

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Presents Encore Broadcast of *Mount Rushmore*

Tuesday, June 30, 2015
8:00 - 9:00 p.m. ET on PBS

It took fourteen years and almost one million dollars to create. Men removed five hundred thousand tons of granite from the rock face of a mountain deep in the Black Hills of South Dakota, creating one of the biggest and oddest monuments in the world. George Washington's face is sixty feet long; the Sphinx would fit between the end of his nose and his eyebrow. Theodore Roosevelt's moustache is twenty feet across and Lincoln's mole measures sixteen inches.

Mount Rushmore represents the toil and the money of many. Yet it is the result of the tireless enthusiasm, egomaniacal drive, and artistic vision of one man: a sculptor named Gutzon Borglum. First broadcast in 2002, *Mount Rushmore* will have an encore play on Tuesday, June 30, 2015 at 8:00 p.m. ET, as part of PBS's Fourth of July programming (check local listings). Through newsreels, home movies, and interviews with family members and Rushmore workers, the hour-long documentary probes the uniquely American idea that one man's ambition can create a colossal and lasting monument. *Mount Rushmore* is produced, directed, and written by Mark Zwonitzer.

Born in Idaho to Danish immigrants, Gutzon Borglum was thirty years old, a failing artist living in Paris, when he found inspiration in the works of sculptor Auguste Rodin. Borglum returned to New York in 1901, determined to become a successful sculptor, and in ten years he had, with major public works and a high public profile to his credit. While he was famous and influential, Borglum was also rough around the edges, known for his crude, racist, and anti-Semitic remarks. He was ruthless in his criticism of other artists' work, calling one a "pinhead sculptor" and decrying the nation's public monuments as "worthless."

Convinced that beauty alone would not move Americans, Borglum turned to scale. "There is something in sheer volume that awes and terrifies, lifts us out of ourselves," he wrote. He staked his reputation—and nearly lost it—on Stone Mountain in Georgia where he embarked on a 400-foot-high monument to the Confederacy. He was fired after a decade with a fraction of the carving completed.

In 1925, undaunted, Borglum eagerly accepted an enormous new project, carving the faces of four presidents onto a mountainside in the Black Hills of South Dakota. "He had expected Stone Mountain to be the crowning achievement of his career, and here he was presented with a bigger crown," says his daughter, Mary Ellis Vhay. Borglum, still a national laughingstock after Stone Mountain, started the project without any money and with little support. One newspaper columnist wrote, "Thank God it is in South Dakota where no one will ever see it."

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Borglum found a booster in South Dakota Senator Peter Norbeck, who “saw this as an opportunity to bring people to the Black Hills,” says the senator’s grandson, Dr. Karl Wegner. “Any tourists, any people we could bring into South Dakota brought their wallet, their dollars with them.” Norbeck convinced President Calvin Coolidge to spend a summer in the Black Hills, and at a dedication of Mount Rushmore, Silent Cal surprised everyone by pledging the federal government’s support to the project.

But finances were just one of Borglum’s worries. The surface of Mount Rushmore, which rose five hundred feet, was deeply creviced; no one knew how much carvable granite lay underneath. And while the supply of workers in 1929 was plentiful, their skills were not.

Borglum persisted, training the “untutored miners,” as he called them, to carve the mountain. “The wind was always a-blowing and it’d be pretty gusty. They was hangin’ with a little three-eighths-inch cable. And that cable looked pretty small to me,” recalls worker Glenn Bradford.

On July 4, 1930, just one year after the real work began, Borglum revealed the Washington head. Tourists trekked to the site in droves, and the sculptor confidently predicted that the entire carving would be completed inside four years. Plans quickly came to a halt, however, when the stone for Jefferson’s face was found to be too crumbly. Eighteen months of work had to be blasted away to find more suitable stone. Money woes mounted as the Great Depression gripped the country. By 1932, the Depression-era relief programs had begun, and Senator Norbeck was able to secure \$100,000 of relief money for jobs.

When work resumed in 1933, many of the original workers returned despite Borglum’s harsh treatment of them. “He’s a heckuva stone carver,” said a man who once worked for him, “but he ain’t no sweet-talker.” Borglum’s twenty-one-year-old son Lincoln was now on the job, and his easygoing manner smoothed over the ill will left by his father’s combative style.

“One of the great miracles of Rushmore is the miracle of the men, those dedicated guys who came back and came back and came back and came back,” says author Rex Smith. “They came together fused in a sense that they were creating a great thing.”

President Franklin Roosevelt dedicated the Jefferson sculpture in 1936. As Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt took form, Borglum clung to his vision that Mount Rushmore was a work of art, not merely a feat of engineering. His determination to finish the mountain, extending the sculptures to the waist, and creating a time capsule within the mountain, was ultimately defeated by time itself.

To the end of his life, Borglum insisted that time was on his side. He told interviewers that he was allowing an extra three inches on the features of the sculptures to account for the elements, which would wear the granite down at a rate of one inch every 100,000 years. “The work will not be done for another 300,000 years,” he declared, “as it should be.”

Produced, Directed and Written by	Mark Zwonitzer
Edited by	Bruce Shaw
Director of Photography	Michael Chin
Associate Producer	Laura McKellar
Composer	Brian Keane
Narrator	Michael Murphy

About AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

For more than twenty-seven years, **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE** has been the nation's most-watched television history series. It has been hailed as "peerless" (*The 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 industry award, including thirty Emmy Awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, and seventeen George Foster Peabody Awards; the series received an Academy Award® nomination for Best Documentary Feature in 2015 for *Last Days in Vietnam*.

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