



Ken Burns

Ken Burns has been making films for more than thirty years. Since the Academy Award nominated *Brooklyn Bridge* in 1981, Ken has gone on to direct and produce some of the most acclaimed historical documentaries ever made. The late historian Stephen Ambrose said of his films, "More Americans get their history from Ken Burns than any other source." A December 2002 poll conducted by *Real Screen Magazine* listed *The Civil War* as second only to Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* as the "most influential documentary of all time," and named Ken Burns and Robert Flaherty as the "most influential documentary makers" of all time. In March 2009, David Zurawik of *Baltimoresun.com* said, "... Burns is not only the greatest documentarian of the day, but also the most influential filmmaker period. That includes feature filmmakers like George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. I say that because Burns not only turned millions of persons onto history with his films, he showed us a new way of looking at our collective past and ourselves." Ken's films have won ten Emmy Awards and two Oscar nominations, and in September 2008, at the News & Documentary Emmy Awards, Ken was honored by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences with a Lifetime Achievement Award.

Ken has been the recipient of more than twenty honorary degrees and has delivered many treasured commencement addresses. He is a sought after public speaker, appearing at colleges, civic organizations and business groups throughout the country.

Currently, Ken is once again partnering with Dayton Duncan, producing and directing a major series on the history of the national parks. *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* focuses on the ideas and individuals that helped propel the parks into existence. Filmed over the course of more than six years at some of nature's most spectacular locales – from Acadia to Yosemite, Yellowstone to the Grand Canyon, the Everglades of Florida to the Gates of the Arctic in Alaska – the heart of the story is nonetheless a story of people from every conceivable background – rich and poor; famous and unknown; soldiers and scientists; natives and newcomers; idealists, artists and entrepreneurs; people who were willing to devote themselves to saving some precious portion of the land they loved, and in doing so reminded their fellow citizens of the full meaning of democracy. This six-part film will air on PBS in the fall of 2009.

In addition to the national parks project, Ken is also working on a history of Prohibition and an update to his 1994 epic *Baseball*, both tentatively scheduled to be shown on PBS in 2010.



In September 2007, PBS broadcast *The War*, which Ken co-produced and co-directed with long-time colleague, Lynn Novick. This seven-part film tells the story of the Second World War through the personal accounts of nearly 40 men and women from four quintessentially American towns. The series explores the most intimate human dimensions of the greatest cataclysm in history -- a worldwide catastrophe that touched the lives of every family on every street in every town in America. *The War* was named an official selection at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival and won three Primetime Emmy Awards: Outstanding Writing for Nonfiction Programming, Outstanding Sound Editing for Nonfiction Programming, and Outstanding Voice-over Performance (for narrator Keith David). Robert Bianco of *USA Today* said, "There are works of TV art so extraordinary all you can do is be grateful. With *The War*, gratitude abounds." Keith Olbermann of NBC/MSNBC said, "This is the finest documentary series of the last decade... if not more," and Adam Buckman of the *New York Post* has said "I have spent the better part of my adult life watching TV for a living, and I have never experienced anything more powerful than this."

In January 2005, *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, a two-part film on the life of the first African-American heavyweight boxing champion, aired on PBS. It was produced with Ken's long-time collaborator and editor Paul Barnes, and had its premiere at the 2004 Telluride Film Festival. This film won three Primetime Emmy Awards: Outstanding Nonfiction Special, Outstanding Writing for Nonfiction, and Outstanding Voice-over Performance (for narrator Keith David). Todd McCarthy of *Variety* called it "...irresistibly engrossing...masterly... a knockout..."; while *The New York Times* described it as "monumental...gripping." *Ring Magazine*, "the bible of boxing," said *Unforgivable Blackness* is "...the most wildly entertaining documentary ever."

Horatio's Drive: America's First Road Trip, an account of the first cross-country trip by automobile, was co-produced with Ken's long-time colleague Dayton Duncan. This film aired on PBS in October of 2003, and was screened that same year at the Telluride Film Festival. The film earned the 2003 CINE Golden Eagle Award and, in 2004, the Christopher Award. David Bianculli of the *New York Daily News* said, "This is one drive on which no passenger will be asking impatiently, 'Are we there yet?' The journey, in this case, is the destination." Mark Sachs of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "The detail work by Burns and Duncan offers such an authentic-feeling trip back in time that it's as if viewers have a backseat perch as Jackson puts his cherry-red Winton touring car in gear and heads east."

Mark Twain, a two-part, four-hour portrait of America's funniest and most popular writer, was also co-produced with Dayton Duncan. Winner of the Leon Award for Best Documentary at the St. Louis Film Festival in 2001, the film aired on PBS in January 2002. Ken Ringle of *The Washington Post* wrote, "*Mark Twain* is not only fascinating, funny, inspiring and wise, it's one of the best primers on American literature and culture you could have."



In January 2001, *Jazz*, the third in Ken's trilogy of epic documentaries, which began with *The Civil War* and continued with *Baseball*, was broadcast on PBS. Co-produced with Lynn Novick, this 19-hour, ten-part film explores in detail the culture, politics and dreams that gave birth to jazz music, and follows this most American of art forms from its origins in blues and ragtime through swing, bebop and fusion. Jack Newfield of the *New York Post* said, "*Jazz* is the best American documentary film I have ever seen. Period." Tom Brokaw wrote, "*Jazz* is a masterpiece of American television." John Carmen of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote, "*Jazz* informs, astonishes, and entertains. It invites joy, tears, toe-tapping, pride, and shame and maybe an occasional goose bump."

Not For Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, winner of the prestigious Peabody Award and an Emmy Award, was co-produced with Paul Barnes and aired on PBS in November of 1999. This dual biography tells the story of the two women who almost single-handedly created and spearheaded the women's rights movement in America, changing for the better the lives of a majority of American citizens. As Bob Herbert of *The New York Times* stated: "The latest splendid effort from...Ken Burns is about two women who barely register in the consciousness of late-20th century America, but whose lives were critically important to the freedoms most of us take for granted." The 2000 Peabody Award citation for NFOA reads: "Remarkable...It is an inspiring story of hopes, dashed dreams and dogged determination...NFOA...brings heart, soul and considerable poignancy to the stories of these two leaders of the women's suffrage movement."

Frank Lloyd Wright, co-directed and produced with Lynn Novick, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 1998, and aired on PBS in November of that year. The film, which tells the riveting story of America's foremost architectural genius, is, according to Janet Maslin of *The New York Times*, a "towering two-and-one-half-hour(s)...sure to have a high profile because of the turbulent, colorful life of the architect and the austere magnificence of his work, which is thoughtfully assessed." Kenneth Turan of the *Los Angeles Times* says the film "...has the unbeatable combination of exceptional interview material and beautiful architectural photography put at the service of an astonishing life." In 1999, it won the Peabody Award.

In November 1997, *Lewis and Clark: The Journey of the Corps of Discovery* was released to critical acclaim and garnered the second-highest ratings in Public Television history. This four-hour film, co-produced with Dayton Duncan, chronicles the corps' journey westward on the first official expedition into uncharted spaces in United States history. Tony Scott of *Weekly Variety* called the film "...a visually stunning account...Striking photography, superb editing, informative reportage and little-known anecdotes characterize the latest fine documentary work from Burns," and Don Heckman of the *Los*



Angeles Times wrote, "...superb...a vast landscape that, even on the television screen, underscores the sense of awe reported by Lewis and Clark in their journals."

Thomas Jefferson, a three-hour portrait of our third president, aired in February of 1997. This film explores the contradictions in the man who was revered as the author of the most sacred document in American history and condemned as a lifelong owner of slaves. Walter Goodman of *The New York Times* said: "...*Thomas Jefferson* is a considerable accomplishment, a thoughtful and affecting portrait of the intellectual who captured the essence of a new nation's hopes in phrases that continue to resound around the world." And George Will, in *The Washington Post*, said: "...Ken Burns presents a timely corrective, a visually sumptuous and intellectually judicious appraisal of Jefferson."

In the fall of 1996, *The West*, an eight-part, 12 1/2 hour film series on the American west was released. *The West* is the story of one of the great crossroads in human history, a place where, tragically and heroically, the best of us met the worst of us and nothing was left unchanged. Ken Burns was executive producer and creative consultant for this highly praised series, directed by Stephen Ives, which won the 1997 Erik Barnouw Prize.

Ken Burns was the director, producer, co-writer, chief cinematographer, music director and executive producer of the Public Television series *Baseball*. Four and a half years in the making and eighteen and a half hours in length, this film covers the history of baseball from the 1840s to the present. Through the extensive use of archival photographs and newsreel footage, baseball as a mirror of our larger society was brought to the screen over nine nights during its premiere in September 1994. It became the most watched series in PBS history, attracting more than 45 million viewers. David Bianculli of the *New York Daily News* said, "[*Baseball*]...resonates like a Mozart symphony." Richard Zoglin of *Time* magazine wrote, "*Baseball* is rich in drama, irresistible as nostalgia, and...an instructive window into our national psychology." *Baseball* received numerous awards, including an Emmy, the CINE Golden Eagle Award, the Clarion Award, and the Television Critics Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Sports and Special Programming.

Ken Burns was also the director, producer, co-writer, chief cinematographer, music director and executive producer of the landmark television series *The Civil War*. This film was the highest rated series in the history of American Public Television and attracted an audience of 40 million during its premiere in September 1990. *The New York Times* called it a masterpiece and said that Ken Burns "takes his place as the most accomplished documentary filmmaker of his generation." Tom Shales of *The Washington Post* said, "This is not just good television, nor even just great television. This is heroic television." The columnist George Will said, "If better use has ever been made of television, I have not seen it and do not expect to see better until Ken Burns turns his prodigious talents to his next project." The series has been honored with more than forty major film and television awards, including two Emmy Awards, two Grammy Awards, Producer of the Year Award



from the Producer's Guild, People's Choice Award, Peabody Award, DuPont-Columbia Award, D.W. Griffiths Award, and the \$50,000 Lincoln Prize, among dozens of others.

In 1981, Ken Burns produced and directed his first film for PBS, the Academy Award nominated *Brooklyn Bridge*. During the 1980s he made several other award-winning films, including *The Shakers*; *Statue of Liberty*, also nominated for an Oscar; *Huey Long*, the story of the turbulent southern dictator, which enjoyed a rare theatrical release; *The Congress*; *Thomas Hart Benton*, a portrait of the regionalist artist; and *Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio*. Ken Burns has also produced and directed three films - *William Segal*, *Vézelay*, and *In The Marketplace* - which explore the questions of seeing, searching and being through the work and teachings of philosopher and painter William Segal.

Ken was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1953. He graduated from Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1975 and went on to be one of the co-founders of Florentine Films.