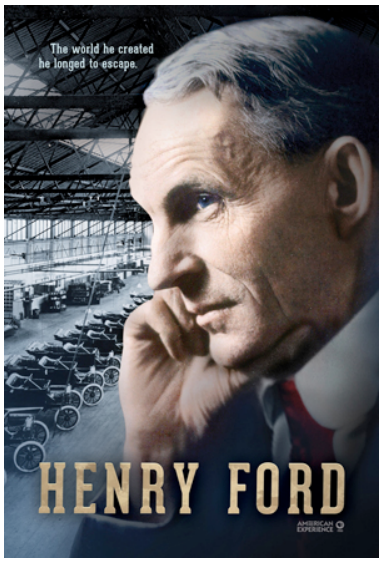


AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Presents *Henry Ford*

Premieres Tuesday, January 29, 2013
9:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. ET on PBS

A New Look at the Mercurial Man who Transformed America



Henry Ford presents a fascinating portrait of a farm boy who rose from obscurity to become the most influential American innovator of the 20th century. Through his own fierce determination, Ford created the Model T, the most successful car in history, and introduced the groundbreaking five-dollar-a-day wage, ushering in the modern world as we know it. But despite his success, Ford remained restless and driven, always seeking to control what lay just beyond his grasp. The creator of an urban, industrial age, Ford longed for the simpler era he had helped destroy. One of the nation's richest men, he despised the wealthy and blamed Jews for what he deemed society's degeneration. A hero to many ordinary Americans, he battled his workers and bullied those who looked up to him—including, and most tragically, his only son. Directed by Sarah Colt, ***Henry Ford*** will premiere on **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** on Tuesday, January 29, 2013 from 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. ET on PBS (check local listings), in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of Ford's birth. Part of the **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** Titans series, ***Henry Ford*** will be followed by the rebroadcasts of *Andrew Carnegie* on February 5, 2013 and *John D. Rockefeller* on February 12, 2013.

Henry Ford was born on a Michigan farm in 1863 in the midst of the Civil War. A natural-born tinkerer who loved machines, he hated the drudgery of rural life, setting out as a 16-year-old to pursue his dreams in Detroit. For more than a decade, Ford worked long hours in one shop after another, forging a career as an expert machinist. But Ford's passion lay elsewhere—building a horseless carriage became his off-hours obsession. With his gas-powered vehicle he named the "quadricycle," he attracted the attention of investors and started his first company. Unlike most carmakers at the dawn of the industry who saw the automobile as a plaything for the rich, Ford believed he could build an affordable vehicle for working people. His vision ran counter to that of his backers and they pulled the plug on his company. Ford's lifelong hatred for the wealthy was born.

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Ambitious and driven, Ford was undaunted. He set out to make a name for himself in the new and dangerous sport of racecar driving. After a series of highly publicized victories, in 1903 he was able to raise the money to incorporate the Ford Motor Company. Every few months, Ford introduced a new model. With Ford as their leader, his team experimented with innovative designs for igniting the engine and for a more flexible suspension system, and made use of steel that was lighter but tougher.

"Why would he create such a violent world of spies and thugs? Why do that? Well, because he was lashing out against the world that had spun out of control." — John Staudenmaier

Finally, in October 1908, Henry Ford introduced his revolutionary Model T. Lightweight, durable and fast, the Model T could reach speeds of 40 miles per hour, and at a time when the average car cost more than $2,000, the Model T cost only $850. The response from the public was immediate and overwhelmingly positive.

With the unprecedented success of the Model T, Ford declared he would soon be producing 1,000 cars a day. Taking its cue from the meatpacking industry, Ford Motor adopted an assembly line method. Under the old system, the record time for building a Model T had been twelve hours and thirteen minutes. Using the assembly line process, it took an hour and 33 minutes. By the fall of 1913, Ford had established the first automobile assembly line in the world and controlled nearly half of the American car market.

But there was a downside to Ford's new production process. Many workers found it so monotonous and physically exhausting, they quit after just a few days. Company managers calculated that every time they wanted to add a hundred men to the rolls, they had to hire nearly a thousand. Desperate to retain his workforce, Ford responded with a revolutionary plan that would stun his employees and infuriate his rivals. In January 1914, he announced his company would double his workers' pay from $2.34 for a nine-hour day to $5 for just eight. Not only would his wage increase reduce turnover, Ford predicted, it would also increase business and propel a new generation of American workers into a shared life of abundance, leisure, and prosperity. Ford's announcement turned him into a national sensation overnight.

With his newfound celebrity, Ford made clear that his ambitions extended well beyond car manufacturing. Insisting that self-discipline had been critical to his success—he rose at dawn and exercised every day, didn't smoke, never drank and did not allow alcohol in his house—he expected the same from everyone around him. As one close associate observed, "cars are the by-products of his real business, which is the making of men." Ford designed the five-dollar-a-day wage with strings attached. He required his immigrant workers, who represented as many as 53 nationalities, to attend the company's English language school and sent inspectors from his "Sociological Department" to probe into the most intimate corners of workers' lives. If a man failed inspection, he was given time to amend his ways and his additional wages were held for him. If he failed a second time, he was fired.

Although Ford was now one of the richest men in the world, his hatred for the wealthy elite only increased. Determined to rid himself of parasitic investors he had eschewed since early in his career, Ford carried out an elaborate plan to trick his stockholders and take full control of his company. With increased power, his ego expanded.

Battered by the press after his inarticulate performance on the stand during a libel trial he initiated against the *Chicago Tribune* in 1919, Ford became more certain of his allegiance to the common people of America—shopkeepers, village leaders, farmers. He purchased *The Dearborn Independent*, his hometown weekly, to share his incendiary ideas about Jews who he vilified as the power behind Wall Street, banks and the degeneration of society. He distributed the newspaper through his 2,000 dealerships to spread his vitriolic anti-Semitic articles nationwide. By 1926, circulation had reached 900,000.

Buying up hundreds of acres in Dearborn, where he and his wife Clara had settled, he set out to create what became one of the largest factories in the world, known as the River Rouge plant, a massive industrial complex that included 15 miles of roadways, 93 buildings, and consumed more water per day than Detroit, Cincinnati and New Orleans combined. No sooner was the Rouge plant complete than Ford began to hate it. He retreated into a world of nostalgia and created a monument to the past, a living museum he dubbed "Greenfield Village". Increasingly, Ford spent more time at the Village than overseeing his company, where a battle brewed between management and workers over unfair labor practices. Any lingering perceptions of Ford as a benevolent employer had vanished at the Rouge, which was run by Ford's thuggish and violent security chief, Harry Bennett.

Ford's all-encompassing desire for control was perhaps no more evident than in his relationship with his only son, Edsel. Although Ford made Edsel president of Ford Motor when his son was just 25, Henry never allowed Edsel to take the reins, undermining him at every turn. In the 1920s, when Edsel finally stood up to his father, insisting that the Model T needed to be replaced with a more modern car, Henry never forgave him. Henry's withering cruelty continued until Edsel died at 49—a death many blamed on the unrelenting stress of trying to please his father. Shattered by Edsel's death, Henry Ford spent his final years a broken man.

An absorbing life story, ***Henry Ford*** also offers an incisive look at the birth of the American auto industry with its long history of struggles between labor and management, and a thought-provoking reminder of how Ford's automobile forever changed the way we work, where we live, and our ideas about individuality, freedom, and possibility.

"His Model T represented this modern notion that happiness lay not in self-denial, not in self-restraint, not in scarcity, but it lay in self-fulfillment." — Steven Watts

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About the Participants

Douglas Brinkley is a professor of history at Rice University and a bestselling author whose books include *Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company, and a Century of Progress.*

Bob Casey is Curator of Transportation at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

Hasia R. Diner is a professor of American Jewish history at New York University.

Beverly Gage is a professor of history at Yale University.

Greg Grandin is a professor of history at New York University and the author of *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry's Ford's Forgotten Jungle City.*

Nancy F. Koehn is a historian at Harvard Business School.

Nelson Lichtenstein is a professor of history at University of California, Santa Barbara and the author of *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit.*

John Staudenmaier is a professor of history at University of Detroit Mercy and has written extensively about Henry Ford.

Steven Watts is a professor of history at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the author of *The People's Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century.*

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About the Filmmakers

Written, Produced, and Directed by	Sarah Colt
Edited by	Sabrina Zanella-Foresi
Co-Producer	Helen Ryan Dobrowski
Associate Producer	Elizabeth Shea
Original Music by	John Kusiak and P. Andrew Willis
Narrated by	Oliver Platt

Sarah Colt (Writer/Producer/Director) is an independent documentary filmmaker who has been working in public television for nearly two decades. In addition to *Henry Ford*, her previous credits include writing, producing and directing *A Nation Reborn* and *A New Light* for Frontline and **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**'S special series *God in America*; *The Polio Crusade*, a one-hour program about the development of the polio vaccine for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**, and *Geronimo*, part four of the **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** special series on native history, *We Shall Remain.* Before starting her own company in 2008, she worked for David Grubin Productions, where she produced the highly acclaimed biography *RFK*, and earned an Emmy award for Outstanding Science, Nature, and Technology for co-producing *The Secret Life of the Brain*, a five-part series. In 2004, Colt was awarded an International Reporting Project Fellowship through Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and traveled to Namibia to report on the racial imbalance of land ownership in Southern Africa. Colt attended Harvard University where she began her documentary career as a still photographer.

Sharon Grimberg (Senior Producer) plays a key role in the origination, development, acquisition, and editorial oversight of films for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**. Since she joined the staff in 2000, films made for the series have won more than forty honors including Peabody Awards, Primetime Emmys, Writers Guild Awards and an Oscar nomination. Grimberg was the executive producer of *We Shall Remain*, a multi-platform mini-series for **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** that looks at U.S. history from a Native American perspective. She also served as supervising producer of *They Made America*, a series on innovation based on award-winning writer Sir Harold Evans' book of the same title. Previously, Grimberg was a writer for CNN Headline News. She did her undergraduate work at the London School of Economics and received an M.A. from the University of Michigan.

Mark Samels (Executive Producer) was named executive producer of **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**, PBS's flagship history series, in 2003. 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** celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2013. The series 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 30 Emmy Awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, and 16 George Foster Peabody Awards, one most recently for the series represented by *Freedom Riders*, *Triangle Fire*, and *Stonewall Uprising*.

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