

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

Home ▶ My courses ▶ HST 209 W18 (Escobar 31595) ▶ Week 2 - 1861 - The Cause ▶ Week 2 Forum ▶ Meet Ken Burns



Search forums

Week 2 Forum

Meet Ken Burns

• [Subscribe](#)

[The Civil War Today](#) ▶

Display replies in nested form 

Move this discussion to ... 

Move

Pin



Meet Ken Burns

by Joe Escobar - Saturday, January 13, 2018, 10:53 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Meet Ken Burns 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: Meet Ken Burns

Sum of ratings: -

[Permalink](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Article One Afterthoughts

by Sydney Hall - Monday, January 15, 2018, 1:29 PM

After watching the seven minute clip, I could tell that Ken Burns was very passionate about his TV series, *The Civil War*.

In the Current.org article, written by Karen Bedford, it seems that the series has historians stuck in the middle. Some enjoyed it because of it being the first of its kind, others on edge due to the presentation of the material, the lack of explanation on certain topics, as well as the limitations that media provides in a classroom and home environment. Robert Toplin, a historian, brings up a great point about interpretation towards the end of the article, stating, "I think a lot of people out there believe that history involves a simple, tidy operation of gathering

the facts, laying out the chronology, and what is out there in the way of the story is all so obvious. Yet we know that the facts are not neutral and the pictures are not so objective."

This quote reinforces the idea that some individuals think with a simple mind. There is always more to the story and there is always more research to seek out.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Meet Ken Burns. Opinion on Ken Burns after video slip and Ken Burns critics in first article.

by Hannah Cartwright - Tuesday, January 16, 2018, 10:22 AM

When I first watched the video clip introducing Ken Burns, I definitely admired him and the way he goes about his work. He seems so open/free minded and his worked seemed so organic. As I read the first article, "Who Speaks for the Past?" I still felt the same way. Critics seemed upset, considering the fact that Burns focused more on the war itself, rather the outcome of the war and the revolution it brought. For example, Litwack, a history professor at Berkeley, states that Burns' film on the Civil War was a "superbly produced history of war, not of the social revolution which the Civil War helped to unleash." However, I do not see any harm in what Burns brought to the table. The war itself, though may not be as popular as the outcome of the war and the revolution it brought, can be just as important for us to understand as a way for us to feel closer and more understanding to the situation that happened so long ago.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Meet Ken Burns. Opinion on Ken Burns after video slip and Ken Burns critics in first article.

by Saige Sloan - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 9:01 AM

I agree with your opinion towards Ken Burns and his films. It is easy to tell that Burns is passionate about his work and carries himself with a humbled demeanor. Critics who shared opposing concerns towards Burns and his films made valid arguments regarding the idea that Burns, himself, was not present during the time of the war. Toplin, a *Civil War* critic, stated that "Can films give us a sense of how partisan this whole notion of interpretation really is?", but Burns quickly replied "[W]hat we were trying to produce is not a piece of academic paper. We were trying to speak to a very large audience ... and excite them and not be the last word or the first word." I believe Burns has created multiple credible films regarding the war, the people, and the era itself. The *Civil War* series will benefit us as students throughout this course due to its convincing arguments and Burns plausibility.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Meet Ken Burns -- A new birth of Freedom

by Nicholas Lutze - Tuesday, January 16, 2018, 7:47 PM

In Episode 1 — The Cause, the film states, “At Gettysburg in 1863, Abraham Lincoln said perhaps more than he knew. The war was about “A new birth of Freedom.”.” (Episode 1, 7:02) The Civil War is more than weapons and soldiers. This is the war on humanity, on human freedom. How can that statement be perceived today? How can this act of citizens be taken into consideration of how today’s society is based and ran?

Sum of ratings:0 (1) 0

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Was John Brown a hero?

by Kyle McDaniel - Tuesday, January 16, 2018, 8:21 PM

Was John Brown a hero? A white man who was described as a failure in episode one of 'The Civil War' by Ken Burns, suddenly began to fight for something more in his life. The means in which he fought were sometimes questionable (hacking up slavery supporters with a broadsword definitely doesn't sound like a heroic quality, but the overall message his actions conveyed seemed to ripple throughout our entire country. Even Ralph Waldo Emerson compared Brown to Christ.

In Harper's Ferry, John Brown had a plan to begin an uprising to his anti-slavery movement, but it backfired in the worst way possible. The intentions were there; the plan might have been violent and not well drawn out, but he was fighting for the better of our nation. He was eventually arrested, charged with treason and hanged. Instead of a final statement, he handed a guard a note which read: " I, John Brown am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood." Little did Brown know, his words would ring so true in coming years.

A failed businessman, using violent means to resolve an issue in our country. His actions undoubtedly had a huge effect on the beginnings of the Civil War which would begin just two years after his death. He fought for the abolition of slavery, and fought for slaves and the freedom he knew they deserved. So when reflecting upon his life, could one consider this man a hero? Or just another violent man in our nation's darkest years?

Sum of ratings:0 (1) 0

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Was John Brown a hero?

by Miles Arnold - Saturday, January 20, 2018, 7:42 PM

Looking back on John Brown, he seemed like he was neither a hero nor a villain. I think he was concerned with finding a place for himself. He failed so much before in life and business that maybe he had a good heart and wanted to make an impact.

The fact that it was so poorly thought out makes him seem a little less serious to me.

Sum of ratings:0 (1) 0

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Was John Brown a hero?

by Kyle McDaniel - Sunday, January 21, 2018, 8:34 PM

Reflecting upon it, I would agree with you. The intention definitely was there, but it seems such little care went into the actual attempt, that it can't really be called 'heroic'. I think all of the personal failures in his life led him to want to make some sort of positive

effort toward something and this was the result of that. His actions had a lot to do with the looming war, but his actions weren't really 'heroic'. The casualties his own team suffered during his poorly concocted 'assault' are enough to say that this man wasn't a hero, just a man who died trying to be a hero.

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Meet Ken Burns

by Saige Sloan - Tuesday, January 16, 2018, 11:42 PM

After watching the "Meet Ken Burns" video, I did find myself admiring his passion for film making and his artistic ability behind each clip. The order scheme in which Burn's uses to create his films was interesting to me: finding the voices, choosing the music, then putting together the scenes. Producer Burns has a clearly unique vision when it comes to cinematography. Successfully being broadcasted through PBS by countless films, Burns organic take on filmmaking, taking his viewers through a trip in the past.

Burns film *The Civil War* clearly raised heavy question amongst other historians, press, and public television. As stated in the article, the film "raised question for all of us about who is to define what we're told is called the 'American Experience', and who will define, through often-politicized funding decisions, who will be represented..." Despite questions and potential concerns raised from others, I still find Ken Burns undoubtedly credible for his film work. Though he, himself, was not present during he times of these specific events, Burns' gracious approach to each event has been handled with factual evidence, supportive facts, and an open mind. The *Civil War* series that will be our main source of historical information throughout the *War Between the States* will provide us with credible information about specific events that occurred during this time period.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Meet Ken Burns

by Kyle McDaniel - Sunday, January 21, 2018, 7:15 PM

I would agree with your statements. The overall asthetic that Burns used to put together this film is phenomenal. Using old music (variations of different patriotic tunes) and sound clips of canons and gun fire really draw you in. I especially love the use of quotes from prominent figures of the time read during key moments of the episode.

What I was especially interested in, in this first episode was that Ken Burns kept the focus on the political aspect. He makes sure that it is known multiple times throughout that this war was not solely fought for slavery. You had one side trying to keep a country together, and another side not wanting their way of life to be changed. Personally growing up, I thought slavery was the sole purpose of this conflict; and yes, it played a huge part in the catalyst, but it turns out the word wasn't even really brought up during the war (at least for the first year as depicted in this episode).

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Re: Do I have confidence in Ken Burns?



by Brandon Gericke - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 3:31 AM

As I watched the first video clip, I definitely felt a sense of admiration and excitement for the process that Ken Burns undertook to make this serious about the civil war. Since he was really the first one to successfully attempt such a feat, I am pretty impressed at the quality of the videos. After I read the second article my feelings have not changed. In Ken Burns own words, " I trust my audience to make much greater leaps and intellectual connections than most documentary films". This to me meant that his intentions were not to drive a certain narrative, but rather to excite the audience so that that are intrigued enough to find the answers on their own. In which case, I have the utmost confidence in this Civil War series. I also kind of take what Ken Burns said about trusting his audience as a challenge to find the answers on my own.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Do I have confidence in Ken Burns?

by Sydney Hall - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 12:43 PM

I completely agree with you. Ken Burns gave us an exciting way to learn about the civil war in a media format. This encourages others to realize that research isn't only limited to a book or inscribed on documents. In the first article written by Karen Bedford, she quotes a historian named Robert Toplin who says, "[W]hat we're all trying to do is reach the public, get them excited about history and make them want to explore and even debate the issues. That clearly is what has happened in the wake of *The Civil War*." With that said, it is clear that Ken Burns goal for others to find out more information after watching the series was achieved.

After watching the video introduction of Ken Burns, I also feel strongly confident that he did his best to convey his extensive knowledge about the civil war in his series.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2



[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Do I have confidence in Ken Burns?

by Leah Livesay - Thursday, January 18, 2018, 8:59 AM

Hi Brandon, I'd have to say I agree with you on this! It's not always easy going into something like this with an open mind, not looking for anything specific and being open to anything that comes your way. I think Burns did this right, wanting to appeal to a large audience, which isn't easy to do with a subject that many people could find boring. He wanted to tell a story, but he wanted people to actually be interested and to keep their interest and it sounds like he accomplished that goal. Leaving your audience wanting more is what every filmmaker wants, or at least that's what I would assume. As I wrote in my initial response, people are going to have their own opinions and critique you regardless, so why not do it your way to begin with!

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Overreaction

by Miles Arnold - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 3:23 PM

I want to mainly focus on the approach of the second article, "The limitations of classroom media: Ken Burns' Civil War Series as a Test Case." I personally don't feel any less confident in the historical accuracy in Ken Burns' Presentation of the War, or at least the portrayal of how it started. But, I also understand the authors displeasure with that particular presentation. With that said, I think this article is a bit of an overreaction.

As we know, the beginning of the Civil War is a complex bit of history with a lot of intricacies. I think one of the main problems is that Burns handcuffs himself in a way (or maybe narrows his focus) by using letters of certain Civil War figures to tell his story. This forces the story to be told through certain viewpoints. And, although there are a diverse range of figures from both sides telling their stories, It becomes difficult to give a fully rounded intro into a broad subject

We have to also keep in mind that Burns had to make this; entertaining and focused enough for mass consumption, factually accurate and short enough to air on television. With a topic like the Civil War he could have done an eleven-part series just on the beginning alone. To expect him to nail every point and explain every working part is a bit of an over reach.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Overreaction

by Hannah Cartwright - Thursday, January 18, 2018, 11:25 AM

I completely agree Miles. It is such a reach for anyone to expect anyone to completely nail every detail about history, and in this case, the Civil War. History is such a complex subject and it is so hard for anyone to know exactly what happened, where it happened, and who did what. Historians only have so much to work with, considering what has happened in the past, that they can only do the best they can to provide the best facts.

It can be easy to pick someone's work apart when it comes to history because, the truth is, anybody who wasn't there during the time won't know 100% of what had happened. It is so obvious, however, that Burns is so passionate about his work and about history and the Civil War itself that he must know at least a good amount about the war, even if he does have some errors in his facts. The third article "The Limitations if Classroom Media; Ken Burns' Civil War Series as a Test Case" seems like such a reach when it comes to criticizing Burns' work because they only want to bring up his errors, as if no other historian has made minor mistakes in their work as well.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Overreaction

by Kyle McDaniel - Sunday, January 21, 2018, 7:29 PM

I completely agree. I would see this as another case of 'not being able to please everyone'. I admire Ken Burns approach to the subject. He uses facts, quotes and history to convey his message, which sounds like historical accuracy to me.

I will say, that one could argue his quotes and dates could seem narrow, in terms of not encompassing EVERYTHING about the war, but as you said; he was aiming for a mass consumed, played on TV documentary, and I just don't think that a 2,000 hour film would

have worked.

The civil war was years of a dark time in American history and so many things happened. I don't envy the job of having to pick and choose what pieces of it to leave in and which to cut it. But, my opinion of Ken Burns was not changed by the article; especially after watching how wonderful the first episode was.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Both sides still don't cover it all

by Nicholas Bates - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 7:17 PM

I found myself admiring Ken Burns and liking the message he presented in his video clip for several reasons even after reading the articles written about him. The first reason being that in all forms of telling history one can only contain so much information. If I were to tell you of what I thought happened during an event in my life, it may have a completely different, and even possibly opposite, occurrence than someone else who had been there and witnessed the same event. So much of life to include history is in the eyes and experience of the point of view that you are trying to look at it from. The second reason being that the amount of information given was in depth, accurate, and had both sides of the war being covered. Too often people will ignore the facts of one side so that the party of their choice is the one that seems to be in the "right" of the situation. I admire that both sides are being told even if he was concentrating on the element of the union itself and less on the slavery aspect, even though I do agree that it was a major part of the war.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Both sides still don't cover it all

by Kyle McDaniel - Sunday, January 21, 2018, 8:39 PM

I definitely would agree with you. As I have said before on here, I don't think a 2,000 hour film would have really been a hot seller to a mass market. For what length he was given, I have nothing but respect for Ken Burns and the content he is choosing to display. Throughout episode one, slavery is mentioned a couple times, but he reiterates throughout that the people fighting the war were not fighting it specifically for slavery. Even Abraham Lincoln said at one point in episode one that the war was not a war about slavery. So I don't see it as the slavery issue being neglected in the episode; I think it's conveying the very politics behind the war, whereas it was NOT a war against or for slavery; it was one side fighting for a revolution and another trying to keep the country together.

Things are going to get left out, and some are going to be glossed over; but not once have I questioned the authenticity of Ken Burns' film. I think he did the best with what he had, and that is pretty darn good.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

1



[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Both sides still don't cover it all

by Sydney Hall - Sunday, January 21, 2018, 10:33 PM

I also agree with you both. It's impossible to be able to tell a whole historical event without missing some details about certain things, especially when you only have so many minutes to tell the world. It's also clearly evident that Ken Burns went above and beyond when it came to giving factual research and gathering thousands of civil war images just for his documentary series. In Nicholas' post, he said, "If I were to tell you of what I thought happened during an event in my life, it may have a completely different, and even possibly opposite, occurrence than someone else who had been there and witnessed the same event." and I concur with that. Everyone has their own outlook and perspective on (shared) events.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



I Agree with Ken

by Turner Elmore - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 7:35 PM

In the first article there were some critics that were arguing about filmmakers being biased but Ken mentions in the video about going into these projects at "ignorant" so they can learn as they produce the film. Another couple critics mentioned that the Civil War series was lopsided on the war and not so much on the political part or what happens after the war. Ken responded that he made the series to appeal to a large audience and get people interested in the civil war and possibly do their own research and come up with their own opinions.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Admiring Ken Burns?

by Leah Livesay - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 7:58 PM

As I watched the video and read through the readings, I would definitely say that I admire Ken Burns and his way of approaching this with an open mind. It would seem that as a filmmaker it is challenging enough when you have a set of ideas to look for, specific points to make, so I can only imagine how much more challenging it would be to go into a film with a completely open mind as to what ideas and points will be captured in the end. When documenting history, I think it would be important to be open to the facts, ideas and even hearsay. It's hard to determine what exactly may have happened in the past and any information that can be gathered about a time period would seem to be of importance. Burns said in the video that they approach their films with ignorance and curiosity, thus allowing them to be open to the information that is gathered.

After reading the first article, my opinion did not change. People will critique and judge you for any reason they deem necessary, regardless of who you are or what you do. Films can never portray an incident, story or time period exactly. There will always be truths stretched, mistakes and possible false statements. I think it's the overall point that a film is trying to make, it may not be 100 percent accurate but it's the idea and main story that is what is important. Sometimes you have to make points that others won't, throw in ideas to keep the audience's attention and so on. In the first article Robert Toplin says The Civil War made a "tremendous positive impact". I think that's what most filmmakers want to accomplish, making a positive impact on the viewers and keeping them interested and watching, in this case it sounds like that's exactly what Burns did.

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

Sum of ratings:2 (1)



Re: Admiring Ken Burns?

by Matthew Hubbs - Sunday, January 21, 2018, 9:28 PM

Hey Leah,

I enjoyed reading your post and could not agree anymore. I too believe being a filmmaker has many challenges, especially when it comes to historic films. I also like your opinion in your second paragraph about how nobody or no film is going to be 100 percent accurate or perfect. One part of your post stuck out the most to me, "It's the idea and main story that is what is important." You are exactly right.

Matt Hubbs

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Opinion of Ken Burns after Video

by Matthew Hubbs - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 8:27 PM

Yes, I found myself admiring Ken Burns after watching the first video. He was portrayed as a hero and someone to look up to. I was fascinated by his work in the video and I was left wondering how he was able to create such moving documentaries. I also wanted to know where he got all his information and photos since all his topics were from so long ago. The video also showed clips of Jackie Robinson from Ken Burns' "Baseball." Although unrelated to the Civil War, it had a positive effect on me because I'm a huge baseball fan and still playing baseball to this day. I am looking forward to watching his documentary about the Civil War.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: Meet Ken Burns

by Hannah Adams - Wednesday, January 17, 2018, 9:48 PM

In the video that Ken Burns presented I did enjoy him and what he was doing, but I also wasn't inspired or impressed by him. When the video first began I had no idea what he was talking about, and I only figured it out about half way through. He is very passionate about his work, and wants to share it with others; however, he seems like he is just doing it for the money. My opinions changed a little while reading the second article because he wants the audience to get the hint and make connections for themselves. He states, "I trusted my audience to make greater leaps and intellectual connections than most documentary films." I think that a good director shouldn't think less of his audience, so maybe he isn't doing it just for the money.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

The Civil War Today ►

