

# How Historical Storytelling Works on Youtube: An Analysis

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HIS0677: History and New Media

April 12th, 2021

## ***Introduction***

With the rise of different technologies over time, historians are constantly seeking new ways of communicating with the public outside of the traditional academic field. These past attempts include producing historical films and creating radio programs on historical subjects in the twentieth century. Historians in recent decades continue to attract a wider audience, and one of the platforms being used to spread historical knowledge is YouTube. Numerous history-related contents seem to be rapidly growing over recent years; they range from educational animations, lectures, documentaries, and reenactments. This paper is designed to look at how historical reenactments and “living history” YouTube channels are engaging with the audience and steering people’s interest in history. By analysing seven YouTube channels that create history-related contents, this paper aims to find out how historians before YouTube interacted with the public? In what ways are history-based content creators using YouTube towards their advantage in terms of production and audience engagement? Furthermore, by analysing the comment sections of an individual video of each channel, the paper will describe how audiences react towards these channels and what attracts them to these kinds of content.

## ***Past Mediums That Explored History***

In order to understand the innovation of YouTube being used as a platform to educate the masses about history, it is important to understand how historians in the past resorted to media like films and radio to also achieve this. *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History 1890-1970* captures historian’s views when encountering mass media such as film and radio. Some historians saw the potential opportunity of disseminating historical knowledge to a broader public audience through visual education. One example is the *Chronicles of American*

*Photoplays*, in which the Yale University Press intended on creating thirty-three films on American history. Many historians were involved in the creation process as “advisers”.<sup>1</sup> Although the series only exhibited fifteen films instead of the intended thirty-three, the reaction towards the series varied. Some viewed it as not entertaining enough for the general public, but the series became popular amongst schools as educational resources.<sup>2</sup> The historians’ demand of accurate historical facts and the filmmakers’ quest for public entertainment was one conflict of the series. Many historians heavily criticized the historical accuracy of these productions.<sup>3</sup> The series also came with a very strong patriotism undertone that was prevalent in the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> Another important reason contributing to the failure of the series were technological issues. Many institutions and colleges did not have the appropriate equipment to play the films.<sup>5</sup> During the 1930s, historians temporarily restrained themselves from any direct involvement with the film industry.<sup>6</sup>

Historians instead turned their eyes to radio in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>7</sup> The American Historical Association (AHA) was one organization that actively sought to have radio act as a medium towards the general public, culminating in their production of their own radio series from 1937 to 1947.<sup>8</sup> However, the reason for the AHA’s failure to sustain longevity is because they relied heavily on commercial networks, which although increased their audience range the programs suffered from a lack of freedom for academics to communicate effectively their

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<sup>1</sup> Tyrrell, Ian R. *Historians in Public : the Practice of American History, 1890-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 78.

<sup>2</sup> Tyrrell. *Historians in Public*. 79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

concepts of history.<sup>9</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, university radio stations began to broadcast their own college lectures and other educational content. For example, the University of Illinois broadcasted James G. Randall's lecture series entitled "History of the South since the Civil War". These types of programs received positive reactions from audiences due to their accessibility.<sup>10</sup> However, because of technological shortcomings and financial issues, not all of the public could receive the program.<sup>11</sup> By the mid-1930s, major networks also began to develop their own radio programs that would eventually become successful. For example, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS)'s program *The Cavalcade of America* that attracts an audience of 6 million by 1940.<sup>12</sup> Because the major radio networks had more accessibility and funds to increase their signal towers, bigger audiences could easily tune in to experience these historical programs conveniently.

### ***The Advent of YouTube***

As generations of historians converged entertainment with history to pitch interest to the public, YouTube, as one of the largest entertainment platforms, became a watershed platform for producing history-related content. Founded in 2005, it quickly became one of the most active platforms to provide a variety of content for diverse audiences especially after Google bought the company in 2006. YouTube as a free-to-upload platform can serve different individuals and organizations an abundance of goals or initiatives by uploading history-based videos onto the platform. One such initiative could be that Youtube is an outreach platform for large institutions, including museums and libraries, to promote their events and attract visitors, another is that it could serve as an archive for historical and cultural organizations to store their collections online.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>10</sup> Tyrrell. *Historians in Public*. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 92

Finally, it could be a panel for particular historical experts to share their knowledge and viewpoints with the public.

By establishing a “clip culture”, YouTube outperforms its rivals by being a more desirable and easily accessible platform compared to cinema and television.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, by choosing YouTube, the creators of history-related contents have more chances to reach a broader audience and they can avoid the obstacles that the older independent radio networks had to go through. Some of the creators have their own websites, but these are less likely to provide interactive features that attract people. Because of YouTube’s social interface, for many content creators it gradually becomes their main outreach platform to promote their content, thereby formulating their unique voice, and increasing their recognition in the given field. The following selected channels listed were chosen based on their high viewcount and their production method of “living history”, i.e. no animation or audio-only channels, because these do not involve real-world reenactments.

**Table of Selected Channels**

<b>YouTube Channel</b>	<b>Creator</b>	<b>Production Type</b>	<b>Viewcount</b>	<b>Content Category</b>
<i><b>The English Heritage</b></i>	The English Heritage Trust	Organization	103,197,774	Cooking, Makeup, Architecture, etc.
<i><b>CrowsEye Productions</b></i>	The Crow’s Eye Production	Organization	72,196,859	Clothing, Historical and atmospheric reenactment
<i><b>Townsend</b></i>	James Townsends	Family	189,209,802	Cooking, Colonial Lifestyle
<i><b>Drunk History</b></i>	Comedy Central	Company	N/A*	Comedy, Historical reenactment

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<sup>13</sup> Snickars, Pelle., and Patrick. Vonderau. *The YouTube Reader*. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2009, 11.

<b><i>The History Underground</i></b>	JD Huitt	Individual	8,220,815	Historical Landmarks
<b><i>Karolina Żebrowska</i></b>	Karolina Żebrowska	Individual	93,343,959	Fashion, Dress, Comedy
<b><i>Bernadette Banner</i></b>	Bernadette Banner	Individual	66,643,472	Fashion, Dress

*\*The Drunk History series is included as part of Comedy Central's main YouTube channel, therefore, there is no discernible total viewcount number for the Drunk History videos themselves.*

### ***Using YouTube as an Outreach Program***

The English Heritage Trust is a charity that oversees over 400 historical sites, buildings, and monuments in the United Kingdom. English Heritage's highly popular "The Victorian Way" is a series of cooking videos that showcases how to create dishes using old Victorian recipes. Organizations like English Heritage link their official website and invite people in an effort to increase traffic, and use YouTube as a way to help gain people's interest and draw their attention to the organization itself.

The Crow's Eye Productions, a small video production team created by Nic Loven in 2005, regularly posts videos on their YouTube channel of the same name. The channel was created in 2007, and as of 2021 has 342K subscribers. The National Museum of Liverpool commissioned the Crow's Eye Productions to create the Youtube series "Getting Dressed in ...". The museum left comments under the videos to introduce themselves and ask for people's support for the organization. This series eventually became the channel's most well-known series, where each episode would show how it was like to get dressed in a certain historic period. 28 "Getting Dressed in ..." videos have so far been produced, and the channel also creates many other historical reenactment videos. Crow's Eye Productions will sometimes create videos that contain only a background soundtrack while the actors would reenact the scene without any

narration or dialogue. More recent videos show the reenactments being narrated, with the audience being given a historical background of the period and info on the places the video is based on. Because of the popularity of the clothing shown in the series, detailed descriptions of the actor's dresses, footwear, etc. are provided. The time period ranges very widely, with the earliest being located in the 14th century, the latest the 1960s. Channels such as the English Heritage and Crow's Eye Productions maintain a high audience scope and successful views because their content is created with the freedom of easy exposure and user accessibility thanks to Youtube's social media-based infrastructure.

Townsend's is a YouTube channel created by the Townsend family. Founded by James Townsend, the store sells mainly goods in the style of the Colonial era. The business was incorporated in the 1980s, and James Townsend's son Jonathan began to run the store by the 1990s. In order to promote business and spread knowledge of historical reenactments, the Townsend family began to make YouTube videos in 2008. The channel began to regularly make recipe videos every week since 2011. Up to 4 people employed by Townsend's would help produce the video by researching, filming, directing, and editing.<sup>14</sup> The Townsends position their channel as "dedicated to exploring the 18th century lifestyle". The contents of the videos are mainly reenacting day-to-day life activities that would have occurred in the Colonial era, such as cooking, clothing, and daily work. The channel now has 1.54M subscribers, 820 videos, and more than 100 million views in total. In the recipe videos, Jonathan talks about the source of the historical recipe he is recreating, however it should be noted that no references are included in the video. The channel invites many guests to join the cooking video series; for example, one

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<sup>14</sup> Gass-poore, Jordan. "Townsend's is YouTube hit with Colonial cooking videos" Daily Mail Online, accessed April 7, 2021. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4876288/Townsends-YouTube-hit-Colonial-cooking-videos.html>

guest was Michael Twitty, a culinary historian and educator, who appeared in 4 videos so far to exhibit cooking some historical dishes.

Although these channels do benefit from high production value, they are still considerably more modest than those of major film networks. However, with YouTube, it seems that this does not matter significantly because audiences will still be able to access the videos more easily and be able to watch faster without a set media schedule like in film and television. Also, by linking certain organizations like the English Heritage Trust, National Museum of Liverpool, and Townsends within their channels, it will not only increase exposure of the channel itself but also of the organizations which will increase the spreading of their initiatives.

### ***Using YouTube as an Archive***

YouTube serves as an archive for both ongoing corporate content, older movies, and TV shows. Corporations sign contracts with YouTube to move their programs and shows onto the platform.<sup>15</sup> Many people who don't own a television can still use YouTube to watch news from big television channels that put their news segments into clips for audiences to watch.

Government organizations such as The Library of Congress has its own YouTube channel where some of their film collections are stored and the public for view for free. Comedy Central, an American cable network, has a YouTube channel where 173 videos from its comedy series *Drunk History* were uploaded.

*Drunk History* is a comedy series where a historical event is recounted by a drunk narrator and reenacted in each episode. The series first aired in 2013 and continued for six seasons until 2020. *Drunk History* can be viewed on the Comedy Central website, albeit highlights are the only free accessible content. However, on a more public platform like YouTube, by splitting the episodes into short clips, the network also allows YouTube users to

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<sup>15</sup> Snickars and Patrick. *The YouTube Reader*. 14.



access content that they can digest more quickly. The series recreated some of the most famous historical events in US history including the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and Benjamin Franklin's "kite experiment". Some episodes deal with lesser-known accounts such as Oney Judge, an African American women enslaved by the Washington family who became the subject of an intense manhunt after her escape, and Nellie Bly, an American journalist who exposed the condition of the mental health institution in the 1880s and prompted asylum reform by faking insanity in an effort to enter the Women's Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell's Island and record what her observations were. The series took on a fresh spin on historical storytelling, using comedy as a means to draw the audience's attention while recounting a historical event.

### ***Using YouTube as "Personal Projects"***

Another category of history-related content on YouTube are "personal project" channels, which are created by individuals that usually have a strong historical background. Each channel's purpose is individualized, however, generally they aim to spread historical knowledge and stimulate the audience's interest in history. Some individual channels might not have the same support as ones backed by a production company because of lower manpower, and could be considered even more "grassroots" in nature. However, this gives them great flexibility to create the kind of content they view as meaningful not only to their audiences but to their own vision.

The History Underground is a YouTube channel created by history teacher JD Huitt. The content ranges from visiting destinations of significant historical value and museums to conversations with creators who also delve into history content. The channel was created in 2019, with currently 109K subscribers and more than 7 million views in total. JD Huitt stated that his purpose in creating the History Underground is to provide useful resources for teachers and students interested in the history field. As someone who is a history teacher themselves and

has a background in video production, he began to produce videos of himself visiting different famous historic landmarks in a series he named History Traveler.<sup>16</sup> The History Traveler has 121 videos, and is characterized into “themes” such as visiting sites that are dedicated to WWII, the Civil War, etc. Besides the History Traveler series, the channel also produces another series called The Echo of War. The series has 11 videos containing oral history from veterans in WWII and the Vietnam War. Each video has a short description of the content, with no references listed.

Historical dresses or vintage clothing are a flourishing category on YouTube. Karolina Żebrowska is a channel that focuses on fashion history and vintage clothing. Named after the creator herself, Żebrowska is a Polish writer, filmmaker, and YouTuber. She has written several books on fashion history in Polish, with a background in filmmaking; she has produced a few short films. The channel was created in 2012 and has 943K subscribers, 170 videos, and more than 90 million views in total. The content of the channel is very diverse, ranging from standard “talking” videos where she dives into a certain branch of fashion history and videos where she recreates scenes from certain historical periods while dressed in that period’s corresponding vintage clothing. The channel also produces videos that explore film and TV historical costumes with Żebrowska’s commentary. It also should be noted that like the other two channels, no references are listed in the descriptions of her videos.

Bernadette Banner has similarly produced content on dress history and reconstruction of clothing from historical periods. According to her bio, Banner is a dress historian who “works in periods ranging from the 10th century up through the start of World War I—or up to the adoption

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<sup>16</sup> History Impossible, “An Impossible Interview III: JD Huitt History Underground”, PodBean, May 3, 2020.  
<https://historyimpossible.podbean.com/e/an-impossible-interview-iii-jd-huitt-history-underground/>

of the electric sewing machine—specializing in English and American dress.”<sup>17</sup> The YouTube channel was created in 2012, has 1.06M subscribers and more than 60 million views in total. On the channel page, there are several playlists including “Traditional Craftsmanship”, “Sewing Things”, “Dress History/Mythbusting”, “Costume Analysis”, “1890s Gown”, “The Masque of the Red Death”, “Lady Sherlock Holmes”, and “Historical Sewing Techniques 101”. Banner is the only one of the 7 example channels that heavily uses historical sources in the videos, while showing historical images and texts, and inserts footnotes in her video description. Banner also reaches out to other channels, creating a comradery of YouTube historians in order to bring together different historical perspectives. In a video called “We Met Mrs Crocombe”, Banner collaborated with the cook from “The Victorian Way” series. Her success has brought her to commentate on the *Mary Poppins* movie with the fashion magazine Glamour in a video called “Fashion Expert Fact Checks Mary Poppins’ Wardrobe”.

### ***Analysis on Audience Reaction***

One factor that contributed to the success of history-related channels are the creativity of their videos. Different from the traditional way that the public usually receives historical knowledge, perhaps from a school textbook, these videos provide shorter and more attention-grabbing content. Among the comment sections of the videos, many audience members left praise stating that they enjoyed the video because it is more interesting than history class in school. Audience reaction is an important factor to study when analyzing history content on YouTube, therefore, sampling of the comments is used. However, it is also important to note that comment sections can only reflect a part of the reactions from the audience. “90-9-1 rule” refers to a general pattern of internet participation rate, that 90% of the internet surfers never interact,

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<sup>17</sup> Bernadette Banner, “FAQ,” Bernadette Banner, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://bernadettebanner.co.uk/faq>.

simply watching or reading the contents online, with 9% interacting occasionally, and the remaining 1% are actively engaging and contributing content.<sup>18</sup> The number of comments is always smaller than the viewing number of the videos. Nonetheless, comment sections are an important way to analyze the audience's opinion and receptions to the video.

I chose one of the most popular videos on each channel to take a closer look at their comment sections. I used Google Sheets to analyze these comments. In each video, I tried to find answers to questions such as how the audience reacts to the content of the video? Does the video stimulate their interest to find out more about the history mentioned in the video? How do they describe the video? Do they share their own historical knowledge on the subject? Do they question the history shared in the video? I use keywords such as "history", "accuracy", "education", "family", "interesting", "informative" to search through the comment section on Google Sheets.

In one of Karolina Żebrowska's most viewed videos titled "1920s Fashion Is Not What You Think", 3974 people wrote in the comment section<sup>19</sup>. Among these comments, 89 people used the word "history". Upon a closer look, many people expressed a shared love for the topic of fashion history, "As a fan of fashion history, I loved that you are taking your time to explain this stuff to the general public!" Some people never have any historical knowledge about 1920s' fashion history but enjoyed listening to the content of the video. "So, I wasn't interested in the topic of this video AT ALL when I first clicked on it, but I must say, I learned a lot! Thank you for the work you do to educate society and preserve history." The word "educational" appeared 15 times, "informative" appeared 33 times, "knowledge" appeared 21 times, "learn" appeared 43 times. These comments expressed that the video is in some way helpful for the viewers to learn

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<sup>18</sup> Snickars and Patrick. *The YouTube Reader*. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Karolina Żebrowska, "1920s Fashion Is Not What You Think", YouTube Video, 19:20, May 20, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCxx-ffyExM>

about the history of 1920's fashion. Several viewers even expressed the desire to learn more about the subject by saying: " Love how knowledgeable you are. I'm interested in fashion history, but don't know much of anything about it. Can you suggest any resources to start learning?", "I learned so much from this!!! I love the silhouette so much more than typical modern fashion. I want to research this more now- I love Taisho Roman era style a lot, and want to learn- anyone know any good places for info?".

Bernadette Banner produced a video titled "How Did They Pee in Those Dresses? A Superficial History of Underwear"<sup>20</sup> in November 2020. It is one of her most popular videos on the channel with more than a million views so far. There are 1802 comments in total. The word "history" was mentioned 79 times. Some audiences found a connection with the relatable topic presented in her video. "I find myself more interested in history in my middle age - when I was younger, I had no interest in history, just intense interest in various sciences. But the history I'm most interested in is typically the history of how regular people lived in the past, in different periods, rather than which ruler did what and conquered what. Never even considered the history of underwear. This was surprisingly interesting!" Other audiences were intrigued to do more research inspired by the content of the video and shared their findings. For example, one viewer said, "Thank you, this was really interesting. I came across an article regarding the use of pins; that to my knowledge speculated that in addition to straight pins women would use insect pins for delicate tasks. I haven't found evidence as of yet but it got me wondering and down the rabbit hole I went." 14 of the comments mentioned the word "family", many of these comments were talking about their own family history relating to the history mentioned in the video. In terms of

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<sup>20</sup> Bernadette Banner, "How Did They Pee in Those Dresses? A Superficial History of Underwear", YouTube Video, 6:54, November 28, 2020.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6G\\_IID4OLg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6G_IID4OLg)

the educational aspect of the video, the words “educational” appeared 8 times, “informative” appeared 28 times, 37 people expressed that they “learned” something from the video. Compared to the reaction to the educational aspect of the video, more comments talked about the entertaining aspect of the video. The word “entertaining” appeared 14 times, “interesting” appeared 87 times, “fun” appeared 80 times. However, there are also people who stressed both elements, they commented that the content is not only “informative” but also “fun” at the same time, including “...You make these things both informative and entertaining.” “Fascinating, informative and entertaining all at the same time!”

Historical accuracy employed by the history-based channels of YouTube remained a point of concern for many history channels on YouTube. Out of the seven channels above, most of the channels do not list historical references on the historical content the video used. The only channel that lists resources is the channel of Bernadette Banner. One viewer left a comment asking for her research method when making the video: “I don’t know how popular this would be, but I would absolutely ADORE a video where you show us how you find this information, how you know the information to be mostly accurate (though I imagine this is largely due to your wide experience and knowledge built up over time.) I’m obsessed with learning more about historical dress, but figuring out where to dive in has been complicated.” Banner includes footnotes under the description under every video citing the historical content she mentioned and the image she included in the video. The amount of research Bernadette Banner puts in her videos was very well-received among her audience; the word “research” appeared 32 times in the comment section, One viewer commented their appreciation to the research Banner has done for the video, “Can we just applaud the CosTubing community for doing actual research into these questions and giving legit answers that don't just simplify the history, also while busting

myths along the way” Other viewers also praised the research and accuracy of the video, “I always and forever will enjoy a niche topic of interest, that has been thoroughly researched, related to me via impassioned exposition with a dash of scathing wit”, “This is absolutely vital historical research and analysis”, and “I love you and your commitment to research and faithfulness to accuracy”. These showed that many viewers care about the accuracy of the information provided in the video they watch and appreciate a well-research topic in history-based channels.

“Getting Dressed in WWI-VAD Nurse”<sup>21</sup> is a video from the “Getting Dressed in ...” series from the Crows Eye Production channel. The video received 2307 comments in total. “History” was mentioned 35 times; one viewer talked about how the channel gave them an opportunity to access and learn history easily. “As a shut-in, disabled vet I want to say how much I appreciate your excellent channel. I love studying history and it’s channels like yours that help bring the classroom to my bedside. Thank you for sharing these thought-provoking programs!” There are viewers who are deeply connected to the content of the video, one commentator talked about her interest in VAD nurse: “This channel /series is so amazing! My mum and I are very much interested in history and we are big feminists! I don’t think VAD’s were given enough credit and one of my favorite books is a diary of a VAD! I can’t wait to binge all of your videos!” A commentator shared her grandmother’s experience as a nurse: “My grandmother was a nurse in the USA. Graduated in the 1930’s from nursing school. I have her nurse's portrait taken of her with her wearing her cap. I also have her nurses cap. A little piece of history representative of all hard working nurses. Nurses see it all and do more than anyone. Thank you for making this video. Made me tear up thinking about her because I miss her but very proud of how much she

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<sup>21</sup> Crows Eye Production, “Getting Dressed in WWI-VAD Nurse”, YouTube Video, 8:53, July 24, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZOaMbTRxWY>

helped others.” Another viewer who is studying nursing themselves commented that “I’m studying to become a nurse myself, and I cannot tell you how much of an impact this video had on my perspective of who we are and what we do and have done in history. I’ve heard many times of the professional nurses during this era, but not the VAD nurses. Thank you for this exceptional piece of history and changing my view on what I intend to be as a nurse.” Perhaps through YouTube’s recommendation system, the video also attracted the attention of other viewers who were not interested in history, but found the material interesting. “This video came up in my recommended and I watched it because sure, why not, that sounds interesting - I didn’t expect to feel emotional by the end! I never knew about VAD nurses, what an interesting snapshot of history”, “I usually don’t really care about history and such but I stumbled across this video and stayed the whole way through. Props for keeping me entertained and thanks for the pretty interesting info”, and “As someone who hates history, I was very intrigued and entertained by this.” Others mentioned a common reaction towards the history-based videos across many different channels, which was “I learn more from these videos about the history than from what I’ve heard at school. Good job!” These comments show that with a topic like VAD nurses in WWI, the audience not only find the history of them interesting, many also find personal connections towards their stories.

History Underground’s “Famous Graves at Arlington | History Traveler Episode 19” episode’s comment section mentions the word “history” 50 times, while “research”, “learn”, “education”, and “informative” were mentioned less than 10 times.<sup>22</sup> Many viewers shared their own travel experiences at Arlington Grave. One person talked about their memory of visiting Arlington as a kid: “When I was ten years old our family visited Arlington National Cemetery,

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<sup>22</sup> JD Huitt, “Famous Graves at Arlington | History Traveler Episode 19”, YouTube Video, 12:54, October 19, 2019. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQe\\_QkOTXNE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQe_QkOTXNE)



that was 1961. I still remember the feelings that overcame me at that time. We attended the changing of the guard, I was in awe.” Others expressed that they were inspired by the video and wanted to visit the place one day. For example, one viewer commented, “This is one place I want to visit. So much history and everyone buried there deserves the utmost respect. I want to see the changing of the guard at the tomb of the unknown as well.” Overall, many expressed that they enjoyed seeing the site of Arlington through the video. However, there were also some comments that debated the content of the video. For example, JD Huitt mentioned the history of the location before it became a National Cemetery by saying “It belonged to Robert E. Lee by way of his wife’s family, and then whenever the Civil War broke out, the federal government just took it and used it to start burying the dead. Now it is the largest, I guess you can say the most prestigious of the National Cemeteries”. Many audiences debated over this passage, with some questioning the accuracy of this account. While others did not necessarily question its accuracy, they were more concerned about the way he recounted the story. For example, one commenter expressed “Wow you sound like the government was wrong for taking land from Lee after he committed treason and lost the war to America”. These mixed reactions reflected people’s curiosity towards a well-known national historical site and different takes on the creator’s narration when telling its history. History Underground’s videos are not reenactments of history, because Huitt does not use a planned-out script in order to recreate certain events. Rather, his tours are filled with his own personal commentary that are not scripted, meaning that these accounts may carry his own personal style in connection with his own interpretations. Therefore, different audiences might react differently not only towards what history was being told but also how it was being told.

The comment section of video “Edith Wilson: The First Female President”<sup>23</sup> by Drunk History however shows less of the themes of “accuracy” and “historical” as the other two channels. Many of the comments are repeating the lines from the video or commenting on the acting in the show. 8 people mentioned the word “learn” in their comments, comparatively less than the comments from the fashion history channels, but there are a few people that expressed how the video raised their interest in the historical events mentioned. For example, one person wrote, “I could swear, everytime a new episode comes up and I see it—I learn something fascinatingly new, by googling it because this didn’t teach me EVERYTHING but it intrigued me”. It’s clear that the reenactment element and the character dialogues of the series are only intended to serve as comedy and are not historically accurate, but the accuracy of the history account themselves were being questioned by some viewers as well. There are 5 comments questioning the timeline of the historical event stated in the video.

Similar to the Drunk History videos, the English Heritage's “Victorian Way” cooking video series also has less comments concerning history, with the majority of the comments being about food and recipes. This is understandable since the Victorian Way videos are generally within 10 minutes and focus on cooking rather than historical narratives. In one of their video titled “How to Make Ice Cream - The Victorian Way”<sup>24</sup> there are 22 comments about the history mentioned in the video, 19 comments mentioning the word “learn”, and no comments mentioning “research”. One comment, similar to the comments appeared in Crows Eye Priduction’s video, said that “I can watch these over and over. I think if they taught history like this I would probably learned more.”

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<sup>23</sup> Comedy Central, “Edith Wilson: The First Female President”, YouTube Video, 7:05, February 19, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta1ZcjpwVLo>

<sup>24</sup> The English Heritage, “How to Make Ice Cream - The Victorian Way”, YouTube Video, 3:40, August 21, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9m0B9qkeq4g>

“Sailor Rations - Stockfish Aboard Ship”<sup>25</sup>, another historical recipe video from the Townsends channel, attracted more discussion around history. It received more than 1 million views and 3078 comments. The word “history” was mentioned 31 times, with some audiences becoming interested in the historical period that the video was set in. “Honestly, the 18th century is the least interesting part of European (and adjacent) history to me, but this channel has been an endless delight that helps immerse me in the time period quite well.” Some were interested in food history. “You do exactly what I want to know about food through history. I’m so interested in it. Especially about sailors, pirates, centurions of roma, what soldiers used to eat food during wars, campaigns. Thank you.” Another describes: “Information you never learned in history class...” One thing that’s very interesting about the comment section of the Townsends’ video is people’s reaction towards its “living history” format. Some people particularly enjoyed the reenacting aspect of the video. “Thank you for the interesting and informative content. Nothing makes history quite as real as living (or eating) it!”, “This is a great way of keeping history alive. Reading a book just doesn’t give you the first hand impression of how things were done centuries ago”, and “I love how this is like a history show and a survival show wrapped into one. All of this stuff is still useful today in a survival situation.”

### ***Conclusion***

YouTube as a media platform has greatly changed the way producers, such as historians, can showcase their content. Rather than having to go into film or radio, while also trying to find funding for studio time, YouTubers have the ability to produce “grassroots-type” content by simply having a quality video camera and recording equipment. Although some YouTube channels elect to have great production value, they don’t have to seek the high amount of

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<sup>25</sup> Townsends, “Sailor Rations - Stockfish Aboard Ship”, YouTube Video, 8:32, May 13, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdzAt6e1l-c>

finances that traditional mediums might amass. These channels can also produce more popularity due to their attractive, simplistic content that audiences from around the world can interact with. The short nature of these channels' videos conforms to the modern fast-paced lifestyle and accommodates people's short attention span. This is different from traditional methods where history was usually confined in textbooks and schools that presented historical content in a rather mundane way; YouTube has the ability to make history "entertaining" for the masses.

The advantages of creating history-related channels on a platform like YouTube is that it enables the creators to reach a broad range of audience members. The audience generally found that it is easier to learn and access history through the format of YouTube videos. Some audiences watched the videos because of their interest in history, others came to the videos because they "stumbled onto a random YouTube video" or "discovered the channel" by accident, found the content of the video entertaining and learned history along the way. However, because not all the audiences have previous knowledge on the history content told in the video, it is the creators' responsibility to make sure the accuracy of the historical content that they are presenting to the audience.

YouTube's immersive social media structure and international recognition leads it to be a media platform of great potential when it comes to showcasing history-related content. Due to the platform's high rate of accessibility, history is being presented and interpreted from many different perspectives while showcasing large amounts of diversity in styles to the audiences. The success from these YouTube channels can possibly be used by future media platforms in order to determine the best possible way to spread content like history to make it more relatable and accessible for a modern-day audience.

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