

America Story of Us, Ep. 1 “Rebels” – Transcript

Introduction:

Adventurers sail across an ocean to start a new life. A nation is born. It becomes the envy of the world. But in search of freedom friends become foes, and these new Americans will wage a war against the world's greatest military power

Opening Credits

We are pioneers, and trailblazers, we fight for freedom, we transform our dreams into the truth, our struggles will become a nation.

America: The Story of Us – Rebels

Shiploads of businessmen and true believers are crossing the Atlantic Ocean to create a new world.

May 1610. 120 years after Columbus, it's still a perilous journey.

One ship, *The Deliverance*, carries a cargo that will change America forever. “All hands over here.” On board is John Rolfe, a 24-year-old English farmer. Ambitious, self-reliant, visionary. A born entrepreneur.

What takes us six hours today by plane was then a voyage of more than two months.

Seven of the early adventurers out of every ten will be dead within a year.

“Land ahoy!”

But the risks are worth it. North America is the ultimate land of opportunity. A continent of vast untapped wealth. Starting with the most valuable resource of all: land.

What will be home to more than 300 million people lies under a blanket of forest covering nearly half the land. More than 50 billion trees.

Further west, 9 million square miles of vast American wilderness. 60 million bison roam the plains. And underground, there are rumors of gems, silver and the largest seams of gold in the world. The settlers expect nothing less than El Dorado.

But what Rolfe finds at the English settlement of Jamestown is hell on Earth. More than 500 settlers made the journey before Rolfe.

“Hello? Hello?”

Barely 60 remain. It's called "The Starving Time.”

“Having fed on horses and other animals, we ate boots, shoes, and any other leather we came across.”

“Somebody, help!”

Three months before Rolfe arrives, a man is burned at the stake for killing his pregnant wife and planning to eat her.

The English arrive unprepared for this new world and unwilling to perform manual labor. Instead of livestock, they've brought chemical tests for gold that they never find.

And this is not their land. They build Jamestown in the middle of a Native American empire. Sixty starving settlers among 20,000 of the Powhatan Nation, armed with bows and arrows that are up to nine times faster to reload and fire than an English musket. They're soon enemies.

Only one in ten of the original settlers is left.

John Rolfe didn't come to plunder and leave like the others. He's got his own plan. There's money in tobacco, and England is addicted. He's arrived with a supply of South American tobacco seeds, but growing it is limited to the Spanish colonies.

The Spanish control the worldwide trade. Selling tobacco seeds to foreigners is punishable by death. But John Rolfe has got his hands on some. No one knows how.

And in the warm, humid climate and fertile soil around the Chesapeake Bay, Rolfe's tobacco crop flourishes. The first large harvest produced by these seeds is worth more than a million dollars in today's money.

“The great strength of America is our people. If you want to know what is the defining strength of America, it is our people, our immigrant tradition, our bringing in cultures from all over the world.” (General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff)

“I know what goes into making success. And when somebody's really successful, it's rarely luck. It's talent, it's brain power, it's lots of other things.” (Donald J. Trump)

Rolfe marries the daughter of the king of the Powhatan Empire. Her name becomes legend: Pocahontas. In England, Rolfe makes her a celebrity when her face is put on a portrait that sells all over London, advertising life in the New World.

Shakespeare mentions the colony. England's rich invest money here. All of London knows about this land of plenty.

Within two years, tobacco grows in every garden. From a living hell, Jamestown is America's first boomtown.

Two years later, nearly 1,000 more settlers arrive, including 19 from West Africa. Slaves. But some go on to own their own land in Virginia.

“Twelve years after the founding of Jamestown, Africans were playing a shaping role in the creation of the colonies. That's pretty incredible.” (Historian, Henry Louis Gates, Harvard University)

30 years later, there are over 20,000 settlers in Virginia. America is founded on tobacco. For the next century and a half, it's the continent's largest export.

Ten years after Rolfe arrives in Jamestown, another group of English settlers lands in North America. They come ashore on a deserted beach 450 miles up the coast from Jamestown and call the place Plymouth, after the English port they sailed from.

These are a different breed of settler, a group of religious dissidents with faith at the center of their lives. They made the dangerous Atlantic crossing seeking religious freedom in the New World. 24-year-old apprentice printer Edward Winslow arrives with a group of religious sectarians on a boat called the Mayflower. By April 1621, their settlement is taking shape.

The Mayflower returns to England. The Pilgrims are on their own in an unknown land.

“A great hope and inward zeal we had of laying some great foundation for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world.”

They're 19 families. Goats, chickens, pigs and dogs. They have spinning wheels, chairs, books, guns. And no way home.

“If you create this environment as a land of opportunity, then you're going to attract those type of people who want to take that risk, who have — want to take that gamble and who believe in a better life.”
(Michael Douglas, actor)

They were heading for the Hudson River, but they've landed 200 miles further north at the beginning of winter. They have arrived in the middle of a mini ice age, temperatures 2° colder than today. Winters are longer, growing seasons shorter. The soil is poor. Little grows. Food supplies run low. In the first three months, more than half the Pilgrims die.

William Bradford is the governor of a community soon in desperate trouble. “It pleased God to visit us with death daily. Disease was everywhere. The living were scarcely able to bury the dead. They died sometimes two or three a day. Of 100 and odd persons, scarce 50 remained.”

At times, only six are fit enough to continue building their shelters.

Susanna White's husband dies that first winter. Edward Winslow's wife perishes a month after. Within weeks, White and Winslow marry. They'll have five children.

Today more than 10% of all Americans can trace their ancestry back to the Mayflower.

For a time, Plymouth provides the sanctuary they sought.

“Edward! Edward! Edward, please go and look over there!”

But like Jamestown, there were others here first.

April 1621.

The Pilgrims have been in the New World for five months. Barely half survive the first winter.

But they're not the first Europeans to arrive on this coast. Five years before, European ships brought light-skinned people and plague. Almost nine out of ten of the local people are wiped out.

The Pokanoket people don't need enemies. They make peace with the Pilgrims. They teach the English how to grow crops in sandy soil, using fish for fertilizer. But they want something in return. They have a common enemy – a rival tribe. And the English have powerful weapons.

The Pilgrims aren't soldiers. But in the New World, they have to fight to survive.

On August 14, 1621, Pilgrims and Pokanoket, shoulder to shoulder, will launch a surprise attack that will seal their future in this new land.

“It was resolved to send 14 men, well-armed, and to fall upon them in the night.
The captain gave charge: Let none pass out.”

The rival tribe doesn't know what hit them. Surrounded, they have no answer for English firepower.

Pokanoket and Pilgrims find common ground and a chance to survive. Two unlikely allies.
A partnership all too rare in North America.

“We have found the Indians very faithful in their covenant of peace with us. They are people without any religion or knowledge of any God, yet very trusty, quick of apprehension, ripe-witted and just.”

Their victory brings a period of peace to the colony. Their friendship is celebrated in a feast. In time, it will become known as Thanksgiving.

“One of the main themes in the founding of America was a place to do business, a place to expand your horizons, a place to live a life of your own, practice your own religion.
Those are the basic themes that brought people to these shores to colonize.” (Rudolph Giuliani)

It's the start of a period of prosperity that will transform North America. From Jamestown and Plymouth, their descendants grow across the landscape. As more and more people cross the Atlantic – thousands, tens of thousands, people with different backgrounds, different reasons for being here America becomes the place for everybody from anywhere. Rolling the dice, coming together to create 13 colonies.

From Jamestown, agriculture spreads across the South, dirt farms transform into sprawling plantations. Irish, Germans, and Swedes push back the frontier. The Dutch bring commerce to a small island at the mouth of the Hudson River. In time, it will be named New York.

The colonists are 2 inches taller, and far healthier, than those they left behind in Europe.
The Puritans average eight children, and they are twice as likely to survive to adulthood.
They are 20% richer and pay only 1/4 of the taxes of those in England.

Many still think of themselves as British, but each generation grows further from its roots.
Nowhere more so than Boston.

May 9, 1768.

Seven generations after John Rolfe's first tobacco harvest, the British want a bigger piece of the action.

A British customs official springs a surprise raid on *The Liberty*, a ship belonging to John Hancock, one

of the richest men in Boston.

But Hancock's crew has other ideas. They're carrying 100 casks of imported wine and don't want to pay duty. It's a radical act of rebellion against taxes imposed by a king 3,000 miles away. To the British, they're just common smugglers.

This small skirmish changes everything.

The British seize Hancock's ship, triggering riots that sweep through Boston.

“We didn't want to pay taxes to a king and to a parliament where we didn't have a voice, and we didn't have any representation. We have a natural resentment toward government, which was how we were born.” (Aaron Sorkin, Screenwriter)

The king sends 4,000 redcoats to Boston to enforce his laws.

“Boston was a city of commerce, culture, civilization, and revolution, unfolding right before the eyes of the colonists and the eyes of the British.” (Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University)

October 1768.

British soldiers clamp down on Boston, a port crucial to the British Empire and a hub of global trade and commerce.

Its dockyards are some of the busiest in the world, producing 200 ships a year from America's vast timber reserves. A third of all British shipping is built in the colonies.

Timber fuels the global economy much like oil does today. Across New England, marks identify the tallest, strongest trees selected by the crown for British ships. England has lost most of its forests. It wants American wood.

In Boston, there's one redcoat for every four citizens. It's a city under occupation.

Paul Revere is a silversmith and one of Boston's prominent businessmen an unlikely subversive.

“They formed and marched with insolent parade, drums beating, fifes playing, and colors flying, each soldier having received 16 rounds of powder and ball.”

He is an upper-middle-class figure, someone who has risen through his own efforts, his own talent. He represents what we have created on our own with very little help from our cousins across the Atlantic. (Richard Norton Smith, George Mason University) (24 min)

But when revolution comes to North America, Revere will be at the center of it. Boston and the 13 colonies are an economic powerhouse, critical to Britain. Nearly 40% of everything exported from Britain makes its way to America.

The fishing fleet ships thousands of tons of salted cod to the Caribbean. It returns with sugar and molasses – raw material for rum. Taxed by the British after every exchange.

In Africa, rum is the currency used to purchase the most profitable cargo of all: African slaves. Between 1700 and 1800, more than 1/4 of a million Africans are brought to the American colonies. More slaves than all those who came of their own free will.

Most wind up on large plantations in the South. But they're also critical to the economy of the North. Ten percent of Boston's population is black. Boston is a melting pot, and tension is building.

“Nobody likes invaders in their homes. To have people here, foreigners on your soil, is something – is a great incentive for people to fight.” (Historian, Annette Gordon-Reed, Rutgers)

March 5, 1770

After three days of unrest, an angry mob roams the streets. Hundreds of men who lost their jobs and blame the British gather on King Street and face off against eight redcoats with orders not to fire. What's about to happen will change America forever.

A 17-year-old wig maker's apprentice, Edward Garrick, lights the fuse. This is how wars start.

“Come on, let's have it!” Private Hugh Montgomery is hit with a club (crowd noises, scenes of action, a skirmish).

An African-American, Crispus Attucks, dies instantly. “Everybody, run!” When the smoke clears, four more are dead. How Boston reacts will change the course of history.

Silversmith and political radical Paul Revere captures the moment British soldiers kill five colonists in the streets of Boston.

His engraving will fuel the fires of revolution as outrage spreads across the 13 colonies.

“Unhappy Boston see thy sons deplore, thy hallowed walks besmeared with guiltless gore, whilst faithless Preston and his savage bands, with murderous rancor, stretch their bloody hands.”

The most formidable army in the world firing on an unarmed crowd. An explosive image with a title that says it all: “The Bloody Massacre.”

“There was the old joke, ‘You give me a picture, I'll give you a war.’ Those who wanted to stir things up and to make a statement and maybe even lead a revolution, it made them able to rally others to their side.” (Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor of NYC)

News spreads fast. The colonists are avid readers, a legacy from the first Bible-reading Puritans in Plymouth. Boston has the first weekly newspaper. There are now more than 40 papers across the colonies.

And the new postmaster general, Benjamin Franklin has introduced a revolutionary postal-delivery system. Night riders cut the delivery time in half. The communications network connecting the colonies is one of the best in the world. (It's called the Committees of Correspondence).

And the British have no idea. They hope the news can be contained. Before news reaches England, most of America knows about the Boston Massacre.

“It's a very American spirit of an idea, this idea that everybody should have access to knowledge. It's very much like that pioneering idea, everybody should be able to make their way in the world.” (Jimmy Wales, co-founder, Wikipedia)

A printer in Connecticut can read the exact same story as a farmer in North Carolina.

December 1773.

The Boston Gazette breaks another story that will fan the flames of rebellion. The rising tide of anger and resentment forces England's hand. They repeal all taxes except one, on tea. It's not enough.

In one of the most famous acts of resistance in American history, Rebels dump over \$1 million worth of tea in Boston Harbor.

“When someone comes along and smacks us, we don't turn the other cheek. That's not who we are.” (Tom Brokaw, NBC News)

“Move it!” The British respond by shutting down Boston Harbor one of America's busiest, wealthiest ports. “Come on, lad.” Hundreds lose their jobs.

The British mean to strangle any resistance from the rebellious colony of Massachusetts.

America is about to change forever.

Tensions escalate far beyond Boston. Settlers are pushing west. Many have their eyes set on new land west of the Appalachians. But to protect Native American lands, England has banned settlements along a boundary called the Proclamation Line. Hundreds are evicted from their homes on the frontier.

September 5, 1774.

“We want liberty.” Incensed at the British actions, 56 delegates from across the colonies gather at the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia. It's the first step on the road to American democracy.

Among them are John Adams, Patrick Henry, and a gentleman landowner from Virginia named George Washington.

“At a time when our lordly masters in Great Britain will be satisfied with nothing less than the deprivation of American freedom, it seems highly necessary that something should be done to maintain liberty.”

Across New England, people prepare to defend themselves. Smuggled arms are collected and stashed in secret hideaways.

But while many expect conflict, most delegates in Philadelphia want peace with Britain.

“A military action would make a wound that would never be healed.”

“That's good, we don't have all day, let's go, come on.”

The First Continental Congress resolves that a British attack on any one colony will be regarded as an

attack on all of them. What emerges at Philadelphia is solidarity.

“The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Englanders, and New Yorkers are no more. I'm not a Virginian. I am an American.”

The future of the 13 American colonies hangs in the balance.

Spring 1775.

Near Concord, Massachusetts. “Get in here, get those weapons stacked up. We haven't got all day.” Local gunsmith Isaac Davis puts the town militia through basic training.

“The American patriots knew that they were doing the right thing. You're starting the birth of a nation. You had to really believe in what you were doing.” (1st Sgt. William Bodette)

“You've gotta keep this clean here, sir. If you keep that clean, it'll save your life.”

If war comes, this will be America's first line of defense. A volunteer home guard with weapons paid for by local citizens.

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They're farmers, blacksmiths, and store owners. A fighting force of ordinary Americans.

The militiamen of any of the colonies were made up of just its citizens. It was a citizen-based protection unit.

And some of them had some skills, but some of them were just the carpenters. Some of them were just the mason or the blacksmith.

“I mean, these were guys that – they had something at stake to protect their colony. So they started to form together, just trying to help protect each other.”

Every town across the colonies has its own militia, but now they're preparing to defend themselves against the British Army.

“Better than yesterday, better than yesterday.”

For six generations across Massachusetts, men are expected to serve as militiamen. In Massachusetts, 1/3 of all men between 16 and 50 are ready to bear arms at a minute's notice.

“Excellent, good shot. We keep this up, we're gonna give those redcoats a scare, all right?”

The British will not stand for any armed resistance.

April 19, 1775.

After midnight, 900 redcoats leave their barracks in Boston for Lexington and Concord, about 20 miles away. Their orders: Arrest the Rebel leaders and seize their weapons.

News of the British attack also reaches Paul Revere. His midnight ride will alert local militias. Revere rides ahead of the British troops. His warning spreads from town to town, across the New England countryside. Paul Revere reaches Lexington in time to spread the word.

“The British are coming. We need to warn the militia. Get 'em together. Come on!”

By 5:00 in the morning, 60 militiamen line up. They're commanded by a farmer, John Parker. They're faced off against hundreds of well-armed and highly experienced British soldiers. What happens next will transform the world forever.

Sunrise, April 19, 1775.

On one side 60 men, poorly armed and barely trained. On the other, hundreds of the most powerful army in the world. Men who have only been active for a handful of months vs. an army that in the past 20 years has fought on five continents and defeated everything in its path. For these Rebels, the fight is for nothing less than freedom itself.

“These guys were revolutionaries, they were scallywags, they were rebels, some of them were gentlemen farmers, some of them were overeducated, some of them were undereducated. It really was the birth of a nation.”

The Lexington Militia gathers on the village common. Dairy farmers and shopkeepers. But also among them are free African-Americans and slaves. It is a unique experience that African-Americans have had in the military in America. African-Americans fought for the country even before it was a country. African-Americans like Prince Estabrook.

“Give me training. You give me a weapon, and I can perform as well as you can. Then there's no power on Earth that's gonna hold me down forever.”

“Stand your ground. Don't fire unless fired upon. But if we mean to have war, let it begin here.”

Captain John Parker once fought on the side of the British. One fourth of the men standing at his side are related to him.

No one knows who fires the first shot at Lexington but it's the shot heard 'round the world.

“I mean, the redcoats, that's intimidating, the way they move, the way they march, the way they execute on that open space. I imagine, on some level, for the guy who works the printing press, this is overwhelming beyond anything you could possibly articulate in words.”

“Fire!” Prince Estabrook is hit in the first volley.

No army in the world can stand toe-to-toe with the British, let alone a ragtag militia.

“Fire!” The British fired up to four times the rate of the militia.

Within minutes of the first shots fired at Lexington, eight Patriots are dead, ten wounded. The American Revolution has begun. The redcoats reach Concord at 9:00 in the morning. Acting on a tipoff from colonists loyal to the crown, they raid the militia's arms stash.

But the Rebels have got there first hiding almost everything. “That's good, we don't have all day, let's go, come on.”

They continue to search for weapons, giving the Patriots more time to spread the word. The militia gathers just outside the town of Concord. By late morning, more than 1,000 have arrived from the surrounding villages. Their plan, to defend their towns against the British. “Let's go!”

The British soldiers left their barracks 15 hours ago. And now they face a 20-mile march back to Boston.

Shattered lives, an occupied city, blood in the streets of Boston and now Lexington. A people unified in the fight against tyranny. Now the Patriots have their chance.

Gunsmith and militia leader Isaac Davis takes a bullet through the heart.

The Patriots seize the upper hand and intend to make the British soldiers pay. They shadow the redcoats' march, firing on them the entire way. A third are killed or wounded.

Seven generations after the first settlers left England, in search of prosperity and freedom, their descendants will have to fight for these rights.

Standing in their way is the might of the world's greatest military superpower. And they're not about to give up their colonies lightly.

End, Ep.1 “Rebels”

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