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Article published Feb 12, 2011

## Sneak preview at UNH: Ken Burns talks about his craft, new film series 'Prohibition'

DURHAM — Award-winning documentary filmmaker Ken Burns visited the University of New Hampshire on Friday as part of the President's Distinguished Speakers series.

Not only did Burns give those who attended the event a sneak peak of his highly anticipated new series "Prohibition," he broke down his thought process for the creation of many of his notable documentaries.

As Burns has won many awards for his films, including 12 Emmy Awards, UNH President Mark Huddleston said Burns' visit was an opportunity for the community to celebrate an individual who's work has greatly contributed to the world.

Having worn the hat of director, producer, co-writer, cinematographer, music director and much more, Burns engulfs himself in his documentaries and has been commended for his 20-plus years of work.

Steve Hardy, a faculty member of the university and the event's emcee for the afternoon, asked Burns about the themes that tie his series together. Many of the filmmaker's series focus on events, monuments and past times that symbolize the American way.

"In some ways, I feel like I've made the same film over and over again," laughed Burns. "I find myself constantly questioning who we are as Americans, and my films reflect our own questioning of our history."

Burns' films have investigated everything from the creation of the Brooklyn Bridge to the nitty-gritty of the Civil War, with baseball and the booming Jazz Era looked at in-between. Burns said he uses his documentaries as a way to show viewers how freedom has morphed as a result of many historical events.

When asked how he chooses the topics he covers for his series, Burns said they mostly present themselves.

"Events today déjà vu events of the past," said the filmmaker. "When something like that happens, there's an inherent willingness of people to want to speak about the past and tell their stories."

Burns said he feels, as a filmmaker, it's his duty to report back about those events. He said no matter the scale of effects of such events, the stories still need to be told as Burns said storytelling makes history what it is.

After a question-and-answer session between Burns, Hardy and the inquiring public, attendees were treated to a world premier viewing of clips of Burn's upcoming film "Prohibition."

According to Burns, the three-part documentary displays the revolution of politics as well as the meaning of American citizenship.

Focusing on the Volstead Act, which established national prohibition throughout the 1920s, the film displays an era of people who chose pleasure over compliance with laws that prohibited the consumption of alcohol. Burns said he tried hard to hone in on the changing pace of America in the 1920s, suggesting that the sexual revolution coincided greatly with the nation's revolution of morals.

Many who had the opportunity to speak with Burns Friday afternoon not only commended him for his series, but thanked him for inspiring them to do their own small scale documentaries.

They noted that his films have created an open-minded society as he has approached many historical events from a nontraditional angle.

For a list of distinguished speakers who are set to visit the university in the future, visit <http://www.unh.edu/president/markhuddleston/events/distinguishedspeakers.html>.