

## KEN BURNS BIOGRAPHY - FULL

Ken Burns has been making documentary films for almost fifty 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. 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 *The Baltimore Sun* 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." The late historian Stephen Ambrose said of his films, "More Americans get their history from Ken Burns than any other source." And Wynton Marsalis has called Ken "a master of timing, and of knowing the sweet spot of a story, of how to ask questions to get to the basic human feeling and to draw out the true spirit of a given subject." Ken's films have been honored with dozens of major awards, including sixteen Emmy Awards, two Grammy Awards and two Oscar nominations. In September of 2008, at the News & Documentary Emmy Awards, Ken was honored by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences with a Lifetime Achievement Award. In November of 2022, Ken was inducted into the Television Academy Hall of Fame.

Ken has been the recipient of more than thirty 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.

Future film projects include *Leonardo da Vinci*, *The American Revolution*, *Emancipation to Exodus*, and *LBJ & the Great Society*, among others.

In October 2023 PBS broadcast *The American Buffalo*, a two-part, four-hour film that, across more than 10,000 years of North American history, tells the story of the buffalo's evolution—including the near extinction of the species in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The film explores the buffalo's significance to the Great Plains and its relationship to the Indigenous Peoples of North America.

In September 2022 PBS broadcast *The U.S and the Holocaust*, a three-part, six-hour series that tells the story of how the American people grappled with one of the greatest humanitarian crises of the twentieth century. The film examines the events leading up to and during the Holocaust, dispelling the myths that the American people were entirely ignorant of what was happening to Jews in Europe, or that everyone looked on with callous indifference.

In June 2022 PBS broadcast *Hiding in Plain Sight: Youth Mental Illness*, a two-part, four-hour film that explores America's mental health crisis through the eyes of more than twenty young people and the providers, advocates, family and friends who support them. The interviewees speak about their challenges, difficulty finding treatment and encounters with stigma.

In April 2022 PBS broadcast *Benjamin Franklin*, a two-part, four-hour film that explores the revolutionary life of one of America's most celebrated and compelling personalities. His 84 years spanned nearly the entirety of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, an epoch of momentous change in science, technology, literature, politics and government, change that Franklin himself helped to advance, and ultimately shape our contemporary world.

In September 2021 PBS broadcast *Muhammad Ali*, a four-episode, eight-hours series that follows the life of one of the most consequential men of the 20th century, a three-time heavyweight boxing champion who captivated billions of fans with his combination of speed, agility and power in the ring, and his charm, wit and outspokenness outside of it. At the height of his fame, Ali challenged Americans' racial prejudices, religious biases, and notions about what roles celebrities and athletes play in our society, and inspired people all over the world with his message of pride and self-affirmation.

In April of 2021 PBS broadcast *Hemingway*, a three-episode, six-hour series Ken co-directed with Lynn Novick that chronicles the visionary work and turbulent life of one of the greatest and most influential American writers, weaving together excerpts from his fiction, non-fiction and personal correspondence. The film penetrates the mythology surrounding Hemingway—cultivated by his larger than life exploits, public bravado and occasional tall tale—to reveal a deeply troubled and ultimately tragic figure.

In March 2020 PBS broadcast *East Lake Meadows: A Public Housing Story*, a feature-length documentary that explores the history of public housing by focusing on the experiences of the residents of one housing project in Atlanta, Georgia.

In November 2019 PBS broadcast *College Behind Bars*, a four-part, four-hour film that tells the story of a small group of incarcerated men and women struggling to earn college degrees and turn their lives around in one of the most rigorous and effective prison education programs in the United States – the Bard Prison Initiative.

In September 2019 PBS broadcast *Country Music*, an eight-episode, sixteen-hour series that chronicles the history of this uniquely American art form. From southern Appalachia's songs of struggle, heartbreak and faith to the rollicking western swing of Texas, from California honky tonks to Nashville's *Grand Ole Opry*, the film follows the evolution of country music over the course of the twentieth century, as it eventually emerged to become "America's music." Margaret Renkl of *The New York Times* said: "*Country Music* is a transcendent work of filmmaking with an ambitious agenda: bringing Americans together again."

In September 2018 PBS broadcast *The Mayo Clinic: Faith - Hope - Science*, a two-hour film that explores the 150-year history of this unique medical institution, from its humble beginnings in Minnesota in the aftermath of a devastating tornado up to the present, now treating more than a million patients a year from all 50 states and 150 countries.

In September of 2017 PBS broadcast *The Vietnam War*, a ten-episode, eighteen-hour series Ken co-directed with Lynn Novick that helped prompt a national conversation about the most significant event in American history during the last half of the twentieth century. One of the most-watched documentary series in PBS history, it weaves the compelling stories of American and Vietnamese (North and South) combatants into the larger historical narrative of the conflict—from the seeds of the struggle during French colonial times to the aftermath of America's withdrawal in the mid-1970s; from the battlefields to the streets of American and Vietnamese cities; from broad geopolitics to the intimately personal. *Esquire* magazine called it "perhaps the most definitive cinematic depiction of the complex and controversial conflict." Describing it as a "masterpiece," the *Washington Post* said, "the experience of watching *The Vietnam War* includes terror, horror, disbelief, discovery, disgust, marvel, pride, ambivalence and tears." Renowned film critic and historian David Thomson said: "It seems to me the best film I have ever seen."

In September of 2016 PBS broadcast *Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War*, a 90-minute film that tells the little-known story of a Unitarian minister and his wife – Waitstill and Martha Sharp – who left their home in Wellesley, Massachusetts, to rescue scores of imperiled political dissidents and Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi occupation across Europe before and during World War II. Ken Tucker of Yahoo said of the film, "The modest, meticulous humanism of Ken Burns and all of the documentaries he has produced and directed is on full display...".

In April of 2016 PBS broadcast *Jackie Robinson*, a two-part, four-hour film that tells the story of Jack Roosevelt Robinson's rise from humble origins to cross baseball's color line and become a true American icon, and traces his life-long battle for first class citizenship for all African Americans, which transcended even his remarkable athletic achievements. Honors include an Emmy Award for Outstanding Narrator and a Writers Guild Award.

In March/ April of 2015 PBS broadcast *Cancer: The Emperor of All Maladies*, a three-part, six-hour film, based on the book by Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee, that traces the history of cancer from ancient to modern times, interweaving a sweeping narrative with intimate stories about contemporary patients, and an investigation into the latest scientific breakthroughs that may have brought us, at long last, within sight of lasting cures.

In September 2014 PBS broadcast *The Roosevelts: An Intimate History*, a seven-part, 14-hour film that tells the stories of Theodore, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, three members of one of the most prominent and influential families in American history. The series marks the first time their individual stories have been woven into a single narrative.

In April 2014, PBS broadcast *The Address*, a 90-minute film that tells the story of the tiny Greenwood School in Putney, Vermont, where each year the students—boys who are all challenged by learning differences—are encouraged to memorize and then publicly recite the Gettysburg Address. Through the story of the Greenwood School, the film unlocks the history, context and significance of President Lincoln's timeless words.

In April 2013, PBS broadcast *The Central Park Five*, a two-hour film about the five black and Hispanic teenagers wrongly convicted of the 1989 Central Park Jogger rape. The film paints a revealing portrait of one of our nation's most egregious miscarriages of justice. *The Central Park Five* played at the Cannes, Telluride, Toronto, London, Vienna and DOC NYC film festivals, among others. It opened in theaters nationwide in November 2012, and was named by *MovieMaker* magazine as one of the top 10 films of the year. Honors include the 2013 Peabody Award, the New York Film Critics Circle 2012 Best Non-Fiction Film award, the 2013 Television Critics Association Award for Outstanding Achievement in News and Information, the 2013 Gabriel Award, the 2013 American Bar Association Silver Gavel Award, and the 2014 Clarion Award.

In November 2012, PBS broadcast *The Dust Bowl*, a two-part series about the worst man-made ecological disaster in American history, in which the frenzied wheat boom of the “Great Plow-Up,” followed by a decade-long drought during the 1930s nearly swept away the breadbasket of the nation. Vivid interviews with twenty-six survivors of those hard times, combined with dramatic photographs and seldom seen movie footage, bring to life stories of incredible human suffering and equally incredible human perseverance. It is also a morality tale about our relationship to the land that sustains us—a lesson we ignore at our peril.

In October of 2011 PBS broadcast *Prohibition*, a 3-part, 5 ½-hour series directed by Ken and Lynn Novick. The film tells the story of the rise, rule and fall of the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the entire era it encompassed, a compelling saga that goes far beyond the oft-told tales of gangsters, rum runners, flappers and speakeasies, revealing a complicated and divided nation in the throes of momentous transformation. *Prohibition* raises vital questions that are as relevant today as they were 100 years ago – about means and ends, individual rights and responsibilities, the proper role of government, and, finally, who is – and who is not – a real American. *Prohibition* received the 2012 CINE Golden Eagle Award, and has been nominated for Emmy Awards for Outstanding Writing for Nonfiction Programming, Outstanding Cinematography for Nonfiction Programming and Outstanding Sound Editing for Nonfiction Programming.

An update to the 1994 epic *Baseball, Baseball: The Tenth Inning* was co-directed by Ken and Lynn Novick. David McMahon, Lynn Novick and Ken wrote and produced the film, which aired on PBS in September 2010. This two-part, four-hour documentary highlights the many dramatic developments that transformed the game: the crippling 1994 strike, the increasing dominance of Latin and Asian players; the rise of a new Yankee Dynasty, the historic World Series victory by the Red Sox, and the revelations about performance-enhancing drugs, a reality that cast a pall on some of the greatest stars of the game.

In the fall of 2009, PBS broadcast *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. Directed and co-produced by Ken, it was written and co-produced by his long-time collaborator Dayton Duncan. The six-part series 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. The film won Emmy Awards for Outstanding Nonfiction Series and Outstanding Writing for Nonfiction Programming, as well as the 2010 CINE Golden Eagle Award.

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 of 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 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 & 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." Author J. W. Burrow wrote in his 2008 book, *History of Histories*: "Restrained but informative commentary, sensitive editing, haunting photographs and music and readings from letters and diaries made this a deeply moving production, matching the scale of the events it recounted in a way no printed book could do. Considered as the presentation of an epic theme on a grand scale this has claims to be the outstanding work of history of the late twentieth century." 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. Griffith 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*; *The 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.