

# 20201005 Episode SD

Fri, 10/2 12:58PM 5:00

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mount rushmore, black hills, grow, grandma, dante, pastor, jangling, feel, matthew, landscape, south dakota, racism, cousin, auntie, faces, steeply, unnatural, marveling, museum, american public



00:06

I'm Tracy k Smith, and this is the slow down.



00:17

I visited South Dakota a year and a half ago, the Black Hills towering steeply peaked and deeply lined mountains reminded me at every turn of the faces of elders watching as if from another dimension. I imagined them gazing down patiently, pityingly at the human realm, with all its swift phases, all of its blindness, all of its corals.



00:49

Bias alert. My sense of how humanity was small and fleeting, in comparison to the Black Hills rock formation, was powerfully amplified by my experience of Mount Rushmore, with so much to be revered in the landscape itself, how was it someone's impulse to say, you who look at us we Americans are just as important as all this ageless nature stuff. I had not expected to feel that way. I had expected to feel all at the scale of the sculptural enterprise, but the four great men carved into the mighty rock felt somehow puny.



01:35

Inside the Mount Rushmore Museum, I learned that the artist responsible for Mount Rushmore was gutzon Borglum, a plaque described him as involved in local politics. museum guide explained that, while not an official member of the Ku Klux Klan, Borglum

was associated with its members and involved in its politics. It is difficult for me to dissociate my personal feeling that Mount Rushmore is an unnatural human manifestation in an otherwise autonomous and coherent national landscape. From my personal opinion, that racism is an unnatural and immoral human disruption of the natural order. This is just one way racism distorts our view of ourselves, and one another.



02:32

Today's poem is Mount Rushmore, by Dante Clark.



02:39

In the 90s, drenched in kids stink, running around with Matthew, little cousin to church boys thundering against the concrete with grandma and Auntie after pastor said Be blessed after grandma and Auntie Sunday hats floated in a great flood of complements, little sequence, little flowers, little statement pieces making crowns wish for better gold, little cousin and me with bright futures. When we grow up, maybe we'll be the faces on the coins jangling in our pockets, maybe will be statues of men with ruthless histories. Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, Matthew, Dante, on Rushmore, Black Hills, South Dakota, Sioux territory defiled. Back in the Bronx. We snagged fireflies after church, marveling at their bulbs, crushing their bodies just enough to retain that bright flickering. We laughed like Gods with cruel punch lines. When I grow up, I won't be proud of the light we made on Linux, a land pastor said, We serve a vengeful God when God was my hero, Savior, tyrant. What's the difference when the trigger clicks for either hand? When I grow up, or vote for the first black president, Grandma will say I look like him. I'll show off his deadly smile.



04:32

The slow down is a production of American Public Media, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation. This project is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts on the web@arts.gov