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GRANT

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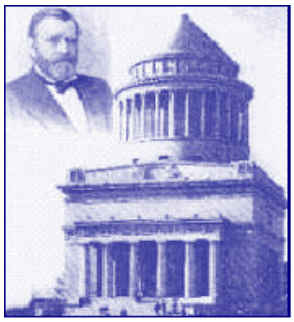

GRANT MONUMENT ASSOCIATION

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GRANT ON TELEVISION

Our series on Grant in the media concludes with a look at Grant on television, where he made appearances in several series going back four decades.

At the end of an episode of *Walt Disney's Wonderful World Of Color* entitled "Johnny Shiloh, Drummer Boy of Chattanooga" (1963), Grant was given a cameo for the purpose of congratulating the protagonist, a teenage soldier. Wearing an atypically resplendent uniform, the Grant character was innocuously pompous as one might expect in a Disney production.

A scene from *Wild Wild West* (1965-1969) featuring Grant

Disney avoided the Hollywood stereotype, but it also seems to have avoided any historical research.

As is true of Hollywood, television is generally uninterested in Grant's career, so when he makes an appearance,

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HOPE FOR THIS JULY 4

The unfortunate performance by pop star Beyonce Knowles in NBC's July 4 special last year points out more than ever the need for events and decorum at Grant's Tomb that affirm what the site means.

The final resting place of our nation's 18th president should be New York City's equivalent to the Lincoln Memorial. It should be a civic Mecca of learning and history that attracts diverse visitors from all over the US and the world. Learning from last July 4 would be a step in that direction.

The underrated Grant was the "hammer" who authored Union victory, enforced the abolition of slavery, and likely kept the North American continent from a Balkan-like fragmentation. He is also underrated as a president who fought to enforce the rights of freed slaves and to peacefully resolve international disputes, as seen in the groundbreaking arbitration of the *Alabama* Claims. Without Grant, our nation's history and the very nature of our contemporary society would be markedly, even frighteningly, different.

The outrage of last year was the utter lack of appreciation for the legacy of Ulysses S. Grant and what so many Americans fought and in many cases died for. This coming July 4 presents a new opportunity. If decision makers at NBC and Macy's don't recognize and explore appropriate alternatives, the Tomb essentially stands as a wasted opportunity. Hopefully, it will not be a hard sell to commit event organizers to a July 4 program that is patriotic – and at least a touch historical.

Grant deserves a high rank in the life and collective mind of our nation. And so does his final resting place. Treating the Tomb with the decorum it deserves would demonstrate that the city, our nation, and its institutions take seriously the ideals for which Grant fought.

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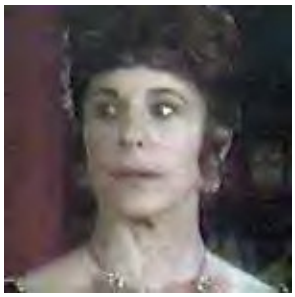
it is usually as a supporting character where the main theme is a separate phenomenon that existed during his presidency: the old West, or at least the popular conception of the old West. The underrated 1965 TV western *Branded* featured as its main character one Jason McCord (Chuck Connors), a brave and proud man suffering from slanderous and inaccurate perceptions of him. This is somewhat ironic, because President Grant would be one of the regular supporting characters in the series, and he was depicted by William Bryant along the lines of the course, cigar-chomping Hollywood stereotype – with an added touch of underhandedness. In one episode, Grant sends McCord west to stop a gold theft by infiltrating a gang of Mexican bandits, and in another, he is sent to spy on General George A. Custer, who is planning to incite an attack on Indians that would politically damage Grant. In other episodes, McCord saves Grant from an assassination attempt and rescues him from a kidnapping.

Grant was a recurring character in another program during the 1960s, *Wild Wild West*. In that series, the protagonists were two secret agents sent by Grant out west, where they undertook various missions, including one to halt the activities of a Mexican revolutionary and another to thwart an assassination attempt on Grant. In one episode, a German baron tries to blackmail Grant by use of a

From *Histeria* (1998)

doctored "Kinetoscope" (a primitive movie actually not yet invented) that shows him signing a deal with corrupt officials of a foreign power, but the plot is thwarted. The Grant of this series has a persona and a role strikingly similar to that in *Branded*.

My World and Welcome to It (1969), the series loosely based on the works of



Dennis Lipscomb as Ulysses and Kathleen Lloyd as Julia Grant in *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1995)

James Thurber, featured one episode inspired by Thurber's cruel short story, "If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox." There, a father who is trying to persuade his daughter that history is not dull re-enacted an alternate version of the surrender at Appomattox in which a totally unkempt Grant was so inebriated that he accidentally surrendered to Robert E. Lee. This over-the-top performance was a low point in Grant's television career.

Ken Burns' 1990 documentary *The Civil War* led to a dramatic rise in interest in its subject. The documentary was an interesting mix of traditional appraisals of the war, which tended to lionize southern military figures, and a new focus on slavery and emancipation. Grant did not fare too poorly overall, but few seemed to notice that the series ended with 3 reverent minutes devoted to Lee's 5 remaining years after the war while Grant's 20 years (including 8 in the White House) were given 2 minutes of ambivalent commentary.

In the realm of non-fiction, Grant unquestionably has enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent years, but this has not resonated in popular television. Here Grant's appearances have been brief, sporadic, and no more accurate than before, as seen in the following programs:

- *Legend* (1993): U.S. Grant, depicted as a pompous snob, and his wife Julia, depicted as a clichéd nag, are seen being jostled about in trains, on horses and even in a hot air balloon as the audience waits for "The Legend" (Richard Dean Anderson) to tear himself away from silly anachronistic gags to save the couple from Julia's ex-boyfriend.
- *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman* (1995): The Julia-as-nag depiction is taken up a notch as the first lady known in her time to be charming and affable appears mean enough to make Mary Lincoln blush. Her husband is portrayed sympathetically but out of historical character as he has an emotional breakdown at a reception after recalling his Civil War days.
- *The Critic* (1995) (animated): Two

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MARK YOUR CALENDAR: ON SUNDAY, APRIL 25, THE SONS OF UNION VETERANS OLIVER TILDEN CAMP #26 WILL HOLD THEIR ANNUAL COMMEMORATION OF ULYSSES S. GRANT'S BIRTH AT GRANT'S TOMB. CEREMONIES BEGIN AT 11:00 A.M. ALL ARE INVITED TO ATTEND.

The GMA Mission:

- To commemorate and perpetuate the accomplishments of Ulysses S. Grant and Julia Dent Grant and their memory.
- To undertake educational activities and ceremonies as they pertain to President Grant's service to his country.
- To cooperate with public and private parties to insure the repair, maintenance and upgrading of Grant's Tomb in New York City.

GRANT MONUMENT ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

The life and extraordinary public service of General and President Ulysses S. Grant is reflected in the grand monument in New York City that serves as his final resting place — popularly known as Grant's Tomb. The Grant Monument Association, the successor to the organization of the same name that built and administered Grant's Tomb until it was transferred to the National Park Service in 1959, was formed to ensure that this important part of our heritage would be preserved. To become a member of the Grant Monument Association or renew your membership for 2003, fill out the form below:

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You can join the GMA with an annual gift of $25 or more ($10 for students and senior citizens). Please indicate your gift below:

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characters visit Grant's Tomb, only to have a Dracula-accented Grant pop out of his sarcophagus and ask who has awakened him from his slumber.

- *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer* (1998): Grant tries to sober up but instead has wild hallucinations where he is challenging the Devil to a bowling match. Never aired (along with other episodes of this universally panned series) was another episode in which Confederates kidnap Mary Lincoln, so Grant kidnaps Robert E. Lee's wife and tries to seduce her.
- *Histeria* (1998) (animated): A Johnny Carson-ish Abraham Lincoln, a psychopathic arsonist William T. Sherman, and a flirtatious Grant appear on "Family Feud" challenging Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis.

Grant pops out of his sarcophagus (complete with cigar) in *The Critic* (1995)

In any but the documentary venues in the media, depictions of Grant reflect little that can be called historically accurate other than the beard and cigar. Of course, such shows do not make historical accuracy a priority, and at times they simply have innocuous fun with history. But T.V. and the movies do reflect and fuel popular images – which may explain why many people can recite no "fact" about Grant other than the myth that he was a drunkard. The historical Grant's persona combined gentleness and determination, taciturnity and honesty. In the words of his wartime adversary, General James Longstreet, "the biggest part of him was his heart." But this is the quality most