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Creative License

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

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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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Major Sullivan's Letter

by [Mariah Marelli](#) – Tuesday, January 19, 2016, 10:56 AM

How do you feel about Ken Burns taking this sort of "creative license" in this specific case of Union Major Sullivan Ballou and his letter?

I think that Ken Burns was smart in the way he presented Major Sullivan’s letter to the audience. By placing it at the end of the episode it gives the audience a sense of sadness at the lives lost during the Civil War. I personally imagined his wife reading the letter and crying over her fallen husband. This image along with his powerful words and descriptive language were very moving to me. To me that was the purpose of the letter, it was supposed to give the audience a deeper understanding of the losses during battle. The war wasn’t just North versus South. It tore families apart and changed the lives of all those involved forever. If Ken burns had included the fact that Sullivan's wife hadn’t received the letter until after the war was over it wouldn’t have had the same effect on the audience. Not mentioning these facts was the right call if his goal was to evoke emotions from his audience

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

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Adding Drama to the Civil War

by [Mariah Marelli](#) – Tuesday, January 19, 2016, 11:09 AM

it necessary to infuse even more drama into coverage of the Civil War, an already compelling and emotional historical event?

I don't think it necessary to infuse more drama into the Civil War. It is was the most dramatic and bloody war the America had ever experienced at that time. Over 600,000 Americans died fighting in the war. The country was torn apart by conflict. Families were divided as some went to fight for the Confederacy and others for the Union. The Civil War brought the word "war" to another level. It was the first "modern" war that America had experienced. New weapons and technology were advancing warfare while tactics were still old, resulting in many casualties. With that being said none of us have experienced that war. I think it is difficult to capture something that horrific and detrimental on film. So, in order for the audience to grasp the level of impact it had on the country Ken Burns adds drama to the film. He adds little touches such as; pictures of wounded soldiers, quotes from people from the war, and sad music in order to help the audience understand the war. While I don't think it is necessary it certainly adds character and makes the film more entertaining.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Adding Drama to the Civil War
by *Katelyn Rasmussen* – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 9:45 PM

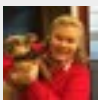
Mariah,

I enjoyed how you added in all of your own specific detail about the war, deaths, families being separated and divided and so on. I did originally view this letter as and such as necessary added drama but looking at things from a more up front perspective I do see the side about it being too dramatic and the war already being dramatic enough with the original detail.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Entertaining
by *Taralee O'Connor* – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 10:00 PM

Mariah,

I agree Burns creates an entertaining and engaging series. His description/portrayal of the new weapons that were developed at this time without having the knowledge on successful tactics needed for them to be effective was spot on. This added another layer to this war I had not thought about previously.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Affect on Chronology
by *Ryan Ritchie* – Tuesday, January 19, 2016, 8:57 PM

I see this addition to events not as a compromise to the overall accuracy of the reports of the Civil War. As far as Ken Burns choosing to do this I think that shows some insight to his style and what he feels is acceptable.I prefer opinions and other things added for theatrical reasons be left out of material used for education and let that be used in entertainment. I think just displaying the Civil War for what it was with actual recorded events could invoke the same emotion as does "adding" extras. That being said, who is to say that a situation like what was described didn't happen? I think that could be the justification in this case?

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Affect on Chronology
by *Thomas Brokaw* – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 5:53 PM

I believe Ken Burns found an interesting middle ground between an education film and an entertainment film. Some of history involves dates and events while other parts of history can be illustrated in personal stories. Dates and events should be historically accurate but personal stories not so much. Burns mixes dates and events with personal stories from letters and diaries of real people with real names for a more visceral

historic experience.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Visceral experience

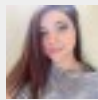
by [Taralee O'Connor](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 3:06 PM

Thomas,

I do agree the way Burns uses stories and pictures does make watching the series " a more visceral experience". I found the section titled Politics (9:42) to be very emotional. With all the fighting and conflict our country was going through, to have a Secretary of War so corrupt "the only thing he wouldn't steal was a red-hot stove" illustrated, for me, how challenging it was just to have honest and competent men around Lincoln during this time.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Unnecessary yet entertaining

by [Abigail Tatum](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 6:38 PM

I would have liked everything to be in chronological order instead of putting the letter that Major Sullivan Ballou wrote to his wife before his death in the Bull Run. To me, placing things in order helps me understand when things happen and how it advances to the next phase or conflict. Hearing about the Bull Run earlier in the episode, and then hearing of it again at the end threw me off because I wasn't expecting more information on a topic already covered. Extra drama is not necessary in a film about the Civil war, but it is interesting. Giving the viewers more information that is more personable might catch our attention and help people remember more about the topic. I personally enjoy the extra information, helps me realize these people were human also, not just names from the past.

The new information has me believing creative licenses can harm or help you. It can help with captivating the audience, but it can also confuse the audience due to placement. Plugging in the letter back to when they spoke about the Bull Run would have been a better placement since we were on the topic instead of backtracking later on in the film. I think that the extra information is interesting and may grab peoples attention just like I did before I read the second article, also, switching it up from dates, names, and battles, a good story is always nice to hear.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Unnecessary yet entertaining

by [Alexander Nonte-Clark](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 4:18 PM

I like the title of your post because it basically describes my own feeling on the use of Ballou's letter in the segment. I believe it doesn't alter anything major in what we are learning about in this class, but it is entertaining to hear because it gives us insight to a real person's life who fought in this war, and died. I also had an issue with the order of events in the segment, just because it felt random to go backwards at the end. To be honest, I hadn't even caught that my first time through the video, but once someone had made it obvious to me, it didn't suit well. I think the added drama from this letter was not crucial, but it help humanize the people we are learning about.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Affects of Creativity

by [Alexander Nonte-Clark](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 7:32 PM

I think that Ken Burns' decision to add in Ballou's letter at the end of the episode left it with a feeling of sadness for the death of Ballou and it makes you remember that these men in this war were husbands, with families and lives aside from the war, fighting for what they believed in. However, adding this in at the end of the episode also messes with the timeline of when it was written, which was in July of 1861 I believe. I personally like things to remain in chronological order, because it is helpful in my learning of events of the past. I thought it was

strange to have it tucked in at the end when they were just talking about the end of 1861, but I do like the affect that it had in humanizing the soldiers. Additional drama isn't really necessary in this subject, but it is usually pretty affective in captivating people.

I think that with this information, it can be said that creative licenses can either hinder, or help to understand some events of history. I think it really matters in how you decide to use these pieces of information, and where you decide to place them in your work. I would have enjoyed correct placement of the topic, but I find that it is also a very powerful ending to a first episode.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3

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Re: Affects of Creativity
by [Ryan Ritchie](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 5:04 PM

I agree that putting this out of order was not helpful. I like the part you wrote about how it makes you think about how these soldiers and that they were fighting for something more than themselves. The emotion you feel during that part is defiantly affected by the way the scene is presented. I don't think it being out of order has too much affect on the emotion side as it does the credibility. In this case I think this helps some people connect with the people from this time and what they were going through.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re: Affects of Creativity
by [Abigail Tatum](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 11:32 PM

So if Ken Burn's was to put Ballou's letter in the middle of the film where the topic was brought up instead of at the end that you would be more fond of creative license? I think Ken Burn's wanted this to stick in your mind so he decided to add it to the end of the film, if he added it where it would chronology make sense it wouldn't stick as well, possibly . I agree with the additional drama, it is very captivating, maybe not necessary though.

Sum of ratings: (1)

0

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Possibly
by [Ryan Ritchie](#) – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 10:24 PM

I am fond of creative license in general, although in educational tools I prefer it being left to a minimum. I like to learn and feel the emotion of the facts and let myself find which way I want to feel rather than having an emotion or feeling presented as more appealing than another. Another post talked about how Ken Burns did a great job keeping the film a mixture of entertainment and education. When this is done you probably find things like this that happen in order to keep people engaged.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1

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Re: Affects of Creativity
by [Mariah Marelli](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 6:01 PM

I like the way you voiced your opinions. I agree with you that adding the letter at the end humanized the soldiers who died in the war. Personally it made me see them as real people, not just people you read about. I don't know if that makes sense, it made you be able to picture the soldiers as people with lives outside the war. I also understand your point about liking things in chronological order. I was very confused when I got to the end of the episode. I had trouble understanding where it fit into the episode to be honest.

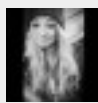
Although I think it was more effective at the end of the episode. It showed Ken's style and it seemed to make the episode work. I think it was effective to end the episode on an educational, but sentimental note.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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The Relatability of "Honorable Men"



by [Alexis Adair](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 8:11 PM

I think that this was an interesting take from Ken Burns. I liked the scene of “honorable men” because it brought someone to life, not to say that the rest of the film did not do this but it can be easier to identify with a story of dramatic loss. For me the scene played a reflective role. The film walks through the events that occurred, and in a way it can be seen as just stating facts. We look at all these facts and then end on this scene of someone who left his life to fight in this war, giving the feeling of the power and sacrifice that the Civil War had. Giving these facts and numbers a life.This event does not need the added drama infused with it because it is such a very important and emotional part of our history, but when we point out a certain perspective and the drama that came with it, it becomes easier to relate too.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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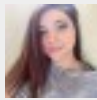


Re: The Relatability of "Honorable Men"
by [Alexander Nonte-Clark](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 11:59 AM

I like how you talk about how this scene and letter bring Ballou to life. I also believe that this is true and that it makes it relatable, like these weren't machines sent into combat. They were everyday people such as you or I who held strong beliefs in their country and government and would see death in order to preserve their values. I also don't think that additional drama is necessary in the event of the civil war, but it provides extra perspective, and more to think about as you watch.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Relatability of "Honorable Men"
by [Abigail Tatum](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 11:42 PM

Relating might be a big role in why Ken Burn's decided to add the extra drama in this. Hoping to engage the audience just a little bit more. I think the film would have been just as strong without the added drama because it showed the emotions throughout the episode by stating facts, numbers, and battles, but by adding in the letter Ballou wrote to his wife it recapped the emotions felt at the time of war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: The Relatability of "Honorable Men"
by [Mariah Marelli](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 6:13 PM

I really liked how you put this. Before hearing that letter and hearing about that man I just thought of them as random people. This made me feel more connected to him. It is easy to read about a war and think how tragic it is, its different to actually hear about someone's life. It adds a face to the people who died in the war. It makes you realize that they weren't just soldiers. They were husbands, sons, brothers and friends. They were people who left their lives behind to fight for their country. They died fighting for what they believed in. The end of the episode really helped me understand the sacrifice that these soldiers and their families made during one of the bloodiest wars in this country's history.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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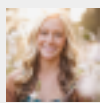
Re: The Relatability of "Honorable Men"
by [Ryan Ritchie](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 9:43 PM

The line you said about it being an, "interesting take" from Ken Burns made me think. I don't think he would have done this if he felt like it could derail the entire train of thought. I think he did this with the viewers in mind. Just a nice little line that made me think. Thanks for that.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Sullivan Ballou Letter
by [Katelyn Rasmussen](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 8:14 PM



With this letter having a few version or “copies” people may never know the exact true words of it but it is clear the words Union Major Ballou was wanting to leave for his wife. I believe that Ken Burns was right to take this sort of “creative license” when writing and talking about this letter because when it comes to this sort of evidence from the civil war it is tough to find exact words in their truest form. For me this personally does not construe my accurate understanding of the civil war. Ken Burns clearly did everything he could and put his all into all of these video’s, which shows that he searched for evidence as accurate as he could find and I believe he was confident in what he produced. Adding in such dramatic effects I think really helps people understand that it was more than just the fighting. It affected so much more and so many more than those just at war and I believe it is good to have those “dramatic” reminders.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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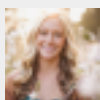
Re: Sullivan Ballou Letter

by [Ryan Ritchie](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 5:08 PM

I had a similar thought about the "true" version of the letter. I feel the same about it having little effect on the understanding of the Civil War. I think this provides an example of what many casualties of the war felt and experienced. It may not be word for word to what the letter was, but combined with the thousands of other letters written I feel it gives a great picture of emotions felt

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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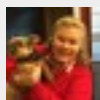
Re: Sullivan Ballou Letter

by [Katelyn Rasmussen](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 10:12 PM

In regards of the false chronology thats taken place in Ken Burn's videos I think that his doing so just to make his dramatic affects fit in better he should, no matter what, stick to the original chronology of the civil war and the sad, gory, and ugly details that come with it. There is no way to truly understand and learn correctly if major details are told in a wrong order.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Pulling heartstrings

by [Taralee O'Connor](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 10:09 PM

I do consider the portrayal of Maj. Sullivan Ballou’s letter to be misleading to the viewer. At the time of the 1st Battle of Bull Run, Maj. Sullivan’s wife, Sarah, had not yet read the letter since it was not sent to her until after the war. The images Burns shows in his Civil War series of the couples, did lead me to believe his wife had the letter shortly after the battle. I could picture her reading it over and over waiting for word of her husband’s fate. The letter is certainly a declaration of his love for her. Ballou expresses his need to “write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I am no more”. Now that I know the letter was not sent by Ballou himself immediately after writing the letter, that line makes more sense to me now. The despair soldiers and their families must have felt, I think is obvious to us all. Burns didn't need to try so hard to pull at our heartstrings

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Pulling heartstrings

by [Katelyn Rasmussen](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 9:42 PM

Taralee,

I completely agree that the fact Ken didn't initially start incorporate that the letter was delivered later to his wife and that can change your idea of this a bit. However, I am beginning to think that it can also affect the dramatic feel of this specific letter because of how he changed up when and how it was delivered. I think he changed this because he was wanting to add to the drama in it and make it very clear to viewers the anticipation the spouses of those in the war felt.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Pulling heartstrings

by Alexander Nonte-Clark – Friday, January 22, 2016, 12:10 PM

While I believe omitting the letter would not change any of the knowledge that we receive from this segment, I also believe that it makes everything seem a bit more real. It gives you the sense of who these men were outside of being soldiers in battles. It makes you realize that they had lives like anyone else, with families and passions of their own. I enjoyed the insight, and I believe this tugging of the heartstrings was a fine addition, although misplaced.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Pulling heartstrings

by Ryan Ritchie – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 10:32 PM

I agree with you. It makes a connection between the people watching the film and the people who are depicted in the events we watch. Not sure it changed my knowledge like you said. I realize these were real people, but when I think of this and how hard that would be it does make it that much more real. Good post

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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Re: Creative License Justifiable

by Thomas Brokaw – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 11:05 PM

The letter written by Major Sullivan Ballou to his wife just before he was killed at First Bull Run struck Ken Burns in a deeply emotion way. The chronology notwithstanding, the drama and imagery that went with the story had to be strategically introduced into his version of the Civil War in such a way as to do it proper justice.

Chronology is important when certain events, and their sequential order, influence subsequent events. War movies, for example, may or may not have to be placed carefully in a timeline of whatever war they were fighting. D-Day, the Battle of Midway, the Attack on Pearl Harbor, would all be movies that must be told with respect given to the chronology of events. Full Metal Jacket, MASH, the Big Red One, are movies in which their stories could be told without particular adherence to specific war dates and events, other than whatever war they were fighting.

Ken Burns used music, voice and imagery to create audience emotion and empathy for the Americans who were plucked from their lives and their futures in the hands of the war. He was trying to appeal to as many viewers as he could reach. Creative license to improve the empathetic audience response seems justifiable.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) 3

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Re: Creative License Justifiable

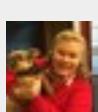
by Katelyn Rasmussen – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 10:04 PM

Thomas,

I really like how you introduced the idea how chronology and when you believe it becomes mandatory or more important for a certain story being told. Most definitely when it comes to the civil war chronology should be most stressed. However, figuring out when to add these certain emotional touches can be tricky when figuring where to include them. I believe that Ken Burns did a fine job in how he told this specific episode between chronology and adding the details about the Ballou note. Though dramatic, it included such detail you are distracted from thinking about when all you are hearing and seeing is guns firing and men falling.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) 1

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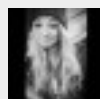
by [Taralee O'Connor](#) - Thursday, January 21, 2016, 7:46 PM

I was a bit shocked to discover the song “Ashokan Farewell” used by Burns was not a Civil War Era song. The song was composed in 1982 to express sadness for the ending of an annual music and dance camp. It is a beautiful song but I feel that it would have been better to use a song from this time in history. This song being played at such an emotional sense seemed a bit contrived to me.

The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, 25 Sept. 2015. Web. 21 Jan. 2016.
<<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/09/ashokan-farewell-how-a-20th-century-melody-became-an-anthem-for-the-19th/407263/>>.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Jay Unjar's "Ashokan Farewell"

by [Alexis Adair](#) - Friday, January 22, 2016, 1:59 PM

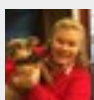
Taralee,

I found this to be an interesting fact. I did not realize that this song was not of that time in history, although it would make sense to pull music from the era that the series was made. I do see your point that pulling music from the actual time in history might just make it that much better. However, I think Ken Burns may have been going for the emotion that came with this song. Jay Unjar wrote " I was feeling a great sense of loss and longing for the music, the dancing and the community of people that had developed at Ashokan that summer." Which, I believe he did a beautiful job of expressing with this song. So even though pulling a song from that point in history would have made it historically more intreging, I think the pain and loss of "Ashokan Farewell" did a very good job representing what the film presented.

<http://jayandmolly.com/ashokan-farewell/ashokan-farewell-faq/>

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Re: Jay Unjar's "Ashokan Farewell" and Burns

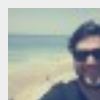
by [Taralee O'Connor](#) - Sunday, January 24, 2016, 3:03 PM

Alexis,

So True! The sentiments Unjar expresses does, in fact, fit nicely. The song is definitely beautifully written. Alone the song makes me feel blue and melancholy but added to the film, I was a wreck! Burns knows how to lead a viewer to a particular emotion.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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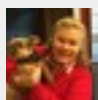
Re: An 80's song

by [Ryan Ritchie](#) - Sunday, January 24, 2016, 9:47 PM

Are you a musician? I only ask because I was curious if other music made you feel emotion as well, or if you just found this specific incident contriving.

Sum of ratings: (1)

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Holding my position

by [Taralee O'Connor](#) - Thursday, January 21, 2016, 8:14 PM

Sadness and tragedy heaped on more sadness and tragedy. The information given in “Two Decades Later” leaves

me sadder than the original Honorable Manhood chapter in the first episode. I hope I don't appear to be ghoulish. However, the description of Major Ballou's grave being desecrated... and by mistake was so heartbreaking and upsetting to me. I think Burns missed an opportunity to delve deeper into the sadness, misery and the literal loss of humanity here. I still feel there was room to make the film more factual and not just try to tug on the emotions of the viewer.

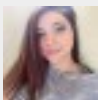
SOURCE

Civil War soldier's heartbreaking farewell letter was written before death at Bull Run.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/civil-war-soldiers-heartbreaking-farewell-letter-was-written-before-death-at-bull-run/2011/07/11/gIQAFe3MQI_story.html

Sum of ratings: 3 (1)

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Re: Holding my position

by [Abigail Tatum](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 11:28 PM

I like that I wasn't the only one torn apart with this episode, but explaining the cruelty of this war by details of Ballou's body being dug up and the beating it took was an important fact to help the viewers understand how brutal and ugly this war really was. Without that extra emotional layer Burn's added, I wouldn't have connected with the facts he was stating as well. I think Ken Burn was trying to allow our emotions to feel what the people in that era felt, too.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Re: Holding my position

by [Ryan Ritchie](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 9:51 PM

I agree with the depiction of war being successfully displayed for the brutality it truly is. There is a lot of ugliness that we sometimes forget.

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Re: Holding my position

by [Katelyn Rasmussen](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 10:07 PM

I fall into thinking the same idea about the gruesomeness and the gory detail. It shows the ugliest of what the wars were and what happened during them in the truest and most honest way without holding back detail for maybe it might tell someone too much about what really happened during our civil war.

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