

# Ken Burns Quotes

*Thinking, People, Jazz, Past, War, Mean, Years, Music, Children, Way,  
Country, Film, Book, Editing, Who We Are, Understanding, Want, Stories,  
Interesting, Reading*

History is malleable. A new cache of diaries can shed new light, and archeological evidence can challenge our popular assumptions.

~Ken Burns

We're having a hard time understanding where jazz is going. What happened to jazz?

~Ken Burns

The genius of our country is improvisation, and jazz reflects that. It's our great contribution to the arts.

~Ken Burns

It is the great arrogance of the present to forget the intelligence of the past

~Ken Burns

I think we too often make choices based on the safety of cynicism, and what we're lead to is a life not fully lived. Cynicism is fear, and it's worse than fear - it's an active disengagement.

~Ken Burns

Do not lose your enthusiasm. In its Greek etymology, the word enthusiasm means, "God in us."

~Ken Burns

History isn't really about the past - settling old scores. It's about defining the present and who we are.

~Ken Burns

People tend to forget that the word "history" contains the word "story".

~Ken Burns

By its very nature, no one person can ever be the center of Jazz.

~Ken Burns

I began to feel that the drama of the truth that is in the moment and in the past is richer and more interesting than the drama of Hollywood movies. So I began looking at documentary films.

~Ken Burns

I have made all my films for my children with the exception of my first film because my oldest daughter wasn't born when I was making the film about the Brooklyn Bridge.

~Ken Burns

Good history is a question of survival. Without any past, we will deprive ourselves of the defining impression of our being.

~Ken Burns

I am passionately interested in understanding how my country works. And if you want to know about this thing called the United States of America you have to know about the Civil War.

~Ken Burns

I don't think that there has been a film that I've done that hasn't been influenced by libraries and archives.

~Ken Burns

When a documentary filmmaker, working in the style that I do, suggests that there has been a shooting ratio of 40 hours to every one hour of finished film, that doesn't mean that the other 39 are bad.

~Ken Burns

The flame is not out, but it is flickering.

~Ken Burns

I subscribe to William Faulkner's' view that history is not just about what we were before but who we are now.

~Ken Burns

I grew up certain for a while that I was going to be an anthropologist, until film turned my head.

~Ken Burns

The only art form that Americans have created that's recognized around the world is jazz music born in a community that had the peculiar experience of being unfree in a free land.

~Ken Burns

There are no ordinary lives.

~Ken Burns

I'm a filmmaker. I'm an artist. I've chosen to work in history the way someone might choose to work in still lifes or landscapes.

~Ken Burns

In most films music is brought in at the end, after the picture is more or less locked, to amplify the emotions the filmmaker wants you to feel.

~Ken Burns

You know, you meet some people, and do a lot of interviews, and you come across a Buck O'Neill and you know you are going to know him for the rest of your life. The same thing happened with.

~Ken Burns

I wake the dead. I bring Jackie Robinson and the Roosevelts to life. Who do you think I'm trying to wake up?

~Ken Burns

I don't use composers. I research music the way I research the photographs or the facts in my scripts.

~Ken Burns

Like a layer on a pearl, you can't specifically identify the irritant, the

moment of the irritant, but at the end of the day, you know you have a pearl.

~Ken Burns

You need, as a historian, essential triangulation from your subject and the only way you get that triangulation is through time.

~Ken Burns

You don't work on something for six years and be blind to the myriad of other approaches.

~Ken Burns

To say that an artist sells out means that an artist is making a conscious choice to compromise his music, to weaken his music for the sake of commercial gain.

~Ken Burns

A jazz beat is a dynamic changing rhythm.

~Ken Burns

The way I work, the interview never becomes larger than the person being interviewed.

~Ken Burns

I never, ever want to apologize for a film. If it's bad I'll say it's my fault. And that's what I can say so far in all the films that I've done, that if you don't like it, it's entirely my fault.

~Ken Burns

One of the things I really like about Ford's films is how there is always a focus on the way characters live, and not just the male heroes.

~Ken Burns

Jazz is a very accurate, curiously accurate accompaniment to 20th

century America.

~Ken Burns

Louis Armstrong is quite simply the most important person in American music. He is to 20th century music (I did not say jazz) what Einstein is to physics.

~Ken Burns

Wynton told us that Miles sold out, just wanted to make more money, just wanted to sell more records. I don't believe that Miles sold out but I'm not in a position to say.

~Ken Burns

It follows the seasons, beginning each year with the fond expectancy of springtime and ending with the hard facts of autumn.

~Ken Burns

I enjoy total creative control right now. Nobody tells me to make it longer, shorter, better, sexier, more violent, whatever.

~Ken Burns

Write: write letters. Keep journals. Besides your children, there is no surer way of achieving immortality.

~Ken Burns

In a sense I've made the same film over and over again. In all of them I've asked, 'Who are we as Americans?'

~Ken Burns

There is no communication in this world except between equals.

~Ken Burns

You can learn as much about the history from reading about the present as you can vice versa, that is learning about the present

through history, which is what I do for a living.

~Ken Burns

History's just been made for sale to an inside deal.

~Ken Burns

The stories from 1975 on are not finished and there is no resolve. I could spend 50 hours on the last 25 years of jazz and still not do it justice.

~Ken Burns

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