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Creative License

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

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IMPORTANT – SUBJECT LINES

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It did not end the war

by [Miguel Perez](#) – Tuesday, January 19, 2016, 11:33 AM

In almost any genre of TV shows or movies, whether it be horror, comedy, or a mystery thriller, it seems that there is always an underlying love story. Maybe directors think that love will make the film feel more real? Even if the film is a blood-and-gore slasher film.

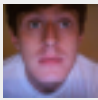
Ken Burns is a director who knows how powerful emotions can be. With Ken Burns taking this type of “creative license”, I do not think anything was gained by using Major Sullivan Ballous’ letter. I also do not think anything was lost by way of Mr. Burns altering the chronology of this letter. After all the purpose of episode 1 “the Cause” was not the love story between Major Sullivan and his wife. I feel as if he used this letter as a way to speak to the emotions of the viewer, it is important to understand all emotions that ran through the Civil War; the fear of death, anger, confusion, and the loss of a loved one. It is necessary to use all the dramas of the Civil War to greater to understand everything that happened.

While this letter does throw of the chronology of the war, it does not damage our understanding, because this letter had no way of affecting the beginning or end of the Civil War.

Miguel

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Disagree

by [Timothy Eckley](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 12:09 PM

This video series by Ken Burns is not a horror, comedy or mystery thriller. It is a nonfiction documentary series that is meant to provide us with a history of the civil war. There should not be room for interpretation in a historical documentary. It's fine if he used this letter to portray the dramas of the civil war, but for him to manipulate how events occurred and intentionally provide us with misinformation in order to "speak to the

emotions of the viewer" then it means he is likely to do this throughout the series.

This specific instance, where the letter likely had no affect on the cause or outcome of the war, seems harmless to the story. However, I do think it's important to notice that this could be a tendency within the work of Ken Burns, a strategy of his when making film if you will. Which makes me feel like I have to double check every date or event in the films just to make sure it's valid. It instills doubt about the integrity of the films and shouldn't be acceptable in works of historical nonfiction.

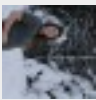
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Re: It did not end the war
by [Sara Baker](#) – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 3:38 PM

While I do agree that it had little overall historical value (the letter that is) I disagree that it didn't "matter." While it is true that romance is often used as a "hook" or "draw" to entice a more varied audience to attend different movie I don't believe that was the intent. In any war it is easy to loose sight of the fact that men who bleed and die on the battlefield are just as human, just as loved or unloved as every other man has the luck or misfortune to be. The letter gave us a clear picture of the humanity of the people who fought on the front lines, and who died there as well. And while you were right in the letter not affecting the Civil War, you left out that it was this kind of connection that played such a crucial role in leading and maneuvering the war efforts (on both sides) outside the battle field. Do you think letters, even of the romantic nature, weren't used to pass information or to convince men and women into certain actions? Again, I know that *this* letter wasn't that important in the grand scheme of things, but I felt that it was said in a way that implied *all* letters of such nature lacked importance. Good thoughts though, and I look forward to hearing more from you on the matter.

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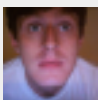
Imagination
by [Carissa Kernutt](#) – Tuesday, January 19, 2016, 9:17 PM

Ken Burn's probably shouldn't have tweaked the history Union Major Sullivan Ballou's letter and how his wife felt. Personally, I cannot stand when someone tries to change the history behind our country.

This doesn't change my knowledge of this subject and the understanding of the war. It only makes me eerie of why we are watching Ken Burns films at this point.

I do however understand that he is trying to get the viewer to feel, as I am in a military relationship myself. Everyone loves watching or even hearing about drama, so he is drawing in viewers. I do not believe he should have added anything to a historical event, because then it would not be called history.

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I appreciate objectivity
by [Timothy Eckley](#) – Thursday, January 21, 2016, 12:22 PM

I absolutely agree that events shouldn't have been tweaked or moved around in a documentary. Documentaries are nonfiction and I would prefer an objective historical representation when learning about our history. It troubles me that I am watching this film as a main method of learning about the civil war, when there are known flaws and fabrications within the film. It genuinely makes me lose confidence in the series as a whole. Even if this event wasn't significant enough to make a huge difference, it makes me wonder what other events Burns' took the liberty of applying his creativity to, in turn, misrepresenting the whole picture.

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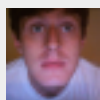
Re: Imagination
by [Jessica Mckee](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 9:29 PM

I do not think that he was purposefully trying to throw off the accuracy of the documentary, and used this

only as a way to inspire us to relate to what these people were going through. I think it was a good way to make us see these soldiers as real people instead of just numbers and statistics that we look back on.

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Disappointed

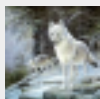
by [Timothy Eckley](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 4:52 AM

When learning about historical events, I prefer that the information is presented as accurately as possible. I feel that this is definitely not as accurate of a portrayal of these historical events as it could be. There is no room for creativity and manipulation when you are presenting historical facts and omitting this information makes me lose a lot of confidence in the remainder of the series. Using music, images and commentary to enhance the story, while leaving out key facts, is immoral in my opinion. I do not see how Ken Burns could be identified as a historian if this is common practice in his work.

The omittance of key facts in our history is already ubiquitous throughout our education system. Certain pieces of important events are frequently left out and enabling this is bad for education. This may sound extreme, but it allows censorship of events in our history and sets a precedent for a very slippery slope. I'm very disappointed with this new information and it genuinely makes me lose confidence in the validity of the series as a whole. The fact that certain aspects of the Civil War were left out can be argued that it allows the series to be more focused and streamlined. However, the manipulation of the occurrence of certain events appears to be deceitful and dishonest.

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Re: Disappointed

by [Edith Ortega](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 8:33 PM

I'm not disappointed. Yes it is a sad fact of life, that historical events are sometimes edit to present a more favorable view on certain people or subjects. But here is a bit of irony from a high school memory my junior year.

The high school I attend at that time, had two exchange student from Russia. Both of them (one girl, one boy) said that in Russia, it is Russia who won the war against America. Not the other way around.

So should we punish them (Russia) for blatantly lying about the outcome of WWII?Clearly, they were deceitful to and lied to their fellow Russians? Or maybe we should censor every person who had anything to due with all of America's historical events past and present?

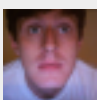
While not everyone tells the same story in the same way and style, what is more important....facts (real or imagined) or just enough information to make people want to seek the truth of what they read, see or hear?

I was raised with a "only believe half of what you read and none of what you see." Still haven't figured that one out to this day.

Edie O!

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Re: Disappointed

by [Timothy Eckley](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 4:58 PM

I don't think Ken Burns needs to be punished in anyway. He didn't do anything illegal as far as I know. However, a documentary is not a work of fiction. If he's altering the story simply to get more viewers, that is immoral. It also shows his willingness to misconstrue key facts or events in order to make the story more appealing. Censorship is not a valid answer either. I didn't propose punishment or censorship and I believe censorship creates more problems than it solves.

I'm not going to get into the WWII argument, it's debatable whether or not they are "lying." As far as I know, the Soviet Union was one of our allies, not enemies but I'm sure that's debatable as well. However, truth is not debatable. Whether something is true or not is not up for debate. Truth is that which

corresponds with reality. Facts are not imagined, facts are facts. People are free to take a relativist approach to finding truth, however this can't fully lead you to the facts.

Stories evolve over time, this is something that tends to happen. It doesn't mean it shouldn't be a disappointment to find out a piece of work we are supposed to be learning from has been proven to provide falsifications about the history of the event we're studying. It should be pointed out that it sets a precedent that this is fine to be doing when presenting historical works of nonfiction to an entire country.

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Ken Burns' intentions

by [Tyler Peckham](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 12:54 PM

I believe Ken Burns’ intentions of trying to convey the emotional hardships of the men and women involved in the civil war were present but he left out some important aspects pertaining to the letter. I feel Burns should have mentioned that the letter had not reached Union Major Sullivan Ballou’s wife. Along with the fact that the original letter had been lost with only duplicates to refer to. The translation between the original and the duplicates could have been altered and less reliable. Burns tries to push the emotional part of the civil war to the max. He’s less focused on the factual basis but rather wants to express the somber times of the civil war.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Uncertain about the effects of creative liberties in history

by [Andrea Douglass](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 1:49 PM

Using creative liberties as Burns has done is a questionable move. On one hand, his video series is meant to be a source of entertainment for the general public, providing a brief overview of a very complex war. That being said, it is understandable that he would draw on the powers of empathy to hook viewers and keep their interest. Yes, the war without fabrication is very compelling and emotional, but modern day citizens (while they can *sympathize*) can't necessarily *empathize* with a lot of what happened throughout its duration. Innumerable people among a wide spectrum of ages have loved and lost, and have very personal connections with the feelings directly and quite poetically expressed in Ballou's letter. While Burns did rub some historians the wrong way (whose upsets are justified) , artistically it was a good move to put the narration where Burns did. If there were any emotionally driven people watching the episode who were considering discontinuing the series, that tear-jerking bit at the end almost certainly kept some viewers clinging on.

As an artistic piece, kudos. As a historical piece, weak. It is openly known, though, that Burns himself is NOT a historian; his work should be looked at objectively and the inconsistencies taken with a grain of salt.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Creative License

by [Edith Ortega](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 4:10 PM

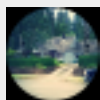
Kevin Burns in my opinion, chose the style of “creative license” in the way one might want to convey, yet soften, (especially for young audiences of students) the overall helplessness that often invades one’s mind, during a time of crisis. As in the case of Union Major Ballou, his letter being used at the end of the episode, to me, conveyed the uncertainty felt not only by Major Ballou but of his wife also. Would this be his last letter to his wife? Would it be delivered before the war is over for him and his men? How would his wife come to see this letter from him once he was dead? Would it become a treasured artifact that she could read over and over again, feeling as if she could hear his voice as he writes it to her?

This scene, like the many others of its nature, allows me to wonder what and how would I feel, if I had been the wife of Major Ballou. Or any soldier on either side of the war. Though accuracy of events are often a casualty of omission, or too many narrators telling the same story each a different way and with different words, it still for the most part, conveys a wish to find out if there isn’t perhaps more to the story. Hence the need seek more information about the event, proves that Kevin Burns did knowing place the scene at the end of the episode, knowing, most if not all of us watching would tune in for the rest of the story and therefore as a teacher, he has

taught the value of a well versed story and what it can accomplish.

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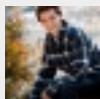
Was Ken Burns in the right?

by [Caitlyn Vermillion](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 5:49 PM

While reading the articles about Ken Burns and the posts from fellow classmates I have ascertained that a lot of people in the history community are not particularly happy with the lack of truth of some of the historical stories in his film series *The Civil War*. So when it comes to the question of whether Burns overstepped when he took "creative license" in the case of Union Major Sullivan Ballou in his series, my answer is that he did nothing wrong. I feel that it is important to remember that this series was meant to get people interested in the Civil War and history and to get people interested in a story you sometimes exaggerate. This series was not meant to be an exact representation of the Civil War.

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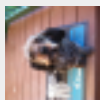
Re: Was Ken Burns in the right?

by [Tyler Peckham](#) – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 12:02 PM

I haven’t looked at it from the point of view that the series was meant to engage most Americans in the Civil War. When doing so you realize Ken Burns is doing his part in re–telling the story. I know I seem to lose interest in something I cant connect with so when Burns stretches the truth and adds that level of emotion, people become more engaged and connected to the series. I could see how he wanted to keep his viewers watching while adding some flare in the process, you make a good point.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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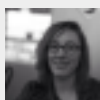
Re: Was Ken Burns in the right?

by [Molly Townley](#) – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 12:38 PM

I agree with your conclusion, but it is still a sad truth. Yes, Burn's goal was to spike our country's interest in the war, but in the end did that truly get more people to watch his documentary? Maybe, but my guess is not many more. If people weren't interested before the letter it is unlikely they watched the rest of the series after the letter.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Was Ken Burns in the right?

by [Sara Baker](#) – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 3:48 PM

I agree, and want to point out that no matter what some people may think, or believe, history is written by the victors, so in reply to some peoples outrage at the "inaccuracies" I would like to point out that much of events surrounding history are subjective and can be looked at from many points of view. While their are some "definite" things we know of the past, I find that scholars and educators even argue over the validity of those events. So, with the belief that nothing is an absolute truth everything should be looked at from several angles and be looked at as only partially true. Again, this is just an observation, it is not necessarily what I think or believe.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Emotion, Humans and the Bloodshed of War

by [Sara Baker](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 8:05 PM

If you ask what I think of Burns “creative license,” then you must ask me how I feel about how Dickens crafted his words, or how Shakespeare formulated his plays. I am not citing, or in any way likening Ken Burns to these great authors, however, the way they organize and craft a story, be it from fact or fiction remains, at least somewhat, the same. Regardless of the specific scenario or Burns reasoning behind circling back to the *Battle of Bull Run* and one mans last letter to his beloved wife my sentiments remain the same; that the reasoning behind it is emotional, and to humanize the men (and in some

cases woman) who fought in the Civil War, rather than seeing them as faceless soldiers, nothing more than props or pieces on a chess board. I have questions surrounding what circumstances the “second” letter appeared, and how much or little it differs from the original. If it is significantly different, than I am inclined to be slightly frustrated, on the other hand, if both letters remain much the same, barring a lack any major information I'm inclined to see no difference. Since it was done for the sake of, I believe, humanizing, rather than to give us a true picture between a man and his wife, I don't see how a misplaced comma, or the word "and" would make much of a difference. Although, I see no reason for Burns to use the “second” letter. If, in fact, the letters had been too different I would scarcely think Burns would use the later model. There had to have been many letters written between wives and husbands during the Civil War. If this letter was so inaccurate, why not simply find another? Burns usage of the letter at the end of the segment wasn't for drama, in my opinion, but to “bring us full circle.” By that I mean, it was meant to give closure to an episode that was only part of a series, just like the first in a trilogy of books, an ending, without an ending, of sorts. It gave his audience emotional closure, drawing them back down from the bloody war he'd begun to delve into. I believe, from a creative standpoint, it was necessary, not unlike how we often start our understanding of history from the outcome rather than at the beginning. After reading the article published a hundred and fifty years after his death, or after he foresaw his passing, I found my above sentiments reaffirmed, though I do wish the article would mention the elusive “second” letter that has been apparently let to run rampant into to public world. In addition, I could glimpse the emotion behind Ballou's words, and it reminds me of how powerful words can be, especially when foreshadowed by actions and events.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Emotion, Humans and the Bloodshed of War

by [Andrea Douglass](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 10:29 AM

While I do agree with some of your points, I strongly disagree with your idea that creating a historical non-fiction documentary is comparable to writing a fictitious play or book. The process should be handled much more thoughtfully and delicately.

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Re: Emotion, Humans and the Bloodshed of War

by [Carissa Kernutt](#) – Friday, January 22, 2016, 1:05 PM

When you said it gave the audience emotional closure, drawing them back down from the bloody war, I enjoy the way you put that! When watching this film I felt the same way. It did give me closure and made me genuinely hurt for these men and women. I also liked when you said that if this specific letter was innaccurate then why not find another? I feel like this is something we are all asking ourselves. Why was this letter so important in our nations history? Maybe we will find out more later on.

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Re: Emotion, Humans and the Bloodshed of War

by [Caitlyn Vermillion](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 2:40 PM

I really like your opinion that Burns put the letter into the series as a humanizing affect. I had not thought of that before and I think that it is a valid point. I would really like to hear Burns' reasons for not using the true story. I also really like how your explanation reminds me and others that Burns is not an historian but a director, his job is to make a movie that caters to his audience and not historians.

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Comes with re-telling a story

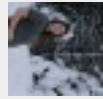
by [Molly Townley](#) – Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 11:23 PM

There are times that it drives me crazy when directors add, change or rearrange events that happen when directing true story films. But they almost always do so to make or help the viewer understand how they view history. To help them not only watch as the movie moves from scene to scene, but to be so engrossed that you are no longer just watching, you are living what that character lived and feeling how they felt. I think that is the approach Burn's was taking when he used the letter at the time he did. Even though everyone knows that it must have been hard for the soldiers loved ones, actually hearing it in the words of a soldier themself makes it all the

more real. The vivid description of his love for his country and to the love for his wife and family was the best way to capture not only an audiences attention, but also their emotion. I believe Burn's used it in that scene instead of after the war because he felt that emotion that soldier felt at that moment wouldn't be fully felt by the viewer. I wish he stuck closer to actual history rather than a good story, but when looking at it from the view of a director that wants to captute his viewers attention I think it was a smart move, but when looking at it from the view of portraying accurate history and not just a movie then rearranging scenes should be done only when necessary to the viewers understanding and made clear when it actually took place.

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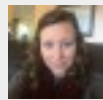
Re: Comes with re-telling a story

by [Carissa Kernutt](#) - Thursday, January 21, 2016, 9:43 AM

In this film I definitely appreciated that he added more emotion to the story, so we were all able to feel what these soldiers went through during this time in history. For Burn's in the film industry it was a strategic move, although it is not set in stone how he truly felt. I was intrigued by the film due to this emotion and for being a military spouse myself. It really hit home and flowed well. I wish he would have stuck with the history, but I also understand his stand point in the film. We all have to remember majority of Americans wanted to watch this film when it first came out.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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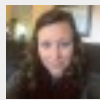
Re: Comes with re-telling a story

by [Jessica Mckee](#) - Sunday, January 24, 2016, 9:34 PM

I agree with you that it doesn't take away from the documentary. Some of the points last week about the film not being entirely accurate were that at least it got you started learning about what happened, and made you want to investigate further. I believe that this letter was used to that effect. It was Burns making the film more interesting to make people want to know more.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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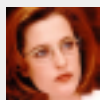
by [Jessica Mckee](#) - Wednesday, January 20, 2016, 11:50 PM

There is no doubt that the Civil War is a tragic event, and I cannot find myself upset even though the timeline is off with the reading of the letter; I feel like the purpose of it is to make an impact. Anytime you add music and pictures to words it adds to the impact of what is trying to be conveyed. When first hearing the letter read it did not matter that multiple families and couples were shown I can see how he was trying to represent the tragedy of what happened. I think that he should have mentioned that there are different versions of the letter, but for the overall pictures of what this part showed I think he was just trying to convey the emotions of this time, and while accuracy is important I do not think that having this slightly off is that important.

After reading the article I still felt the same way. It emphasized the affect that this letter had on people. There was a reason that so many people wanted to hear this letter and bought out copies. It was something that people could relate to on a personal level. It was something that tugged on heart strings and made people think about how it affected those on an individual level instead of seeing this as just an event as a whole.

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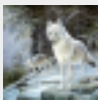
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Timeline

by [Andrea Douglass](#) - Friday, January 22, 2016, 10:36 AM

After reading everyone's replies it seems as though the conversation has drifted from "Should Burns haved moved the letter in the incorrect point of the timeline?" to "did he have the right to use it at all?". Many of the points (including my own) that have been used to justify his slip-up argue that it was necessary to evoke emotion, which I partially agree with. But, for the sake of accuracy, couldn't Burns have used something else true to the chronology and saved the letter for later on?



Re: Timeline

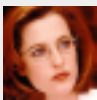
by Edith Ortega – Friday, January 22, 2016, 8:44 PM

Ok. I agree that the letter could have been utilized at a different point in the film. But that said, how many of us have watched a movie or tv series that was especially bloody? And no I am not talking Freddoe Cruger or The Walking Dead. What about the mini series Roots or North and South Book I and Book II? These movies dealt with slavery and the Civil War.

How many of us, were glad to have a scene that dealt with love between characters instead of missing limbs, welts on raw skin?

Ken Burns, I feel, deliberately put the letter where he did to give us a break from having to see all that carnage. To help us understand that though this war alone was the bloodiest on American soil and in American history, that there were other aspects that needed to become known as well, in hopes that one would hopefully learn that there are lessons of strength that don't involve killing each other.

Edie O!



Re: Timeline

by Andrea Douglass – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 2:30 PM

I understand why he put it where he did, but as I mentioned in my previous post, I imagine there may have been some other material (letters, sentimental photos, etc.) that were true to the timeline which he could have used in place of the Ballou letter to achieve the same effect.



Re: Timeline

by Molly Townley – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 6:30 PM

I agree. It conveyed his message, but surely there was something else he could have used that actually happened at that time.



Re: Timeline

by Tyler Yrineo – Saturday, January 23, 2016, 5:46 PM

I also thought he used the letter as a tactic to get the audience more concerned with the story, and his slip-up didn't really do any harm in my eyes and did what it was intended for. I personally felt a little something when he brought up the letter and read it off, it was a little emotional definitely. I do also think Burns could of had it in order and it would evoke a similar reaction, but with that said there's no doubt in my mind that there were a number of things he could have said (actually in order) that would have the same effect. I mean the civil war is a terrible terrible war and getting personal with any aspect of it like he did with the letter would make anyone feel something.



Re: Creative License

by Tyler Yrineo – Friday, January 22, 2016, 7:00 PM

I believe Ken Burns put the case out of sequence to invoke something out of the audience, but it is also apparent that the events presented were not necessarily in chronological order and you try to place it in order yourself rather than what is presented as if it was in order. I do believe that it isn't really necessary to add more drama to the event, but as human beings in order to really get into something like this, some kind of emotional

attachment can definitely help get the viewers attention and keep them intrigued. So while I think it was an attempt to keep viewers watching, I do not believe it was with ill-intent. If you need to appeal to emotion in order to keep people interested about the civil war then so be it.

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Re: Creative License
by [Caitlyn Vermillion](#) – Sunday, January 24, 2016, 2:52 PM

I have seen some posts that also talk about the already present drama that engulfs the Civil War. I think that even though the Civil War is already filled with drama it is drama that you expect to be there. Everyone expects to hear about slavery, the anger of the south, and the politics of secession, however love stories are a dramatic part of the Civil War that most forget about. We forget about the people who were torn apart by the fighting that ensued after the south's decision for secession. So when you say that you don't think it is necessary for more drama I agree with you but this soldier's story is not more drama but just drama that people forget is already within the history of the Civil War.

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