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Filmmaker Ken Burns Reminds John Kelly What Caused The Civil War: Slavery

President Donald Trump's chief of staff said Monday a "lack of an ability to compromise" triggered the war.

By [Chris D'Angelo](#)

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WASHINGTON — Documentary filmmaker [Ken Burns](#) has weighed in on White House Chief of Staff [John Kelly's controversial comments](#) about the Civil War, saying that while many factors contributed to the conflict, one caused it: slavery.

Burns's post to Twitter comes a day after Kelly told Fox News' Laura Ingraham that a "[lack of an ability to compromise led to the Civil War](#)." Kelly went on to defend Confederate monuments, describe Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee as "an honorable man" who "gave up his country to fight for his state," and say that "men and women of good faith on both sides made their stand where their conscience had to make their stand."

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The backlash was fierce. In a post to Twitter, author [Ta-Nehisi Coates](#) said it was “[shocking that someone charged with defending](#) their country, in some profound way, does not comprehend the country they claim to defend.” Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.), the sole black Senate Republican, said: “There was no compromise to make — only a choice between continuing slavery and ending it.”

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders [defended Kelly's comments](#) during a briefing Tuesday, saying “because you don't like history doesn't mean that you can erase it and pretend that it didn't happen.” She also pointed to Burns' 1990 PBS documentary, “The Civil War.”

“I don't know that I'm going to get into debating the Civil War, but I do know that many historians, [including Shelby Foote](#) in Ken Burns's famous Civil War documentary, agree that a failure to compromise was a cause of the Civil War,” Sanders said. “There are a lot of historians that think that.”

Burns later posted to Twitter a quote from historian Barbara Fields that is included in his film.

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