

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Presents *Billy the Kid*

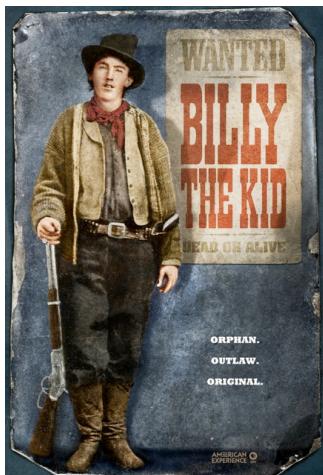
The True Story of the Orphan Teen Who Became the Most Wanted Man in the West

Premieres Tuesday, January 10, 2012

9:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. ET on PBS

“Escape was one of his great talents. When he leaves the courthouse on horseback, as he goes out of sight, he passes into legend at that moment. The story will never be the same after that.”

— N. Scott Momaday, Pulitzer Prize-winning Native American author



On April 28, 1881, twenty-one-year-old Henry McCarty, a.k.a. Billy the Kid, just days from being hanged for murder, outfoxed his jailors and electrified the nation with the latest in a long line of miraculous escapes. An outlaw with a deadly reputation, the young man was finally gunned down by the ambitious sheriff Pat Garrett just a few weeks later. The felling of one of the most notorious criminals of the age made front-page news and marked the end of Henry — but it was the beginning of one of the West's most enduring legends.

Demonized by the lawman that killed him, the Kid was soon mythologized by a never-ending stream of dime store novels and big-screen dramas, portrayed by everyone from Paul Newman to Roy Rogers to Emilio Estevez. But in all the tellings, Billy the Kid's real story has been obscured. A fascinating look at the boy behind the myth, *Billy the Kid*, directed by John Maggio, will premiere on

the PBS series AMERICAN EXPERIENCE on Tuesday, January 10, 2012 at 9:00 p.m. ET (check local listings). The broadcast kicks off a month-long salute to the West that also includes the premiere of *Custer's Last Stand* (January 17) and encore broadcasts of *Wyatt Earp*, *Geronimo*, *Annie Oakley* and *Jesse James*.

Born to impoverished Irish immigrants, Henry McCarty left the slums of New York City with his mother, Catherine, to join the wave of humanity heading west following the end of the Civil War. Lured by the promise of silver, they settled in a remote outpost in southeastern New Mexico, a place on the edge of civilization where Latino, Native American and Anglo cultures mixed freely. Henry embraced this *mestiza* culture and within a few months was speaking Spanish fluently, wearing sombreros and moccasins, and courting señoritas in the evening. When Catherine remarried, the family fortunes improved.

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But in 1874, his mother died of tuberculosis, his stepfather abandoned him, and Henry returned to a hardscrabble, itinerant life. An orphan at fifteen, alone in a tough and transient mining town, it didn't take long for the Kid to find trouble. He became a skilled gambler and fell in with a gang of seasoned outlaws who taught him to steal horses and master a six-shooter. When he killed a bully named Frank Cahill in a barroom brawl, he suddenly went from thief to murderer — and to a life on the run. Henry McCarty became William H. Bonney and there was no turning back.

In the lawless corner of New Mexico where Billy came of age, times were changing. Following the Civil War, Anglo businessmen flocked to New Mexico, becoming the largest property owners, often wresting land from Hispanic ranchers with the aid of unscrupulous bankers and a rigged legal system. In Lincoln County, two tough Irish immigrants — Lawrence Murphy and James Dolan — held a vice-like grip on all moneymaking endeavors. With huge government contracts for their cattle, Murphy and Dolan ruled the county like a fiefdom from their headquarters in the center of Lincoln known simply as “The House.” Meanwhile, John Tunstall, a young Englishman with dreams of a cattle empire, moved into Lincoln County. When Billy was arrested for stealing horses from Tunstall, the Englishman surprised Billy by offering him a job. But Tunstall wasn’t just looking for a good cowboy — he needed a good gunslinger to defend his land and property. Tunstall treated Billy and the other men he hired with respect, creating a loyal band of outsiders.

When the House, with the help of the local sheriff, murdered Tunstall, Billy and the other Tunstall loyalists were out for revenge. Forming a cowboy army, the Regulators, they dispensed their own brand of justice, gunning down Sheriff Brady and his men as they strolled the streets of town. All-out war erupted between the House and the Regulators.

A participant in almost every skirmish in what became known as “The Lincoln County War,” the Kid found it easy to blend into the night, slipping in and out of the small, Hispanic-owned sheep farms that populated the area. By fighting the Anglos who had stolen their land, Billy became something of a folk hero to the Hispanos.

Eventually caught by Pat Garrett and convicted of the murder of Sheriff Brady, Billy the Kid escaped one last time, but not for long. On the night of July 14, 1881, as he crept into the home of his sweetheart, Paulita Maxwell, Garrett stepped out of the shadows and gunned him down. The Hispanic community, which had hidden him when the law came looking, mourned him most when he was gone. As writer Denise Chávez says, “People saw him as a voice for the disenfranchised. He was the Robin Hood of New Mexico.”

Featuring interviews with a wide variety of Western historians and writers, *Billy the Kid* puts a human face on the legend who transformed himself from a skinny orphan boy to the most feared man in the West and eventually to an enduring icon.

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The Participants, in order of appearance

Drew Gomber is a New Mexico-based historian and expert on Billy the Kid.

Mark Lee Gardner is a historian and author of *To Hell on a Fast Horse: Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, and the Epic Chase to Justice in the Old West*.

Frederick Nolan is the author of several award-winning books on Southwestern frontier history including *The Life and Death of John Henry Tunstall*, *The Lincoln County War: A Documentary History*, *The West of Billy the Kid* (1998), an annotated edition of Pat Garrett's *Authentic Life of Billy the Kid* (2000), and *The Billy the Kid Reader*.

Michael Wallis is a historian of the American West, a three-time Pulitzer Prize nominee, and author of *Billy the Kid: The Endless Ride*.

Denise Chávez is an American author, playwright, and stage director from New Mexico.

Bill Richardson was Governor of New Mexico from 2003 to 2011.

Fintan O'Toole is an assistant editor of and a columnist with *The Irish Times*. His article "The Many Stories of Billy the Kid" ran in *The New Yorker* in 1998.

Hampton Sides is a New Mexico-based historian and author whose books include *Hellhound On His Trail*, *Ghost Soldiers*, and *Blood and Thunder*.

Paul A. Hutton is an American cultural historian, author, and a professor of history at the University of New Mexico, and former executive director of the Western History Association.

N. Scott Momaday is a Pulitzer Prize-winning Native American author.

E. A. Mares is a New Mexican poet, playwright, short story and essay writer, and historian.

John-Michael Rivera is an associate professor of English at the University of Colorado; he wrote the introduction to *The Real Billy the Kid*.

About the Filmmakers

Written, Produced and Directed by	John Maggio
Edited by	George O'Donnell
Associate Producer	Julia Marchesi
Director of Photography	Stephen McCarthy
Music by	Gary Lionelli
Narrated by	Michael Murphy

JOHN MAGGIO (Writer/Producer/Director) is an acclaimed writer, director and producer of documentary films. His work includes several films for FRONTLINE (*College Inc., Growing Up Online*) and AMERICAN EXPERIENCE (*The Lobotomist, The Boy in the Bubble, Kinsey, The Fight*). Maggio's films have been honored with the National Emmy Award, Writers Guild Award, an Independent Spirit Award nomination as well as multiple News and Documentary Emmy Award nominations. His work has premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and has shown at festivals around the world.

MARK SAMELS (Executive Producer). Under Samels' leadership, the series has been honored with nearly every industry award, including the Peabody, Primetime Emmys, the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award, Writers Guild Awards, Oscar nominations, and Sundance Film Festival Audience and Grand Jury Awards. Samels also serves on the Board of Governors at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Prior to joining WGBH, Samels worked as an independent documentary filmmaker, an executive producer for several U.S. public television stations and as a producer for the first co-production between Japanese and American television. A native of Wisconsin, he is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

About AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Television's most-watched history series, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE has been hailed as "peerless" (*Wall Street Journal*), "the most consistently enriching program on television" (*Chicago Tribune*), and "a beacon of intelligence and purpose" (*Houston Chronicle*). On air and online, the series brings to life the incredible characters and epic stories that have shaped America's past and present. Acclaimed by viewers and critics alike, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE documentaries have been honored with every major broadcast award, including 14 George Foster Peabody Awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, and 30 Emmy Awards, including, most recently, *Exceptional Merit in Nonfiction Filmmaking* for *Freedom Riders*.

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