



Administration

Navigation

Student Support

HST 209: American History: Civil War W17 (Escobar 31664)

Home ► Winter 2017 ► HST 209 W17 (Escobar 31664) ► Week 8 - 1864 - Most Hallowed Ground ► Week 8 Forum ► Petersburg



Search forums

Week 8 Forum

Petersburg

• [Subscribe](#)

◀ Petersburg

Display replies in nested form

Move this discussion to ...

Move

Pin



Petersburg
by Joe Escobar - Saturday, February 25, 2017, 8:19 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Petersburg 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 that focuses on the questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Petersburg

Sum of ratings: - [Permalink](#) | [Edit](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



The subtle biases in the Petersburg documentary
by Josh Myhre - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 10:25 AM

It was interesting how the subtle biases of these southern historians effected the kinds of information they were giving us. The whole documentary seemed to be trying to paint Petersburg as a tragic affair *for* southerners; Burns seems to try to paint the whole civil war as a tragic affair, but for America as a whole. I feel the biases were most glaringly obvious in the discussion of the commanders on either side.

At about the 8 minute mark, one historian, in a single breath, describes Lee as “stunningly handsome” and a genius and then describes Grant as being devoid of any charisma, his only positive quality being persistence. Later in the documentary, at about the 40 minute mark, they describe Grant as “never [becoming] anything more than an old shopkeeper from Illinois.” Are you kidding me? Grant is the man who finally beat back Lee, widely considered to be one of the greatest military minds of all time! Grant later became president! Does that count for nothing? I was a little bit awe struck at the “shopkeeper” comment. The southern historians in this documentary really seem to hold Grant in a lot of distaste, almost in disbelief that he could have ever beaten their golden boy Lee. Two of the historians seem to think that it was only through a stroke of great luck that Grant ever managed to put a siege on Petersburg, and it was only through a greater stroke of luck that he succeeded, since the citizens of Petersburg “took patriotic pride” in starving themselves (around 45:00). Contrast this with Shelby Foote arguing in Burns’ documentary (at about the 47:00 mark, episode 7) that the South NEVER stood a chance of winning the war just due to the size and potentiality of the northern war machine.

In addition to this, the Petersburg documentary seems to blame all the union failures in the Overland Campaign of the spring of 1864 on the commanders. They point out that Butler was a political general who had no battle instinct, they point out that Hunter and Sigel were cowards who could never make a decisive move, all the while holding Lee up on a pedestal. Meanwhile, McPherson spends several pages (733-37) discussing what he calls “Cold Harbor Syndrome” – the toll that the campaign was taking on the soldiers, not due to Grant’s pre-constructed grand strategy, but due to the fact that Lee himself was turning Grant’s campaign into a war of attrition by keeping to the shadows. Grant’s only flaw here was that he refused to retreat. The Petersburg documentary seems to completely discount the impact of the soldiers themselves during battle. Of course it’s going to be a lot more difficult for an offensive force to make headway against substantial entrenchments when the soldiers have been battling to the death every day for a month. I can’t even imagine the level of exhaustion that these soldiers must have been feeling.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: The subtle biases in the Petersburg documentary

by Spencer Kellar - Friday, March 3, 2017, 7:15 PM

That's a good point on the Cold Harbor syndrome, although I disagree that the Petersburg documentary completely discounted the impact of the soldiers on battle. Instead of pointing out that the men were tired of ceaseless bloody conflict however, James I. Robertson discusses the fact that the new recruits of 1864 were poor fighters. As Robertson says, "a major reason behind the Union reverses was a change in army make-up. It is an axiom of warfare that the first men to rush to arms are the best. Progressively after 1862, the quality of the new men coming in to the Union armies gradually declined...By late 1864, the new Billy Yanks in front of Petersburg were substitutes, draftees and men bought with bounties. They performed poorly, and sapped much of the luster from the proud Army of the Potomac" (Petersburg 39:16).

McPherson concurs, writing that there's "little wonder that the Army of Potomac did not fight at Petersburg with the 'vigor and force' it had shown in the Wilderness – It was no longer the same army. Many...had been killed or wounded; thousands of others...had left the war or were unwilling to sacrifice their lives during the few days before leaving" (page 741).

That's not to excuse the lack of a discussion on morale in the Petersburg film. Ken Burns touches on it, using primary sources like he does so well. As the New York World wrote, "who shall revive the withered hopes that bloomed at the opening of Grant's campaign? All are tired of this damnable tragedy" (Civil War 14:16). If I had to guess, I would chalk it up to a difference in perspective. The Petersburg documentary was clearly more concerned about straight military tactics than the feelings of soldiers. I suppose, if I wanted to put on my tin-foil hat, it could have been a subtle way to craft a narrative that Grant only beat Lee because of sheer numbers, as his forces obviously weren't up to snuff (and Robertson mentions nothing of Confederate morale in that same segment).

Speaking of which, I totally agree with you on the Petersburg depiction of Union generals. As I wrote in my first post, most of them are depicted as cowards and morons. But I think you're not giving them enough credit on their depiction of Grant. Sure, they present the Union general as being the direct opposite of his charming and proficient southern counterpart in many ways. On the flipside though, he's really the only Union general that gets any credit at all. That shopkeeper comment, for example, is taken a bit out of context.

The full quote:

"But U.S. Grant was a different sort of man. It's an example of the essential humility of Grant that for the first months that he was here, he refused to take over a very comfortable house only a few hundred yards away. Instead, he lived outdoors in his tent...It's so typical of this man who never really became anything more than that old storekeeper from Galena, Illinois who never could put on the airs of highest station" (Petersburg 41:08).

Obviously, the point they are trying to make is that Grant, in contrast to some Union generals, was more comfortable living amongst his men. His humility is a sign of his virtue as a leader. They aren't saying he never amounted to anything, but that success and a promotion never went to Grant's head.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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



Re: The subtle biases in the Petersburg documentary

by Josh Myhre - Saturday, March 4, 2017, 8:09 AM

In regards to the quality of troops - Yes, the Petersburg documentary does mention that the union soldiers were generally more green than previously in the war, and that the more experienced soldiers had been rapidly dying off. But, it was really only briefly mentioned once. I'm pretty impressed you even managed to find the quote, it was such a short little aside. However, the Petersburg documentary fails to mention that the same thing was happening to Lee's army. McPherson points out (p.743) that the Army of North Virginia suffered from a similar casualty and desertion rate. McPherson also mentions how morale had been depleting steadily since Gettysburg (681). McPherson also mentions how thousands of men "discharged themselves" and were heading home to feed their families, because the whole country was starving (613). These are all smaller points, but if the Petersburg documentary wanted to offer a fair comparison of troops, then it would have brought up at least some of these points.

In regards to Grant - you're right that they pay Grant a little bit more respect than any of the other union generals, but I don't think I'm taking the shopkeeper comment egregiously out of context. The comment felt patronizing, in a way. Similar to the way someone might say "you throw pretty well, for a girl." The comment seemed to put Grant into a separate category which changes the criteria of evaluation. "He was a pretty good general, for a shopkeeper." I think it's an essential point about Grant's leadership style that he wore plain clothes and slept in shanties like his troops. It's one of the few examples from history of a humble military victor - this man was a highly successful general but was the opposite of a Napoleon. But I think to say that he "never became anything more than a shopkeeper from Illinois" is a little bit condescending. Grant became much, much more than a small town shop clerk.

Sum of ratings:3 (1)

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



Re: The subtle biases in the Petersburg documentary

by Jordan Okoniewski - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 5:52 PM

I do think their criticisms of Grant seemed pretty biased, especially in the context of their "stunningly handsome" comment about Lee (I had to play that back to make sure I had heard it correctly). Grant was not without his failures (though interestingly, his nickname of "Butcher" for having so many of his own men killed is probably one that could also be applied to Lee, for his strategy of being super aggressive with much more limited man power), but I feel like a lot of the criticisms he gets for being shabby and common and unpresentable kind of make him more endearing in an everyman sense. The fact that his name wasn't even Ulysses S. Grant, but he just didn't care to correct the clerical error that recorded his name as such speaks a lot to this. This really makes him look good when compared to Burnside's complete failure as a General and total vanity as a facial hair groomer or Generals Liedle and Ferraro drinking in their bombproof shelter during the Battle of the Crater. Also when you consider how a lot of the officers in the Union were political appointments, Grant's rejection of all things fancy comes across as a breath of fresh air, and most southerners critiques of him just make him more endearing.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: The subtle biases in the Petersburg documentary

by Josh Myhre - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 6:43 PM

All valid points! I loved the little factoid about his name. That he just didn't care to fix it is hilarious to me

Sum of ratings:0 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

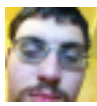


Re: The subtle biases in the Petersburg documentary

by Spencer Kellar - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 9:14 PM

See, I view it in a completely different manner. When William C. Davis made those comments on Grant, I really do believe he was *trying* to be complimentary. I just think he worded it poorly. In fact, I think Davis would agree with all of your points about Grant being an everyman, because that's exactly what he was trying to say. Grant the Union general and Grant the U.S. President were no different than Grant the shopkeeper from Illinois, because success never changed him. Davis was trying to play up Grant's humble nature in my opinion, but I can see how the way he phrased it made the whole thing seem questionable.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: The subtle biases in the Petersburg documentary

by Zachary Embree - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 11:48 PM

I definitely agree that the series showed a significant bias towards Lee throughout the coverage of the battle. I find that many of those who look positively on the Confederacy tend to look upon Lee as a general who was sold out by the government and lionize him for his victories. That tendency shows when he heaps praise upon Lee while presenting Grant in a negative light.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)



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



Narrow Focus is Nice Sometimes

by Lillith Ka'at - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 12:34 PM

This documentary helped me to digest and comprehend information! I think that there were three real ways it helped - and the first was the fact that repetition in new words will always help. Secondly, I think that in general, I learn better when I'm watching a person talk, even if what they're saying were the same as a voice-over on top of some still photos. This documentary relied more on watching people talk with photo cut-ins rather than the other way around. Which, again, less to do with the content of what they were saying as being inherently useful, more with directing choices.

But the third reason that it helped me was because it was so specific in what it was discussing. I often find myself trying to place events on a mental timeline.

Presumably our reading or a documentary will progress through events in a linear way... But if it's covering two sides, it may need to back-track at times. Plus there's so much travel, and so many different areas and different battles - so I often find myself lost in where events take place. They'll say, "this took two months," and then I spend the next couple minutes trying to figure out if the rest of what they say is during those two months or after them. I lose track of which battle we're in, and sometimes miss the transitions from one day to another. Not through flaws of the work, but through my brain being an anxious trash machine. But when watching a documentary that focuses on a specific chunk of time, the stress of my brain doing that is alleviated, because I know that all of what they discuss is central to a certain area, or event. (In this case, Petersburg.) This lets me take in more of what they're actually saying about the events instead of sitting around trapped in my own head going "wait, have I lost track of something yet?"

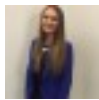
I think that it's definitely worth while to have this hyper-focused piece on one specific spot in the civil war - because why not? We have plenty of 'big picture' works, like our book and the Ken Burns' videos. We have plenty of text books with the goal of analyzing the entire civil war, and those are great. But it does not take away from anything to have supplementary material with a more focused topic. I think that... On one hand, I'm not inclined to give much sympathy to the confederacy, so I can't say I'm emotionally moved by the So Sad Background Music™ or the heavy lean in

language. (Referring to southern leaders as "heroic," describing them as "saving" people and their country. Describing union leaders by their flaws etc.) But on the other hand, if we want to study history, as per all my forum posts, it's best to have as many eyes and perspectives on it as we can.

And as always, I think it's best to have details on how things were within situations rather than just a chronological recap of events. Even if the background music is a little ham-handed, and the choice in stories they tell is subjectively not to my taste, I still prefer hearing those almost anecdotal stories. (Specifically referring to the story they told of the dying soldier being assured the day was theirs.)

I really can't imagine looking at a documentary and saying, "no, this isn't worth while, it's too specific." The closest I can imagine is saying, "this isn't worth while for our class," or "for our studies," but not that it wasn't a worth while task to create it.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Narrow Focus is Nice Sometimes

by Bailey Tillotson - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 11:45 PM

I can definitely relate on your points, especially your third one. The repetition was helpful to cover these subjects, I feel more confident after watching the documentary. I also find myself confusing events or wondering for a few minutes if what they are talking about was related to the subject before or not. So the specificity of this documentary was helpful in narrowing what I was learning.

I also believed that this was a different way and perhaps a good thing to get a one sided story to an event, such as Petersburg. I was a little entertained by the dramatic subtleties, such as the music and the way they talked about the Confederate generals versus the Union's; portraying the Union as the bad guy or not as competent, while the Confederate generals, especially Grant, were so humble, skilled and just over all amazing men.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



tactics in the microcosm

by Jordan Okoniewski - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 9:36 PM

Wars are tremendously huge events, and when learning about them there is always so much that can be covered. There are the cultural and economical impacts on the countries involved, the generals and politicians who make or break their careers by them, and then the battles themselves. It seems like you can always zoom in more and still learn something. That's why I rather liked the Petersburg: Graveyard of The Confederacy documentary. It devoted an hour to just teaching about the in's and out's of one location and chapter of the war.

I think one topic especially that benefitted from this detailed format was the area of tactics. I often feel like we don't learn enough about tactics in historical wars other than very general things (the South was trying to fight a war of attrition and Lee was very aggressive; the North had a lot of very hesitant, incompetent officers and participated in total warfare). I also feel like you don't often enough get a sense of the importance of the locations people are fighting for in war. A lot of times you just kind of get a sense that battles happened where they happened because that's where people were. This documentary helped both of those things. You got a sense of the importance of Drewry's Bluff, with its overlook of and ability to defend the James River. You learned about Beauregard's ruse and pincer attack on Butler there. And they described in great detail the importance of Petersburg itself, in that it was connected both to the Appomattox tributary of the James River, and to most of the railroads going through the Carolinas. You see why losing it was a death blow to the Confederates, for reasons besides the fact that it's only about 25 miles from Richmond.

Sum of ratings: 3 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

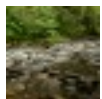


Re: tactics in the microcosm

by Jordan Okoniewski - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 9:41 PM

I thought you also got a good sense of why the Confederates attempted their highly unsuccessful attack on Ft Stedmon. With its proximity to Petersburg, its distance to the railway to City Point, and the fact that it was so run down from the winter, it was the perfect spot for Lee's favored "attack to drive them away" strategy. Unfortunately for the South they just didn't have the man power to pull it off. This is something I would not have known about if not for the Petersburg documentary.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Re: tactics in the microcosm

by Joseph Miller - Friday, March 3, 2017, 9:21 PM

I know the Petersburg documentary talks about the size difference in army's, but I think the book and Burns, have done a pretty good job at showing the lopsidedness of the two. If I remember right the Union had roughly 2 million of the 2,750,000 soldiers total that fought during the Civil War. I mean the Union had just under 75% of the soldiers fighting during the war. They also had black soldiers fighting as well. 179,000 just in black soldiers, when south had 750,000 total. I think from the beginning we've known this was a lopsided affair. I don't feel like anyone's held that back. That seems to be the whole reason behind Jefferson Davis and his offensive/defensive strategy. Or more like defensive strategy. The book, as well as Burn's point out that Jefferson Davis knew, along

with a lot of other people that they couldn't compete when it came to gathering soldiers. His only choice was to go on the defensive. Lee as well. Remember the Appomattox Courthouse, Grant had 120,000 soldiers to Lee's 30,000. It's been a lopsided affair from the start.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: tactics in the microcosm

by Josh Myhre - Saturday, March 4, 2017, 8:22 AM

Totally a lopsided affair from the start. I thought it was very interesting that in episode 7 of Burns' documentary, Shelby Foote talks about how just due to the sheer size of the union war effort and industrial capacity, the South never stood a real chance of winning (about 47:00 minutes in). Don't forget though, the hubris of the southern soldier. Southerners were constantly under the impression that one southerner could "lick ten yankees" (316). So in the minds of the southerners, 25% of troops in the war was more than enough for them to win. In addition to this, the South never really *needed* to fight an offensive war. They had already set up the Confederacy, they only needed to defend it from invaders. Why would you try to lash out when all you have to do is stay behind your shield? This put the South at a tactical advantage, because they knew the terrain better (think of stories where union generals can't even find accurate maps of the regions they're invading) and they can pick the sites of battle (a good example would be the Wilderness battles). It's not all just troop numbers, even though that's a large part of it. I think the playing field was more even than comparison of troops numbers or industrial capacity would indicate.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: tactics in the microcosm

by Jordan Okoniewski - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 6:06 PM

I completely agree with Shelby Foote on this. The thing is, if the South could have won the Civil War, they would have. Look at how poor the Union's start to the war was and how poor most of their leadership was. Grant's promotion is often heralded as a turning point in the war, but his promotion to Lt. General didn't occur until March of '64, meaning he was really only in charge for about a year and two months. Meaning for about 3/4 of the war the North had Scott, McClellan, and Halleck in charge, all just hesitating in pretty much every scenario. If the South could have won, they would have, but they just didn't have the men, the supplies, or the political/economic strength that the North had.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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



Re: tactics in the microcosm

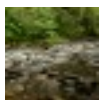
by Spencer Kellar - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 11:20 PM

I think Foote is probably right, in that the Union would have ramped up the effort if it felt that circumstances were particularly dire. On the other hand, I'm not totally sold on this idea that the South never had a chance. That's not evident to me, after doing the readings and watching the documentaries. It was always a longshot, but if a couple of events had gone differently, things could have become interesting. What if the Confederates had succeeded in recruiting England and/or France as allies? What if Missouri and Kentucky had left the Union? What if General Hood had been able to hold Atlanta, at least past Lincoln's bid for re-election? Would George McLellan have won the election of 1864, and dropped emancipation in an effort to bring peace?

A lot of "what if" questions, I know. I don't believe the Confederates ever had a chance to outright win the war, but I think they could have conceivably fought the Union to a draw, if circumstances had been different.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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



Re: tactics in the microcosm

by Joseph Miller - Friday, March 3, 2017, 9:10 PM

Your point on Drewry's Bluff I think is a big miss on Burn's episode. I have to watch it again, but I don't remember them talking about it. It seems Burn's is so caught up with the land battles because of the importance of them obviously, but the fact that it could have been a quicker death to the South had they not had this Bluff well fortified. The fact that they pushed back the ironclad ships and others was fascinating and an interesting new piece of information and perspective as well. To actually see it in the episode, it was a big area they had to cover, to imagine the ships trying to get through with cannon balls being hurled at them, again, is fascinating.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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



Subtle Manipulation and Local Bias

by Timothy Lucas - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 10:07 PM

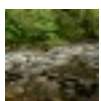
I found the *Civil War in Virginia* to be a very worthwhile watch. There certainly was a charm to the lower quality production, yet well delivered information by the various speakers. In contrast to Burns attempting an organic approach in things like the music score, this one was very heavy handed with somber tones in several moments particularly when discussing a loss to the Union, death of a Confederate officer or after describing Confederate citizens sacrifice during the siege at around 45:38.

There are certainly times when the movie praises figures such as Grant, but even during the praise there are several barbs that cut at his character compared to Lee, the consummate Southern general and aristocrat. At 7:45 the picture of Grant may as well have a caption that says 'DERP,' while Grant is described as 'western yeoman stalk.' This is after we had just seen much high praise and a several flattering pictures of Lee. This is clearly an attempt to make your target and likely local audience happy while painting the Union commander in a negative light compared to their paternal hero.

While subtle manipulation such as the previous example makes you want to smile and shake your head, at 32:19 Robertson commits the largest dog-whistle statement to bigotry in the entire movie. Moments before the statement of 'their conduct bringing praise, both genuine and grudging' puts the quality of service of black soldiers in question. Robertson then says, 'most of those were ex slaves, illiterate and accustomed to servile obedience' as we see a slightly characterized drawing of black people that could be seen as less than flattering. He goes on to say, 'how good they were depended in great part on their white officers who led them.' The quality of a commander is certainly a factor in battle, but this statement removes any recognition of service by black soldiers and subversively elevates whites above blacks in his narrative.

The tactical information in the movie is fascinating, and certainly seems as well researched as it is presented which gives you a clear understanding of not only the larger picture of the battle, but harrowing details such as the narrator standing in the crater of the giant blast. Even though Robertson ends the movie acknowledging that Lee did surrender his army and a new nation indivisible, was born - I cannot help but feel like he is telling the story from an independent Virginia, or at least one that laments every aspect of the Confederate defeat of Petersburg.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Subtle Manipulation and Local Bias

by Joseph Miller - Friday, March 3, 2017, 9:02 PM

The whole dig on the black soldiers took me a little by surprise as well. I could see them saying it in a dozen different ways in regards to their poor leadership when it came to the crater other than calling them incompetent and only as good as the officers who lead them. You can definitely tell their feelings are still hurt. I liked seeing the actual battle fields, the crater, and fortifications, but I could tell it was all

about putting the Union down. With Grant being a stoop an Lee's men would follow him anywhere. That's the good thing about perspective. It's different for everyone. After seeing the video it did make me want to go and see some of the battle fields. It sold me.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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



Re: Subtle Manipulation and Local Bias

by Josh Myhre - Saturday, March 4, 2017, 8:37 AM

That's one thing I *really* liked about this documentary - that they *showed* you what the Crater looked like, that they *showed* you what the earthworks around trenches looked like, that they *show* you the massive size of the river that Grant built his pontoon bridge across. Up until now, I hadn't realized that this sort of thing had even been missing from the Burns series, but I loved having these visuals. I can read about the 2000 foot pontoon bridge but I sort of glossed over it without the visual. The visual of that massive river (I've never seen a river that big!) really hammered in what an amazing feat of construction that pontoon bridge was. Having these visuals really helped me connect a lot more to the real-world activity of the war.

But that being said, I don't think you could be more right about depictions of Grant or racism in this documentary. The "servile obedience" comment was pretty shocking. I understand the point that they were trying to make (just that these soldiers were largely uneducated, but hey, so were a *lot* of the confederate soldiers), but the way they said it just fit so well into the "paternalistic planter" ideology that slaveholders used to justify slavery at the time. I was very surprised to hear this kind of thinking come from academics and intellectuals who have spent their life studying history.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

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



Re: Subtle Manipulation and Local Bias

by Jordan Okoniewski - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 5:24 PM

Yeah, I definitely won't make apologies for the rather callus tone when discussing the contributions of black soldiers in the Civil War. Though I was kind of expecting that from the line Escobar dropped in the description about how "this documentary will be the most pro-Southern, Confederate-friendly source that you will encounter all term long in this course."

That being said, the level of detail brought to the Battle of the Crater was fascinating - something I've been curious about since I saw Cold Mountain back in 2003. I've read a bit about it since then, but the insight this documentary gave into it was fascinating. I can't imagine building that, let alone having the motivation to do it when the army only half heartedly endorsed the project, let alone being the guy volunteering to go into it to see why all the explosives haven't blown up yet. To see the giant bowl that's still there, and frame work for the tunnel is amazing. It's interesting; last week I wrote about how much I appreciate Burns not using re-enactors in his documentaries, and as an extension of that, how much I like his particular style. It's almost all old photos (with some illustrations thrown in) or interviews with historians. This documentary argued well for the other side of that - showing how valuable on location filming at historic sights can be. Particularly showing the Earth Works at Petersburg. You get a sense for why the Army of the Potomac decided to seige - fighting through the abatis, the stumps connected with telephone wire to trip people, the sharpened logs to impale and bottleneck charging troops, the moat, and finally the mud wall, would have been suicide for the Northerners.

Sum of ratings:2 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Re: Subtle Manipulation and Local Bias

by Bailey Tillotson - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 11:35 PM

I completely agree, especially on how you felt about the visual aspect we received from the documentary that we don't get through the book or from the episodes all the time. This documentary was specific and I felt that I was there and could imagine how the soldiers lived to an extent. I liked how he even brought us to the cabin that Grant stayed in while telling us how humble and highly thought of he was. We then see a picture of the other cabins at the time and even his family who came to live with him. But I do have to remind myself how "pro-confederate" this video is. The video makes the confederacy seem so put together and respectable, which I'm sure it was, but it is so one sided I find myself doubting certain claims or statements such as when the same man refers to Grant as nothing more than a storekeeper who didn't amount to much all the while mounting, maintaining and overseeing the largest, most complex military enterprise that had ever taken place on the continent. It just seems he is downplaying Grant as such a simple man but at the same time was so amazing. Which he was successful and their is truth in everything they say.

I guess in the end, I appreciate the different viewpoint. Instead of a general look at both sides of the war, we see more into the South's and perhaps get a glimpse of what people there thought. Reminds me of today's politics,

Democrats and Republican's arguing and arguing over who's right and wrong; when in the end everyone has their own view and opinion. I feel that it is good to be educated in both sides of a subject and gather your own opinion.

Sum of ratings: -

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



Required Details

by Zachary Embree - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 10:39 PM

One thing I tend to be wary of when watching documentary series is when too much detail is included. Otherwise important information can be buried in all the facts being presented to the audience and visualization can be more difficult. I would place the Petersburg video as coming close to that point though it does offer insights into both sides of the battle from common soldier to the generals. However I find those insights somewhat smothered. That being said the film definitely contains in-depth information that added to my understanding of how the battle progressed and just why it was so important.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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



Re: Required Details

by Bailey Tillotson - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 11:50 PM

I appreciate your different thoughts on having a detailed source. I can see what you mean on important details being buried when so much information (biased information at that) is thrown at us.

And your comment on the film adding to your understanding of the battle, I assume our teacher really wishes us to go in-depth on Petersburg and get a full and extensive understanding of the importance as you mentioned. I can appreciate our forums on how they proactively teach us, and cause us to reflect so much and thoughtfully.

Sum of ratings:1 (1)

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



Thoughts on Documentary

by Bailey Tillotson - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 11:09 PM

I thought this documentary was helpful and very informing. It was an in-depth look into Petersburg and it held my attention. I think it wrapped up all of our sources we used nicely, with the reading and the Ken Burns episode to add detail. I liked the imagery provided, and that he went to the James river that Grant moved his men on with the 2200 foot pontoon bridge, not something we

would see in the episodes we watch. Providing a mainly confederate side of things was refreshing, I feel that a lot of the time the South is viewed as the bad guy, when in fact not everyone was pro slavery or mean hearted people. I also liked the photos provided of city point (biggest union supply base), of the docks where so many ships were in and out of bringing food, supplies and materials. Also including photos of the shops, bakeries, and other buildings for the soldiers use, this definitely emphasized how important city point was for the Confederate army to sustain so long and have access to Richmond and Petersburg (almost 10 months).

Sum of ratings:3 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Documentary Adds Context

by Spencer Kellar - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 11:50 PM

I think the Petersburg documentary did a fine job of filling in the blanks left by Ken Burns and James McPherson (although I have not finished chapter 26, admittedly, so I assume McPherson still has more to write on the subject). I particularly enjoyed A. Wilson Greene's walkthrough of the Confederate's "earthworks" at the 35-minute mark. It's one thing to read that Petersburg was heavily fortified, but it's another to see it on screen. After being shown the abatisses and other obstacles awaiting Union forces, it's no wonder they suffered so many casualties when Grant eventually attacked Lee outside of Petersburg.

I did find the Confederate bias to be as advertised in the documentary. Particularly, when it came to Union generals. In fairness, they give Ulysses S. Grant his fair share of praise. But as for the rest, the movie depicts them as clueless, blundering and incompetent. Which isn't far from the truth, as McPherson himself writes extensively about the Union generals and their many failures. But McPherson and Burns spend time on the mistakes of Confederate military leaders as well, which this documentary does not seem to do.

William C. Davis in particular gives a more critical insight on Union officers than the other two sources in our class. For example, when talking about the Battle of the Crater, he describes the last-second change to who would lead the assault as being done "in true [Ambrose] Burnside fashion." Davis also called the new man leading the charge, James H. Ledlie, "one of the worst commanders in the Union army, even though his was a good division" (Petersburg 28:40).

Compare this to McPherson, who mentions nothing of Burnside's indecisiveness in that moment. He does write that Ledlie "had a mediocre record and an alcohol problem" and "stayed behind in the trenches drinking rum" while the battle was waged (McPherson p.759). The author does not go as far as to call Ledlie one of the worst the Union had to offer, however. It's subtle in this example and more obvious in others, but it doesn't bother me quite as much since other sources are used in this class. Just thought it was interesting.

As for whether this documentary was a “worthwhile task,” I think it was. I understand our other sources spent more time on the Atlanta campaign and the political intrigue of 1864 for a reason, as those two events were arguably more important and needed more time. But Petersburg is also important, if for nothing else than because it occupied and forced Robert E. Lee’s army to cease their movement, and because it caused the Confederates to vacate their capital of Richmond. So clearly, time spent watching a documentary on the siege was worth it in my eyes.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) Permalink | Show parent | Edit | Split | Delete | Reply



Peterson Documentary Pleasing

by Joseph Miller - Thursday, March 2, 2017, 11:18 AM

The one thing I liked about the perspective of The Graveyard of the Confederacy was the fact you got to see historical sites. You were shown the trenches, another spot where they had the brush and twigs all piled up, then the stumps, and after that huge spear poles, then motes, and dirt walls. You don’t really get to see that in the pictures. Awe inspiring to see the crater at Petersburg as well.

Burns focused more on the stalemate of Petersburg and land battles. He did give Forrest due credit as well. He didn’t talk negatively about him, other than saying he was the most terrifying Confederate General. Which was more of a compliment, I would say. The Graveyard series, it wasn’t as kind. They talked about How Grant was stoop and slouchy, and nothing about him, other than his historic wins in battle, was inspirational. Biased comment. They did talk about his undying commitment and not giving in, but were quick to point out all the mistakes in detail. Even though he wasn’t at the crater, they were sure to point out every mistake, including how General Ferrero, sat in his bunker getting drunk while his men made mistake after mistake by not going soon enough, General’s fault, then dumping right in to the crater instead of its outskirts. It allowed the Confederates to regroup and slaughter his black troops from above.

Something the Graveyard documentary talks about is Drewry’s Bluff. I’m not sure Burn’s even really talked about this. It talked quite a bit on the fact the union was coming up James River and this fortified fort nearly destroyed the union and advanced and they had to turn and run.

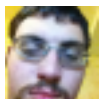
The Graveyard documentary also talked a lot about the discouragement on the Union side when it came to soldiers. They also mentioned the fact the Union soldiers weren’t any good anymore because most had gotten out that survived and they weren’t reenlisting. The new soldiers coming in to replace them were substandard soldiers. Substandard was the word used in the episode. They also were quick to point out that black soldiers were illiterate and only as good as their officers. When referencing Lee’s army, they said Lee’s soldiers loved him, thought of him as a father figure, would do anything for him.

The Burn's video also talks about Petersburg and how long it took, but they focus on the feelings of the northerners and how it was wearing everyone thin, emotionally on the subject. They talked about the stalemate and the election coming. Democrats wanted an end to the war. General McClellan nominated by Democrats. The campaign was ugly and all about war. Their soldiers were being slaughtered and it was dragging on. It would last forever until the last man was killed. The Graveyard documentary however, painted a picture, of them receiving up to 150 ships a day of supplies. They had bakers, baking so much bread that sometimes it would be warm when the soldiers got it. The documentary made it seem less of a hardship than Burn's.

I have more differences as well, but I'll leave it at that for now. Overall, Burn's leaves things out that make the Union look even less organized and dysfunctional, and the Graveyard series doesn't short change you at all on all the things the Union did wrong. While doing this it gives us more information that was withheld. Drewry's Bluff for one.

I definitely think this was a worthwhile task. Just as writing a term paper you need to get multiple sources. You can't rely on just one. To be considered legitimate, the more credible sources you use, the better information you are going to put out or get. One thing I like about this class is the fact were always given new leads to information. We're not stuck with one source.

Sum of ratings:3 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)



Southern Quality

by Zachary Embree - Sunday, March 5, 2017, 11:40 PM

I have found that this documentary really fails to get into how the lack of resources in both men and materials effected the south. As the documentary said, the North did have quite a few green soldiers but it also fails to mention one reason that the South did not have so many was they were running out of men altogether. I find that overall Burns does a much better job of bringing up how the resources available to each side swayed the outcome. In one of more recent chapters of his documentary Burns made a point to bring out how the Union used a repeating rifle to great effect in Sherman's army.

Sum of ratings:1 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)

◀ Petersburg



You are logged in as Joe Escobar (Log out)
HST 209 W17 (Escobar 31664)