

KENNETH LAUREN BURNS

Almost single-handedly, Ken Burns's documentary films of American history and culture have redefined the medium of filmmaking and raised it to a new level of art. Perhaps his most acclaimed achievement is the series The Civil War, for which he was director, producer, co-writer, chief cinematographer, music director, and executive producer. When the series was first aired on public television in 1990, it attracted an audience of 40 million viewers and went on to receive two Emmy Awards, two Grammy Awards, Producer of the Year Award from the Producer's Guild, the People's Choice Award, the Peabody Award, the Du Pont Columbia Award, the D.W. Griffiths Award, and the Lincoln Prize.

His other documentary films have also earned wide acclaim. Brooklyn Bridge and The Statue of Liberty were nominated for Academy Awards, but each of his productions has earned a long succession of prizes and approval: The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God; Huey Long; The Congress: The History and Promise of Representative Government; Thomas Hart Benton; Lindberg; and Empire of the Air: The Men Who Made Radio. Ken Burns's Baseball, a nine-part series on the history of the national pastime, is now complete and will be aired later this year.

A graduate of Hampshire College, he has received honorary degrees from Dartmouth College, Amherst College, Bowdoin College, the University of Delaware, Case Western Reserve University, and other institutions. In 1991, Ken Burns announced his decision to donate his papers and working materials to the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He completed the initial transfers in 1993.

Speaking of his ambition as a filmmaker, he has said, "I started off my career wanting to be the next John Ford. I was particularly drawn to the way his films seemed not just to retell but essentially to be American stories." The work of Ken Burns is indeed embodying stories of America at the highest level of documentary journalism and art. For his creative innovations as historian, filmmaker, and artist, the University takes profound pleasure in conferring upon him this honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.