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Two Decades Later

by Joe Escobar - Thursday, January 26, 2017, 8:23 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Two Decades Later topic.

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: Two Decades Later

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Personal Connections



by Timothy Lucas - Friday, January 27, 2017, 12:52 PM

The Washington Post article is certainly a punch to the feelers. It may be difficult to say anything new to what I or others have already said on this topic. If anything it further reinforces in my view the necessity of the reading of this letter in the context of the *Civil War* series and the first episode especially. It is worth repeating, that a wall of facts about numbers of troops and casualty rates along with complex issues of slavery and self-determination is pretty far removed from the ability to grasp for most people in this time and place. Some of us may be looking through our own lenses of interest and enjoyment of history and forget a lot of people could not care less about these issues and are happy with a glancing knowledge.

Some have questioned the motivation of the producers when using creative license in this situation with a worry of corruption of further facts. We should know that there is always a motivation behind a wide range of available facts that we hear and be knowledgeable enough to decide for ourselves from a range of verifiable sources. In this case, any bias or cherry picking in this sense is more than justified when you consider the possibility of Ballou's story not being more fully told or explored. It is complete with the irony of what can happen when facts and motivations are truly distorted or misunderstood...

After the Confederates evacuated the area around Manassas in March 1862, officials from Rhode Island returned to the nearby Bull Run battlefield to retrieve the bodies of the state's dead.

When they did, they found that, according to witnesses, Ballou's body had been dug up, beheaded and burned by Confederates.

The rebels supposedly were seeking vengeance against a different Rhode Island officer blamed for inflicting high Southern losses in the battle. They dug up Ballou by mistake. (Ruane)

We might also forget that the people who made this series are clearly passionate about the work that they are doing, with the environment and in this medium of the series they have attempted to convey that passion and hope it sparks an interest in us to explore and understand further.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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My thoughts do not halt or falter

by Stanley Cates - Friday, January 27, 2017, 8:37 PM

This new information doesn't alter my thoughts much. I still maintain that because Burns did not make claims of fact and focused purely on pathos displays as a tool to create an emotional link that there was no fault in his actions. I think this analysis is exclusive from the analysis regarding claims of historical facts and their accuracy. I did however find the bit

about the grave desecration to be of interest; the contrast between what the south tried to portray itself as: gentlemanly and honorable, and this plainly grizzly and appalling action is astounding.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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A committed director

by Zachary Embree - Saturday, January 28, 2017, 12:00 AM

In light of this new information my view of this documentary does not significantly change. From the beginning of the series and after viewing some of the introduction materials for the series I saw Burns as a emotionally invested director. He clearly wanted to present not only the facts of the war but the feelings going through the public at that time. When he talked about going through the process of researching and filming I could tell he felt strongly about the subject. After reading through the article this impression has only increased. The fact that he kept a copy of this letter with him during the filming and so long after speaks to his deep investment in the people caught up this momentous event.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Understanding Concerns

by Zachary Embree - Saturday, January 28, 2017, 11:45 PM

Upon further reflection I can see where the possible critics of the series maybe would view the amount of emotional investment as a problem. In this conflict due to the many factors leading up to and that became involved in the war, the causes can be construed in a variety of ways. Emotionally it is very satisfying to think of the Civil War as a righteous war for racial freedom over an oppressive slave supporting south. When you get invested in the material their is a danger that you could get caught up in a satisfying answer to some of the moral questions rather than the truth. I do not think that Burns fell int this trap and kept a fairly factual overview. But hearing how he was so moved by a letter of a Union soldier might make a critic think he could develop an bias unconsciously.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Understanding Concerns

by Stanley Cates - Sunday, January 29, 2017, 2:01 AM

I'm afraid I have to disagree. You call it "satisfying" to think the conflict was over slavery between the good guys in the north and the bad guys in the south; I call it simplistic, even over simplistic in proper company. So while you say that there is a danger of accepting such a faux truth when one is invested in the material I say that one runs a much higher risk of simply dismissing the opportunity to challenge such a falsehood in the absence of said investment. Do you suppose that James McPherson or Eric Foner spent years separating fact from lore in grad school in an absence of investment of some sort?

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Burns opportunity for drama

by Nicholas Esser - Sunday, January 29, 2017, 12:58 PM

How unfortunate are the last days of this man's life, including his body after he had left it behind in that cruel world? Those arguing against the drama that this letter infused unnecessarily can be very thankful Burns does not end it with Ballou's body being dug up, beheaded, and burned...

The way I look at the controversy surrounding this letter is in two ways. First perhaps the rebels found the letter before the Union, but why then would they not discard the letter or try to change it to further humiliate the man, rumors say, they were beheading and burning.

If any controversy actually does exist, I would think it would be involving the North. As this newest article states, this incident made the newspapers, and that crowds assembled as his body was recovered and brought to Providence, Rhode Island. Though I've not personally read anything to convince me of this opinion, I can understand an argument that the letter (or situation involving it) might have been altered to create more of a martyr figure to rally the North after such a defeat as Bull Run. I cannot argue for this idea or against it. Though I consider myself to be quite the skeptic, to me it seems like speculation.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Burns opportunity for drama

by Zachary Embree - Sunday, January 29, 2017, 7:21 PM

I admit that there is always a possibility that historical artifacts like letters and opinion pieces could have been altered before coming into the hands of historians. That being said from what I have read and seen in the series so far it would seem that it was not uncommon for soldiers to write letters before a battle. Thus I would think that the letter was most likely written and not created from whole cloth. As for having southerners modifying the letter I gave some thought about that as well. One of the main reasons I

discarded this idea was that the rebels won that battle and would not have any real motivation for destroying some random letter. Of course that fact that the north lost this moral crushing battle makes the idea of them modifying a letter to drum up more support more plausible. But given the total lack of evidence this can only be an option, one that I do not put stock in.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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A Washington Post Review

by Jacob Micheli - Sunday, January 29, 2017, 10:50 PM

The Washington Posts article praised Ken Burns use of Sullivan Ballou's letter. It didn't address continuity issues or obvious emotional pandering. My feelings towards Burns are still the same. Surprisingly, the article brought up some interesting facts regarding Ballou's body. His exhumed, decapitated and scorched corpse are just a few. Arguably, this is enough inspirational material to keep Ballou's 1861 letter scene in sequence. Burns could have went a less predictable route and revealed what actually happened to Ballou. Regardless, I keep neglecting the Burn's audience. Being able to engage and entertain is also an important goal.

Obviously not everyone will critique the film under the same dogmatic microscope. Making a well rounded, historically accurate, and entertaining film seems like a balancing act. Considering Burns aim is to engage children, the elderly and everyone in between. It's almost a given that any one production could brand Burns friend or foe. With that being said I can see why he used the letter. I don't agree with its use but I understand it. It was easily digestible material that didn't require much interpretation. A perfect combination for history novices.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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