

HST 209: History of the Civil War W18 (Escobar 31595)

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Week 8 Forum

Comparing Sources

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Comparing Sources

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, February 24, 2018, 8:16 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Comparing Sources topic.

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Sum of ratings: -

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If I didn't know any better I would say Ken Burns read McPhearson's book.

by Heather Saxon - Tuesday, February 27, 2018, 12:22 PM

Concerning all topics, I believe the Ken Burns documentary and McPherson's book are the stronger sources, but I think that has a lot to do with presentation. I simply don't remember as much from the Divided Union documentaries. It might be possible because we don't watch them as frequently, but either way.

I found while watching the Ken Burns documentary that the information of the evolution of medical practices was appropriately covered for a documentary. It explains war hospitals pre-Sanitary Commission and then post, explains the conditions, highlights the differences in

medical hospitals, including numbers, between the north and the south, and sheds light on some key figures in the reform of medical practices. McPherson's book follows along with this well; I found frequently when reading that the book presents events in the same order as Ken Burns documentary, but it fills in gaps left by the documentary's time restraints. While the book focuses more on the technical aspects and providing detail about the condition of soldiers on either side and some more names than the documentary might, the documentary in return adds some more of the emotion (which seems to be Ken Burns strength when showing history) that the book displays, but in comparison lacks.

The Divided Nation documentaries provide decent detail in comparison to the Ken Burns and the book, but I can honestly say I don't recall much more being added to the previously known information from the other two sources. There was some detail on Andersonville and otherwise, but other than that I just don't remember the Divided Nation adding very much when it came to hospitals and medical development during the Civil War.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: If I didn't know any better I would say Ken Burns read McPhearson's book.

by Kyle McDaniel - Wednesday, February 28, 2018, 11:22 AM

After reviewing my notes and skimming through the past segments of the Divided Union, I would have to agree.

The Ken Burns documentary spends way more time on the hospitals and health care aspect of the Civil War. In episode 6, it is even told that the writer Walt Whitman visited hospitals and recited poetry; which is actually very interesting and I am perplexed as to why it wasn't included into our other source material.

I know that the Divided Union is half as long as Ken Burns' documentary; but there's no denying that Burns' film covered medical practices way more thoroughly than the Divide Union. Just looking back at my notes and thinking about it; I don't recall hearing much or any stats or numbers about the medical side of the war throughout the segments.

It seems the Burns film dedicates a good ten minutes or so to this information near the end of every episode; which is very interesting to learn. Especially people like Dorothea Dix; the woman who helped wounded soldiers for the entire war without getting paid a cent. All of these were very interesting facts that should have been included in all source materials about the war, in my personal opinion.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) 2

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Re: If I didn't know any better I would say Ken Burns read McPhearson's book.

by Jackson Peterson - Sunday, March 4, 2018, 7:23 PM

I feel the same, Ken Burns videos are very historically accurate but I found they did focus too much on the hospitals and not enough on what was happening during that time in the war. I found the videos that include the history of the civil war hospitals interesting, he does spend too much effort showing that then what was occurring

outside of them. But the people associated with the hospitals like Dorothea Dix were interesting to learn how they helped and what their roles were during that time in the hospitals. I could have done with all the details about the amputations tho!

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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Battle of Wilderness Content

by Sydney Hall - Tuesday, February 27, 2018, 9:33 PM

With the three sources (documentaries and textbook), I personally found them not being conflictive of each other in terms of the content. Obviously, a textbook has more in-depth details that are presented than in an hour long episode/documentary. Because of that, I preferred *Battle Cry of Freedom* as my most enjoyable source (Divided Union came a close second).

With the Divided Union episode Total War, I found it much more engaging compared to Episode 6 of Ken Burns' series because of a couple of factors. In Total War, not only did they have reenactments, they also had several historians and professors provided throughout the episode with bits of knowledge ranging from the comparison of Jefferson and Lincoln to the engagements of Lee and Grant. It also included visuals such as maps and reenactments. With Episode 6, it felt like one historical picture after another with monotonous background music choices.

If you look at the two amazon reviews, one person leans Ken Burns and the other leans towards Divided Union. Gustav, a reviewer, says, "The Divided Union is just as comprehensive, and half as long." I personally find that as a crucial statement due to the fact that sometimes learning about a certain subject doesn't have to require so much time if you can present a wealth of material in a great, summarized way. The New York Times article written by John O'Connor also briefly mentions a summary by stating, "Overall, "The Divided Union" examines and outlines the major issues clearly, although fierce debates about their significance will certainly continue."

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Re: Battle of Wilderness Content

by Kyle McDaniel - Wednesday, February 28, 2018, 11:14 AM

I would most definitely agree. The three sources we have been using have not conflicted and have presented us with the same information. I feel Ken Burns' documentary has a lot of opinions on certain people, whereas the other two sources are just about cold hard facts.

I also agree about the Divided Union being more effective with it's reenactments and actually doing interviews with subjects at actual sites of battles, as oppose to the Ken Burns documentary which uses pretty much the same three songs throughout it's long running time and not much in-terms of graphics or imagery. The Divided Union feels better in actually taking the viewer into the past to see what these battles were like. After this many episodes, The Civil War by Ken Burns actually feels repetitive; where (as the reviewer you pointed on said) the half as long Divided Union always feels like it is offering something new.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Re: Battle of Wilderness Content

by Sydney Hall - Wednesday, February 28, 2018, 10:25 PM

It's nice to know that I'm not the only one who felt like the music was too repetitive as well as the content being somewhat repeated, granted that I do appreciate the information that Ken Burns gives out to us in his series. I have always found reenactments enjoyable to watch in a historical sense due to the fact that they try to portray the time period and the battles as well as they can with modern day technology. Because of this, I felt like the reenactment shown in the episode Total War was a great representation of a visual summary with narration.

Also, I'm glad that you also feel that Divided Union and *Battle Cry of Freedom* were more factual (no bias) because I felt that the textbook was more raw due to several reasons: statistics, facts, and information presented without any excessive usage of music, pictures, and whatnot which were all used in both of the documentary series.

Another thing I wanted to mention was that it feels evident that Ken Burns tries to rub off a certain perspective in his series whilst the Divided Union is pretty straight to the point with facts, although to some it may not be as much information as they would like. With that said, I think it's important that we look at all the sources and see these connections and notice which ones lean towards one way about something, such as the views of a certain person (i.e. Jefferson).

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Re: Battle of Wilderness Content

by Heather Saxon - Wednesday, February 28, 2018, 5:54 PM

I can agree that the Divided Union is much more concise when presenting and that the reenactment did add a certain level of visuals that Ken Burns doesn't have, but honestly, they were kind of distracting, but that's just because I was paying a lot of attention to the costuming. Otherise I think the real differences between Divided Union and Ken Burns is that one focuses more on emotion and delivery than the other. From previous class discussions, it seems the general consensus is that Ken Burns rides the emotional waves and tends to lay his documentaries out as informative movies to keep his audience, educating them and entertaining them at the same time.

I think some of it might just come down to taste; I prefer Ken Burns, though I do agree he could use more historian accounts, but that's likely because I enjoy narration while you find it monotonous, and the structure of his documentaries more compared to Divided Nation, which seems to be more info-heavy (which is good!) but doesn't counter-balance with little details in the same way Ken Burns does.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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**Re: Battle of Wilderness Content**

by Sydney Hall - Wednesday, February 28, 2018, 10:00 PM

I completely forgot about the emotional route that Ken Burns usually takes with his episodes until you mentioned it. Now that I'm recalling this, I can agree that it does feel like that is one of the primary differences between Divided Union and Ken Burns series. Depending on what you like as a person, everyone has a different preference in how they like their information presented to them.

I will also admit that I do appreciate the effort that Burns had structured in his series because you can tell with every detail that he (mostly) strived to provide accuracy, anywhere from his narration, music coordination (which I mentioned was monotonous), and the photographs presented. Another thing you mentioned was the lack of (a few) historians in Ken Burns series compared to those in Divided Union, and I also concur with you on that. In my opinion, I personally like seeing historians talk about something they feel passionately about as that gives off a positive vibe and makes the documentary more enjoyable. Plus, it also adds a nice break from photographs and reenactments.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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**Re: Battle of Wilderness Content**

by Heather Saxon - Thursday, March 1, 2018, 9:53 AM

I have no idea how I mixed up "music" and "narration" so I wanted to correct myself on that - he could use some more tunes, I agree, as thinking about the documentary I think there's like...3 identifiable tunes that come up the most, with a few others that don't last as long (the whistling of Yankee Doodle, that one theme that just seems to kind of blanket the series, and then the intermittent African American gospel are the main three I remember the most).

Agreed; I also like the little tidbits you get out of the historians. I personally like some of Shelby Foote's the best because he seems to bring up a lot of the little moments that are either funny or poignant, depending.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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**Re: Battle of Wilderness Content**

by Hannah Cartwright - Friday, March 2, 2018, 4:49 PM

I completely agree with you, regarding your opinion on Divided Union, which was my personal favorite. Though, Battle Cry of Freedom is another incredible source, I guess it just comes down to those who prefer readings over films. I truly appreciated all of the historians in Divided Union. Hearing different historians, who are very passionate about the topic of the civil war, was super engaging because it was different than just reading words out of a book or watching reenactments and looking at photos; it was refreshing to see and hear actual people talk about the events and the people of the civil war. I also found the music from Divided Union very engaging because the music helped set the mood of the scenes. If they were talking about deaths, they would play slow and sad sounding music, and when they were talking about the battles, they would play louder and faster sounding music. I feel

that the Dived Union was easier to concentrate on and stay engaged with, considering all of the historians, reenactments and music, rather than the Ken Burns episode which seemed to be a slideshow with a speaker, with very few historians. Though, Ken Burns episodes are still very interesting because he provides many real pictures from the civil war and seems to go into more depth when talking about the soldiers and/or generals of both sides of the war. Again, it just comes down to every persons personal opinion and what engages them the most.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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Grant and Lee

by Kyle McDaniel - Tuesday, February 27, 2018, 9:40 PM

Through all of these different sources we have been studying about the civil war; covering nearly the same ideas and moments in history, I feel the one source with the strongest, most oppinative voice is undoubtedly the Ken Burns documentary, the civil war. It is not afraid of voicing what they think of certain people.

For instance, when talking about Grant, especially in the earlier episodes, the narrator would rave about Lee's strategy and his skill and about how no one could out think him.

The only specific example of the Ken Burns film talking about Lee I could find in my notes was during the battle of Chancellorsville; the narrator refers to it as "Lee's masterpiece".

Undoubtedly, it was a good battle and Lee came out on-top, I feel that the movie almost tends to paint Lee as some kind of superhero. So I re-read the portion of the book about the battle of Chancellorsville and the book paints more of a picture of things going wrong within the union army than Grant making a masterpiece assault. It also slightly hints that Lee may have actually been a little arrogant.

"..and the boost that the battle gave to southern morale proved in the end harmful, for it bred an overconfidence in their own prowess and a contempt for the enemy that led to disaster. Believing his troops invincible, Lee was about to ask them to do the impossible."

One thing I noticed about Ulysses S. Grant In the book "Battle Cry of Freedom" By James McPherson, His alcoholism is touched upon a little more. In Episode 6 of The Civil War by Ken Burns, it is said that he only touched the bottle out of boredom, and during downtime. However, in the book, James McPherson writes more in-depth about his struggles with it. The book explains he needed the help of his wife and his chief of staff to stay on the wagon, and that he believed alcoholism to be a moral weakness and that he had a struggle with self-discipline.

"...his predisposition to alcoholism may have made him a better general."

Just thought that was interesting. The book seems to have a more neutral voice, as well as the documentary "The Divided Union" than the Ken Burns documentary where he has very clear opinions on how he feels about certain people in the war.

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Sum of ratings:3 (1)

3



The Generals

by Jonathan Wheeler - Wednesday, February 28, 2018, 9:18 PM

General's Lee and Grant were the two commanding generals for the South and North. In our readings and video episodes, Lee and Grant were well explained and complimented one another. The Ken Burns documentary was the best though in my opinion. For example, we are told the backstories of both generals and how they came to where they are. We also learn that both Lee and Grant were humble leaders whose greatest successes were as military officers. According to Shelby Foote, Grant and his son went to the Willards Hotel in Washington DC. While entering the lodging, Grant was wearing dirty civilian clothes. Unlike other generals who would have worn their best uniforms and medals to impress. Both Lee and Grant also cared deeply for their soldiers. After the Battle of Gettysburg, Lee profusely apologized to his retreating soldiers, and volunteered his resignation to Jeff Davis. We also learn however that they both had completely opposite upbringings. Lee came from a celebrated military family with links back to George Washington. Grant on the other hand came from a poor farming background and was sent to West Point to receive some kind of schooling/career, by his father. Lee was an outstanding cadet at West Point who graduated 2nd in his class. He also was a strict disciplinarian, as Shelby Foote mentions Lee telling/punishing one of his soldiers "that he need not worry as justice will be served." Grant on the other hand was average and graduated somewhere in the middle of his class. In the end though, both Lee and Grant had a strong sense of duty. They also were destined to be the military leaders of the South and North.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



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Re: Comparing Sources

by Jackson Peterson - Thursday, March 1, 2018, 12:50 AM

I think the civil war medical care and hospitals were covered thoroughly both in the textbook and the videos we had seen from Ken Burns and other sources we have been provided with. All of the information with the important people that we need to know and I felt it is beneficial to compare different sources when learning new information. Having multiple ways of taking in information and learn it from different points of view. I felt like the Ken Burns video impacted me personally because of the visuals provided along with learning of how little help and knowledge of medical care they had during the war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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Re: Comparing Sources

by Kyle McDaniel - Sunday, March 4, 2018, 3:49 PM

Very true. The Ken Burns documentary has actually been pivotal in my understanding of hospitals and medical care during the civil war. I like how the episodes tend to spend at least 10 minutes on this issue, an issue that is important but easily glossed over in other materials.

Hearing of these brave nurses who sometimes worked without pay is truly amazing and they are heroes that should be recognized amongst all the other heroes of the civil war. I am glad Ken Burns took the time to recognize these brave people in more detail.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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Comparison between Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant

by Hannah Cartwright - Thursday, March 1, 2018, 4:28 PM

While reading the chapters of the textbook Battle Cry of Freedom by James McPherson, and watching Ken Burns episode 6: Valley of the Shadow of Death and the "Total War: The War Takes Its Toll on Day-to-Day Life" episode from the Divided Union Documentary, I started learning more and more about Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant in comparison with each other, typically as how they were as commanders. I found the way that McPherson talks about Grant and Lee in comparison is different than the way they are compared in the Ken Burns episode and the Divided Union episode. I feel that in the book, McPherson does a good job at weaving information about the way Lee and Grant were as leaders rather than just bluntly stating facts such as "The Union army was more organized than the Confederate army," as it had seem to be like in Ken Burns episode and the Divided Union documentary. For example, in the Battle Cry of Freedom, chapter 24: "If It Takes All Summer" McPherson says on pages 718-719 how Confederate soldiers were required to remain in the army, even though their three-year enlistments were about to expire. He then says on the bottom page of 719 that the Union army did not require their soldiers who's three year enlistments were about to expire to stay. Instead, those who did choose to re-enlist were rewarded. Though, all three of these sources were talking about the same thing, I appreciated how, in my opinion at least, the book seems to weave in information, whereas the films seemed to be more blunt with the information. It makes me feel like I am not just hearing/reading the same information over again, rather I can learn about the war at different angles and in different way, which in this case, learn about Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant at different angles and in different ways. Though, I did seem to gather more knowledge through the Divided Union episode because it kept me more interested and easier to follow along with as it has more speakers, reenactments, and music than the Ken Burns episode, which seems to be a slide show of pictures with someone talking in the background for the most part, which can be hard to stay focused. Then, of course, watching films always seem to keep me more interested than reading, in general.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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Ken burns Sources

by Jackson Peterson - Sunday, March 4, 2018, 7:19 PM

In his videos Ken Burns goes above and beyond to retreat the scenes as if they were real and pays great attention to detail. For example the costumes, locations and narrations are always very well done and this is why so many people have watched the series. HIs music is another great example, he plays accurate tunes from that time period and creates an authentic emotional tie to the great tragedy that is the civil war. The use of historians makes for accurate depictions of the events and what was happening in that time period.

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Sum of ratings:0 (1)

0



Re: Ken burns Sources

by Kyle McDaniel - Sunday, March 4, 2018, 11:52 PM

In the Ken Burns documentary, I do love the use of music of the time period and the photos and letters read aloud. But I must say the reenactments from The Divided union do add a pinch of flavor the stories that are told.

We will never know just how brutal and awful the battles of the civil war were, but having these reenactments adds a certain element to the documentary that the Ken Burns films lacks. The best we get in the Burns documentary is some fades to black and some sound effects of rifles and artillery for the representation of battles. And the occasional map

I think this is where Burns' documentary falls short. The music is the same three different songs and the battles are represented exactly the same. Otherwise it is a wonderful piece of information regarding the civil war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



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Re: Comparing Sources

by Jackson Peterson - Sunday, March 4, 2018, 7:47 PM

I found the Divided union to be very accurate. Using interviews and sites from the actual location adds to the authenticity and accuracy of the video. Ken Burns only used a few songs and this felt like it hadn't been done before where other videos can seem repetitive. Using many sites and locations where the battles actually occurred was able to visualize then the ken burns videos.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

0



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