

# ‘When We Were Apollo’: A Movie about Mission and a Culture of Creativity

by Barbara Boyd

Aug. 22—The movie, “When We Were Apollo,” manages to capture, almost physically, the change in human personality induced by a mission orientation to conquer the unknown and unexplored, shared entirely by 450,000 people, as the result of the challenge by the President of the United States, and the crash scientific effort—with management techniques being innovated as the project moved along.

Unlike other productions, this film does not focus on the story as told by astronauts or chief scientists, but rather by Apollo’s engineers, technicians, builders, and contractors, describing their roles in the project and the roles of others at key stages, against the backdrop of the social turmoil that engulfed the United States as Apollo proceeded.

One very poignant note introduced in the film, states simply, “Thank you Apollo, for saving 1968.” Another particularly telling moment is the description, by those interviewed, of the end of the Apollo program, which the interviewees described as a limitation caused by the program being a race with the Russians to get to the Moon, and also caused by the failure of vision and will to continue to inhabit the Moon and move on to Mars.

What is remarkable about the film, at least to this writer, is the artistry of these young filmmakers in capturing a different generation, and conveying the depth of what it was like to be fully engaged in a highly productive and completely intellectually challenging enterprise. The workers they interviewed were white and black. Many trained for the mission in place, thanks to many educational and skills training opportunities attached to the Apollo program. The film features Wernher von Braun reading NASA’s order against any form of racial discrimination to his team of scientists and engineers.

The film was released during the recent Apollo 11



*A prize-winning student in a photo from the movie.*

celebrations and was shown on PBS in July. Here is how the film’s creators describe its mission:

Half a century later, the Apollo Space Program remains the single greatest initiative in peacetime the world has ever known. Its story speaks to the most beautiful characteristics of our humanity: A metaphor for our ability to rise to challenges once

thought insurmountable and push past them with even bigger and bolder solutions. Behind every astronaut who set foot on the Moon and every figurehead who inspired us to get there was Apollo’s massive workforce: A team of men and women over 400,000 strong—spanning race, socio-economics, culture, company and country—who came to understand that the overall Program was only as good as the effort they put into it.

This dedication and the can-do attitude behind it—the Spirit of Apollo—carry invaluable lessons about our potential as a species as we chart a course into the 21st century. Like Apollo, our world is too big, diverse and complex for any one person, group or nation to tackle. Only by working together—by taking a truly cooperative approach and empowering one another to become the best versions of ourselves—will we truly be able to overcome the seemingly insurmountable challenges of our day. Such a future is within our grasp. The story of Apollo can help us get there . . . if we listen.

This is an invaluable experience for all of us as we seek to demonstrate just what a national and international mobilization for Moon-Mars looks like in terms of its impact on the human spirit and society. The movie, produced by Contact Light Films, is [available](#) on Amazon.