

# THE AMISH

1 X 113 HD



PBS

INTERNATIONAL

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On October 2, 2006, a 32-year-old milk truck driver named Charles Roberts entered a one-room schoolhouse in the Amish community of Nickel Mines in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and shot 10 young girls, killing five, before committing suicide as police officers stormed the school. Just hours after the shooting, Amish community members visited the gunman's family to offer forgiveness. The events at Nickel Mines horrified the nation for the senseless brutality of the shootings and left many questioning and haunted by the victims' startling response.

An offshoot of Anabaptist Christians, the Amish Church began more than 300 years ago in Europe, and flourished in the U.S. through the 18th and 19th centuries. Much like their neighbors, the Pennsylvania Dutch and Pennsylvania Germans, they lived on farms and traveled by horse and buggy.

The Industrial Revolution brought the rise of the machine. While everyone else embraced the future, the Amish held fast to life as it had been. But it wasn't until the 1930s that Amish determination to remain apart from the rest of America provoked conflict with the state. New laws that extended the age for compulsory school attendance provoked outright rejection from many Amish. Schooling, they argued, was important as long as it was practical and applicable to life on the farm. Amish parents worried that more education would make their children too individualistic, lose their values, and want to move away. In the 1950s, they began to keep their children home after eighth grade. Court appearances and jail terms quickly followed for hundreds of recalcitrant Amish. In 1972, after two decades of prosecution by the court, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the rights of Amish parents to remove their children from public school after the eighth grade. No other group in America has achieved such an exemption.

Filmed over the course of a year, *The Amish* answers many questions about this insular religious community. Their intense faith and strict adherence to 300-year-old traditions have by turn captivated and repelled, awed and irritated, inspired and confused America for more than a century. The film questions why and how the Amish, an insistently closed and communal culture, have thrived within one of the most open, individualistic societies on earth; explores how, despite their ingrained submissiveness, the Amish have successfully asserted themselves in resisting the encroachments of modern society and government; and looks at what the future holds for a community whose existence is so rooted in the past.

With unprecedented access to the Amish communities, the film is the first to deeply penetrate and explore this profoundly attention-averse group and also includes the first television interview with one of the parents of the murdered schoolgirls.

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## AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

CREDITS

*Writer, Director:* David Belton

*Producer:* Callie T. Wiser

*Senior Producer:* Sarah Colt

*Executive Producer:* Mark Samels

*Photo Credit:* Courtesy of WGBH/Tim Cragg



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