Ballou's epistle captures not only the spirit of patriotic righteousness that led many men to the enlistment office, but it also drives home the stark reality that casualties of war were not confined to the battlefield. There were hundreds of thousands of soldiers who would not return to their families over the next four years, leaving behind a Sarah, or a Willie and Edgar who would "never know a father's love and care." Very few, however, had the foresight or the eloquence to leave behind a legacy as touching as Sullivan Ballou's to his grief-stricken family.”
(<http://www.nps.gov/resources/story.htm?id=253>)

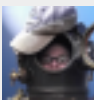
I pulled that from the website of the U.S. Park Service. I think this is what I was trying to say when I agreed that it embodied the Civil War, although perhaps I should reword that to say this letter embodies an aspect of the war that some of us may not have considered. Interestingly enough, they didn't mention the potential or assumed rewriting of the letter, so perhaps it is more legitimate than many of us are giving it credit for.

There was another passage on this website that makes the story even sadder.

“During the weeks and months that followed the battle, Confederate forces occupying the area of the battlefield desecrated the graves of many fallen Federals ... Supposing they had disinterred the body of Colonel John Slocum, commanding the Rhode Islanders during the battle, the

Confederates desecrated the body and dumped it in a ravine in the vicinity of the Sudley Methodist Church. Immediately following the Confederate evacuation from the Manassas area in March 1862, a contingent of Rhode Island officials, including Governor William Sprague, visited the Bull Run battlefield to exhume their fallen sons and return them to their native soil. Led to the defiled body, the party examined the remains and a tattered remnant of uniform insignia and discovered that the Confederates had mistakenly uncovered the body of Major Sullivan Ballou, not his commanding officer.”

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Re: Creative liberties with history
by Ashley Ramos – Friday, January 22, 2016, 12:55 PM

Wow. Great find. That is horrible. I'm going to check out that site. Good work!

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Creative License
by Tyler Moffett – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 11:22 PM

I believe that with history should be something about facts and not storytelling by people with a "creative license" as much as possible. However, each story must be communicated with words and pictures, so misinterpretations of the creators message are common or unintentional. Burns is sharing the story the best way in his eyes, and i doubt he is trying to insult Ballou and his family. Leaving out important quotes to his family that were in the letter i do not believe was the right thing to do. I think that Burns should of used the letter to exactly what it should wrote and not leave anything out.

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Re: Creative License
by Ashley Ramos – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 1:33 PM

Hi Tyler,

This letter is supposed to have been rewritten more than once. At this point does it seems to me that it's the sentiment of the letter that matters the most. As for the quotes to the family, they have been gone for a long time and I don't have any problem with Burns using the version of the letter that best suits his show.

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Family Hardship
by Tyler Moffett – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 8:13 PM

Hi Ashley,

After doing more research and reading some of the letter it is really clear how much Ballou loves his family. Writing my initial post i was not aware about how significant this letter was and how much attention it received. Many versions have been written and shared and Robert Young wrote 700 pages just about the letter. However my grandpa was a war veteran and i have heard so many stories from my grandma about her struggles through the war as well.

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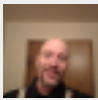
Re: Creative License
by Kayla Rogers – Friday, January 22, 2016, 8:59 PM

Although I agree facts are important, the vast majority of Americans today only know about the Civil War form what they learned in middle and high school. Burns making history more visually appealing, and adding a story line isn't necessarily a bad idea. Sure a few dates are off and the sequence may not be in order but

that is not what the public will remember. They will remember the things that brought them emotion or caught them by surprise. The letter is a great example of just that. Americans experiencing the hardship of that soldier and his wife helps not only bring appeal to history, but makes viewers want to watch more. The more they watch, us included, the more we will all learn about an important time in our nation's history.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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It could have been personal

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 5:27 PM

Tyler,

I can appreciate your position to a point. I agree that having as complete information as possible is the best way to know everything we can, in terms of history especially. But do we absolutely have to know every personal thing someone said, in order to have an accurate understanding of an event such as the Civil War?

Ballou may have considered his quotes to his family personal, or private. Maybe he wouldn't have wanted any of his letter to be widely known and shared by the entire country. I can look at it that way, and respect that.

If by Burns withholding certain words, quotes, or things Ballou wrote because they were deemed personal, or insignificant is "Creative License", then I'm fine.

The way I see it, Ballou wrote a letter to his wife only after all, and it could have been personal.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Big picture

by [Tyler Moffett](#) – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 7:49 PM

Hi Robert,

Thanks for the reply, i should of been a little bit more specific. I was talking more about just this letter from Ballou that was intended for his wife, being a sensitive letter and topic i think it should be original. On a big event like the civil way yes i agree, there is no way to completely tell history exactly how it was created without changing the story somehow. I didn't think of it in that sense of keeping it so personal that maybe that is why he kept it out. I was just thinking it was Burns being stubborn. Good point.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Unnecessary in my opinion

by [William Branstetter](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 11:52 PM

I guess if I had to pick a feeling describe Ken Burns use of this type of “creative license” in the Ballou letter, it would have to be content. I am definitely picking up more of an artistic vision rather than a historical account for the overall flow of the series. That is not to say that I haven’t already, and won’t continue to gain knowledge. As I said last week though, the film will be going through my motive filter as does most “information”.

Since I have now given my intention for how I will view this series I will say that I’m not a big fan of the use of “creative or artistic license” when it comes to documentaries, docuseries, or really anything non-fiction. I see it as a sign of the, directing of the viewers perspective, towards the director/producers vision. I don’t see how maintaining accurate chronology would have taken away from the viewers’ exposure or understanding, of how hard the Civil War was on wives and families. When these kinds of things go on in the making of documentaries about such topics as the Civil War, which is extremely well researched, and which in the case of this particular series, extremely well-funded. It makes me more spectacle of smaller and less documented parts of our history. I don’t like the idea of creative license becoming common culture in the retelling of important events, and I am a supporter of strict chronology.

The only reason I can see Ken Burns think it would be important to do something like this is posed as a question for the forum.” Is it necessary to infuse even more drama into coverage of the Civil War, an already compelling and emotional historical event?” I suppose the answer would depend on who you ask. Maybe it’s possible that infusing this drama toward the end of the first episode hooked a few extra viewers for the next week. Maybe that

is worth it to Ken Burns. I personally think that it is completely unnecessary. I think that when making a docuseries you have a unique opportunity to tell complete parts of the story. I think it would be much more effective at both storytelling and helping to solidify the memory of events to include these emotional and personal parts at the point in the story in which they occurred. I feel like things like this are often producer and rating related decisions.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Unnecessary in my opinion

by [Kayla Rogers](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 9:07 PM

I see where you come from when you say you want to watch a series for historical information, however, many people including myself do not want to watch just facts. If that were the case then I would take a class where I learned using power point. The audio effects and creative licensing done by Ken Burns is what makes the series desirable to watch. He did have a team of historians by his side as he made the film, and he did spend a great amount of effort to create the series. So although it may be artsy it is also intellectual to the best of this producer's abilities. Faults in information are just as much the historians' fault as is Burns. He never claimed to be a historian but when watching the documentary of him watching the film, you could tell he tried to use as much information available as he had. I am not saying facts are bad, and art is good. I am simply saying learning in an interesting and engaging way is much more appealing than dry facts any day.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Not Over Done

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 3:07 PM

I feel like the “creative License” taken by Ken burns in *The Civil War*, adds just enough drama to suck in the audience without over doing it, for a good example, take the scene “Honorable Manhood”.

How I see it, in this scene Burns helps stir up the emotion and interest with music, and a letter. With photo’s Burns helps the audience to visualize the times, the war itself, and its effect on people. It’s very relatable for the viewer, at least for me it was.

I would agree that the Civil War is a very compelling and emotional historical event. I wouldn’t add anymore drama than Ken Burns already has so far from what I’ve seen in the film *The Civil War*, but I wouldn’t take any away either.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Not Over Done

by [Ryan OToole](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 11:34 PM

Well put. I can definitely see how some people might feel emotionally manipulated by the letter, but at the same time television programs by their very nature are meant to be entertaining. Adding some drama to a documentary shouldn't be a bad thing, so long as it's relevant and doesn't detract from the educational aspect of the film, which I feel was tastefully done here.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Ballou's letter

by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 8:51 PM

The reading of Major Ballou’s letter was the most dramatic scene of the first episode. This is why I do not think the fact the letter did not follow the chronology of the film, was a detriment to the film's credibility. The end of episode one made you immediately want to watch the next chapter. It did surprise me that his wife received the letter long after his death. Although the letter was emotionally touching, I find it somewhat crazy that someone could write a book over 700 pages on the letter.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Ballou's letter

by [Ryan OToole](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 1:40 PM

Good point. I definitely feel like the letter was intentionally pulled out of chronological order purposefully, due to its emotional significance. I am curious why they never mentioned that his wife read it much later. Did they think that it would take away from the emotion of the letter? Perhaps they felt that it was simply unimportant?

I'm curious which book you're referring to, though. I don't think you're referring to *Behind the Lines*, but if you are I don't think that that's all about the one letter.

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

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Re: Ballou's letter

by [Ryan OToole](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 1:48 PM

Nevermind, looked over the article again. Don't know how I forgot about Robert Young's book! A brief google search didnt really turn up anything about the book, which is weird since it was published in 2006.

If I had to guess, I would think that the book is sort of like a biography, so it wouldn't be entirely about the letter itself, but his life before and during the war (It is titled *Sullivan Ballou's life*, after all.) Still, even considering that 700 pages is pretty insane. How much information could we have possibly been able to dig up on one union soldier? Either Robert Young's book is a credit to the historian community and their ability to unearth the past, or he is a veeeeeeeerrrrryyyyy slooooooowwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwwrrrrriiittttteerrrr.

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

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Re: Ballou's letter

by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 7:37 PM

Thank you for doing some extra research for me! I knew in the back of my mind it would have been ridiculous to write a whole book off of one letter. I should have know too googled the book to get some more information.

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

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Washington Post article

by [Robert Johnson](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 6:44 PM

To sum it up briefly, if anything, the Washington Post article actually helps me to appreciate Burns “Creative License” in his award winning film *The Civil War*, even more.

I do not believe the “Creative License” taken by Burns has an effect on my accurate understanding of the Civil War at all. But it sure does make the film a lot more interesting, all of it. As I’m sure Burns intended, it sucked me right in.

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

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Re: Washington Post article

by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 7:49 PM

Robert,

I agree. The effectiveness of the emotional hook over weighed the slight inaccuracy of the date. The reading of Ballou’s letter did not negatively effect my understanding of the civil war, rather, made me excited to go forth and learn more.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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The DRAMA

by [Sebastian Warren](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 8:12 PM

Although the civil war is a very dramatic topic, I believe that the use of the letter is still very appropriate. I only say this because of how amazingly the letter was written. In my mind I could picture the scene of his wife reading the letter after he had been killed. The historical inaccuracy of the date was not enough to undercut the emotional hook this letter added. The letter did only improved my understanding of the civil war by adding another prospective.

Also, after reading the washington post article, I found it extremely sad to hear that the voice actor who read the letter had taken his own life after his wife lost the battle with cancer.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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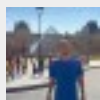
Re: The DRAMA

by [Tyler Moffett](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 10:43 PM

Well said Sebastian, i think this letter does a great job in reminding people the hardships on all fronts including the women and children back home. It is not something must people talk about because it gets washed over with all the racism and the battles that took place. Burns grew lots of attachment to this letter and he felt including it in his film would add some benefit.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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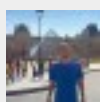
After Reading New Information

by [Tyler Moffett](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 9:55 PM

After reading more information about Ken Burns and the Ballou letter from the washington post website my stance has changed from the original discussion. At first i was quick to assume Ken Burns was in the wrong for portraying the letter in his own views. Now, after reading the article and see how Ken Burns was reading this letter to his family and became attached to the letter it changed my views. Lots of people had forgotten about this letter and he brought it back into the spotlight by putting it in his civil war documentary. Burns liked the letter and felt like it would add some emotion and realization to his civil war series. It is not just the men fighting this war it was the whole country, even the women and children at home.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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A Very Bloody War

by [Tyler Moffett](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 11:05 PM

The title A Very Bloody War is a great title for this episode and even the Civil war. Growing up in school i learned a lot about racism and the effect it had on the war. I also learned a lot about the battles and the casualties lost in the major battles such as Shiloh. After watching this episode two things stuck out at me, first was the letter from Ballou and realizing how hard it must of been for the families back home. Another thing was how much hate there was between the Union and the Confederate, especially the Confederates. To see that the Confederates dug up the grave of Ballou and beheaded him is really sickening. We were all part of the same country and should be on the same side however they were huge rivals who wanted to kill each other.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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