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The Story of Us Episode 3: Westward A new country heads West  
With new heroes and a new enemy - The American wilderness.  
The pioneers face incredible hardship But their battles  
forge the American character And build the new American  
nation.

We are pioneers and trailblazers.

We fight for freedom We transform our dreams into the truth,  
Our struggles will become a nation.

300 million years BC.

A meteorite the size of Central Park Hurtles towards Earth.  
With the force of 100,000 Atomic bombs, It smashes into the  
Appalachian Mountains.

The Cumberland Gap.

When America passes through this gateway And conquers what  
lies beyond, A colony will become a continent.

I think Americans have always been-- have been pioneers.

We're a nation of adventurers And explorers.

We are always moving forward And we're always dealing with  
problems, not ignoring them.

Land west of the Cumberland Gap Belongs to a patchwork of  
foreign superpowers: Britain, France, Spain.

The rest occupied by hundreds of Native American tribes.

3,000 miles of fertile land.

Millions of acres for anyone who can conquer it.

Riches, too.

Thousands of tons of gold and silver.

But this land is also brutal wilderness.

Conquering it requires extraordinary people.

March 1775.

Daniel Boone: Woodsman, hunter, Freedom fighter, explorer  
Dreamer.

Boone and his 30 men slash through the Cumberland Gap On a  
mission to tap the riches.

Cut it through, we're coming through here.

Before us lay the finest body of land in the world, With  
which little exertion we can call our own.

One day thousands will desire this land, And we will be  
rich.

But Boone's journey into the western wilderness Is also a  
journey into the American soul? The frontier is a crucible  
Where America will define itself And forge its true  
character.

The King of England has outlawed any Western expansion,  
Illegal settlers rounded up and punished.

Boone's already fought the British back East.

Now he's defying them again.

Daniel Boone was that first great Action hero for America.  
America wanted to see itself that way, I think.

They wanted to see themselves As fiercely independent, Very  
capable And And willing to go places Most human beings  
wouldn't have gone.

Come on, men, this way.

Boone and his men take no supplies.

Come on, come on! conjured (from the land.

insect repellent.

food.

Come on, come on! Boone records in his journal.

We are exposed daily to peril and death amongst Savages and  
wild beasts.

But nature satisfies all we need.

Few experience the happiness we feel here In the howling  
wilderness.

But for the Shawnee, this is not wilderness.

It is home.

And they will defend it At all costs.

Good work, John, good work.

These areas that seemed like wilderness To the Americans  
weren't wilderness To these American-Indian people.

That was just their lands.

Daniel Boone and the Shawnee have history.

Only the year before, They kidnapped his eldest son, James  
And tortured him to death.

On the 25th of March, 1775, Boone crosses into Shawnee

territory.

In the mountains for eight days People were able to survive on this With nothing to eat.

Go, go! Go, go, run! Rifles, get 'me, come on! Ambushed, Boone must flee.

His friend, Captain Twitty, and his slave, Sam, Are both scalped and slaughtered.

But Boone pushes on further west.

Well, I think more than anything, The American character is perseverance.

They persevered, they fought, It wasn't easy against great odds, But they had persevered.

Boone's friend and companion Felix Walker writes: He conducted the company through the wilderness With such bravery.

Indeed he appeared void of fear, With too little caution for the enterprise.

50 of Boone's men die settling Kentucky.

But within 20 years, 200,000 Americans pour in behind him. We were a burgeoning society.

Suddenly we realized, Whoa, the owner's manual says, "This is all ours.

" "Keep going west.

" Land hunger becomes a fever Even for the government.

27 years after independence, The single biggest real-estate deal in history.

President Thomas Jefferson Buys the vast Louisiana territories from Napoleon.

Half a billion acres for 3' an acre.

Just as America will one day go to the moon, Now a mission into this unknown.

Lewis and Clark wanna see What's on the other side? Given a mountain, we wanna climb it.

We hold those Ventures of the past In great admiration.

May 1804.

A presidential aide and a junior army officer Set out on a mapping expedition.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's journey Is about to become one of the most epic tales of survival In American history.

The Rockies: Unknown, mythical.

Even woolly mammoth are fabled to roam here.

Treacherous, too.

No one expects the Rockies to be 90 separate mountain ranges, 3,000 miles long.

They're caught in a death trap.

After two weeks, starvation sets in.

They eat any plants they can find.

Next, they eat their horses.

The expedition is given up as dead.

But they survive, And they owe their survival To a 16-year-old Native American girl.

Sacagawea of the Shoshone Nation guides them, Finds wild food, And saves their precious million-word journals From an overturned canoe.

In 1805, William Clark notes in his journal: Ocean in view! O! The joy! They are the first New Americans To reach the Pacific Ocean over land.

Lewis and Clark's remarkable expedition Discovers 300 Species of wildlife, Transforming science and agriculture. But their journals record an even greater discovery, One that will forge A whole new breed of American hero.

America.

East and West.

The pioneering spirit of Americans Has busted the continent wide-open.

Lewis and Clark's heroic expedition through the Rockies Uncovers a route to the West's most valuable commodity Beaver.

Their pelts, frontier hard currency.

Traded by Native Americans for guns, Knives, salt.

And they're a high-fashion luxury for the rich.

They've been hunted nearly to extinction in Europe.

Here they're everywhere.

Millions of them.

The freezing Rocky Mountain water Makes the beaver pelts thicker, warmer, More expensive than other fur.

New iron traps from New York foundries Make catching them easier.

Baited with the beaver's own scent glands, They're drawn to

their death.

October 1823.

300 eager trappers roam the Rockies, Searching for their fortune.

One in five won't make it out alive.

Trapping's harsh, hungry work.

6,000 calories a day are needed to survive The extreme conditions-- Three times what we eat today.

Jedediah Smith is the greatest hunter of all.

24 years old.

He walks up to 1,000 miles in the Rockies each year.

Traps 600 pelts in a season-- Three years' pay back East.

Smith is a devout Christian.

Doesn't drink, doesn't smoke.

Bible and gun a constant companion.

He's smart, works with the Native Americans.

The Crow show him ancient shortcuts, Sell him horses, Nurse his sick men back to health.

Wilderness survival.

For millennia, the tribes of North America Have adapted themselves to live in any condition, From arid plains to harsh mountain pass.

Jed Smith uses their knowledge and his skill To open up the West for vast fur-trapping profits.

He'll die a rich man.

But today he's not the hunter.

He's the hunted.

Jed Smith's friend James Clyman writes: The grizzly did not hesitate, springing on the captain, Breaking his ribs and cutting his head.

This gave us a lesson on the character of the grizzly, Which we did not forget.

The grizzly bear is the most deadly frontier beast.

100,000 of these terrifying killers Are on the prowl.

Up to ten feet tall, 1,000 pounds, They don't fear man Yet.

Today there are fewer than 2,000 grizzlies In the Rockies.

Halfway to death, Jed Smith's right-hand man, Jame Clyman, Stitches his scalp and ear back to his head.

I put in my needle, stitching it through and through And over and over, Laying the lacerated parts together as nice

as I could.

There is an amazing sense of confidence As part of that  
American spirit That doesn't Even think about failing.

Jed Smith pushes on.

This is the new character of America: Frontier grit, rugged  
individualism, Survival.

And something else survives, too.

The trails he forges become settler paths, Wagon trains,  
roads And today Interstate 15.

And Americans follow the new tracks west In a tidal wave of  
hope.

May 1846.

Thousands of men, women and children.

Riding, walking, pushing.

They're heading for a new life 2,000 miles away.

It was a land of opportunity.

You can make of yourself what you want.

You're only held back by your own desires.

Germans, Belgians, French.

Catholics, Presbyterians, Mormons.

One of the world's great mass migrations begins.

The pioneer spirit has moved on.

In this colossal migration to Oregon and California, America  
will finally define its character.

It's the American dream, Then as now, The people want an  
already good life to get better.

They can walk ten miles a day For up to six months straight.

Some go through ten pairs of boots each.

Half are children.

En route, one in five of the women are pregnant.

But these aren't America's poor.

Families sell farms, Save for five years to join the exodus,  
Risking it all.

I think if there is one episode That encapsulates the  
American spirit, I think it is probably the move west.

Whip those mules and horses And cross those rivers and cross  
over those mountains To the unknown and say, "I'm leaving  
everything behind.

" "I'm leaving everything that I know behind" "To reinvent  
myself.

" A wagon and oxen cost minimum \$5,000 in today's money.  
But it buys a complete life-support machine.  
The wagons carry a precious cargo, 1,000 pounds of supplies  
And a grubstake for your journey-- Your entire new life in  
the West.  
The pioneering spirit is ingenious.  
Essential drinking water captured from rain On the wagon  
canvas.  
Even the oxen's dung is fuel for fires.  
And like today, there are tolls.  
Native Americans charge \$10 for road And \$100 for river  
crossings, in modern money.  
But the greatest toll of all Human lives.  
In all, 20,000 Americans Will die reaching the West.  
Ten graves for every mile.  
But one story of suffering and death Will show just how far  
The pioneers will go to conquer the West.  
Hiyah! Hiyah, hiyah! June 1846.  
A wagon train heads west.  
Its leader is George Donner.  
Good luck.  
Good, now push! Push! His wife, Tamsen Donner, is a  
schoolteacher.  
Yes, okay.  
But on the trail, women must turn their hands to anything.  
Push, that's it! Yeah, push, push! The Donner Party are  
halfway across the blistering Wyoming Prairie, Miles from  
the nearest doctor, With barely any water.  
Good, yes.  
Okay.  
I think the women who came across America In the early days,  
must've been made up of The strongest fiber possible.  
It's unimaginable.  
Good.  
Yes.  
Ludwig.  
The new American's mother and father Are Philippine and  
Ludwig Keseberg.  
They christen their son Louis.  
The journey is tough But the going's good.

Tamsen Donner writes in her journal: I could never have believed we could have traveled So far with so little difficulty.

Indeed if we do not experience anything worse, I shall say the trouble is all in getting started.

But as leader of the wagon train, Tamsen's husband, George Donner, Is aware there's one final obstacle to their journey.

The Sierra Nevada.

Peaks up to 14,000 feet.

Fail to clear the mountain passes Before the first snow falls And the consequences are terrifying.

But as the Donner Party approaches Utah, George Donner makes a fateful decision-- Leading a splinter group off from the main party.

He's read one of the many new trail guidebooks, Showing a shortcut that claims To shave two weeks off the journey time.

Hastings Cutoff is said to be a saving of 400 miles.

We are informed it is a fine, level road With plenty of water and grass.

But Donner's information is wrong.

In fact, the "Shortcut" adds 100 miles to the journey.

High in the Sierra Nevada, The Donner Party enters the Truckee Pass.

They're only 30 miles from the California plains.

But supplies are dangerously low, And traveling through the mountains Is taking its toll.

A broken axle.

The Donner Party stops to make repairs.

But that night 5 feet of snow falls.

Soon the drifts are 60 feet deep.

The Donner Party will be stranded for five months.

In just three weeks, They've eaten all their food.

Then they kill their pack animals.

Next, they eat charred bones, Twigs, bark, leaves, dirt And worse.

Even the wind held its breath As the suggestion was made that was one to die, The rest might live.

Cannibalism.



Christmas 1846.

They eat their first human.

Bodies are cut up, flesh labeled, So people don't eat their own kin.

Four rescue parties bring out some survivors.

The very last finds Philippine's husband Ludwig, alone.

He is surrounded by bones, entrails, And a 2-gallon kettle of human blood.

George Donner's body is found, skull split open, His brain removed.

Tamsen Donner's body is never found.

The pass is renamed the "Donner Pass," Testament to the hardship of the pioneers' push West.

Today it's the Lincoln Highway.

Thousands drive this road every year.

But beneath the bones of the Donner Party, The Sierra Nevada conceals a seam of gold.

Largest the world has yet seen.

Gold fever is about to change the West, And the American character yet again.

March 1836.

Texas, the Alamo.

The American nation is expanding, Growing stronger, bigger.

But there's something else out there even bigger, Even stronger: Mexico-- a superpower.

A colossal empire stretching from Oregon to Guatemala.

But Texas is disputed territory.

The Mexican government has invited American settlers in, But are soon overwhelmed by the flood of pioneers.

Americans, by the thousands, were coming into Texas And they were not abiding to the agreements To come in as settlers.

And once they outnumber-- By 1835-- Mexicans ten to one in that area, Of course the Americans are thinking about independence.

The Alamo is where Mexico tries to stem the flood.

The shots that killed Davy Crockett And his fellow settlers echoed across America.

The women and children are spared, Sent back to send the Mexican message, "Don't come.

" But America hears something else.

"Remember the Alamo.

" (Screaming A turning point.

America will now wage war to go west.

Texas is won, California fought and bought.

The same month California becomes American, It becomes the nation's greatest prize.

Volcanic magma.

Over millions of years, In a fault zone beneath the Sierra Nevada, Cooling and pressure create quartz.

And within the quartz, gold.

The seam is one of the densest on the planet.

Rocks erode and the riches are released.

Carpenter James Marshall finds a 3-ounce nugget In the California river.

Two months' pay in his hand, But billions of dollars beneath his feet.

News of Marshall's discovery Spreads to every corner of the world.

In California, you can taste the American dream: Get rich quick.

Within a year, 100,000 Desperate amateur prospectors Flood the Sierra foothills.

It was the American dream distilled to its essence.

Take yourself and go out And try and make a success of it.

A Chinese prospector's 100-ounce strike In the Yuba River. \$26,000 made by a single Irishman In just four days.

A \$200,000 super seam Mined by 12 Mexicans at Bear Valley.

In the port of San Francisco, A plot of land worth \$16 Before the gold strike Now changes hands for \$45,000.

In two years, the population of California explodes From 15,000 to 100,000.

Now, hand-panning is replaced by lines of sluice boxes Desperately combing For anything the first prospectors missed.

And the price of living rockets.

Picks, pans, shovels Go from a few cents to \$10 apiece.

Breakfast costs ten times what it does back East.

But still the people come.

200 abandoned ships in San Francisco harbor, The crews deserting, rushing for the hills.

He's traveled 6,000 miles.

He's spent all his money.

Now he travels by foot.

Belgian Jean-Nicolas Perlot writes: We crossed 200 miles of wilderness Full of Indians, bears, panthers, Wildcats, snakes of every kind.

The first thing he finds isn't gold.

Its graves.

200 of them.

Prospectors cut off by rains in the foothills Starved to death.

Approaching, we realized animals of some kind Had dug up the bodies.

I read a note attached to one of the graves.

"God has willed that civilization" "Should begin in this place," "With this duty which a man owes to his kind.

" "Bury the dead.

" Perlot does find gold, But never in the quantities that he'd dreamed.

As the gold fields are picked clean, Tensions rise, times get tougher.

After just five years, the Gold Rush is over.

I think that there is that Western mentality of prospecting-- Try and fail, try and fail, And the fact that you tried is worthy in and of itself.

Of 300,000 Who rush to find gold, Less than one out of 100 Struck it rich.

But fortunes were made By the merchants and landowners Who supplied the miners.

From dirt and dreams Came the great cities of California. Both the West And the American character that built it are settled.

Now this new powerhouse will face another revolution.

October 1818.

A nine-year-old boy comforts his mother As she lies on her deathbed.

Milk sickness kills thousands of pioneers every year.

The cause: White Snakeroot eaten by cattle, The deadly poison passed in milk to humans.

At 18, the boy becomes a man, But he has been working like a

man for years, Battling for existence in this harsh environment.

It was a wild region, With many bears and other wild animals still in the woods.

There I grew up.

I had an ax in my hand From my eighth to my 20th year.

This is the life of American settler stock.

The young man's grandfather followed Daniel Boone's Wilderness Road into Kentucky.

His father pushed further Into the primeval forests of Indiana.

Settler families of ten or more Live in log cabins built from scratch.

Single roomed, basic.

The trailer homes of the day.

The wilderness provides everything.

They make their own plows, Rakes, forks, shovels, build their own furniture.

And they bury their dead.

In bad years, malaria kills One in eight of the settlers.

Life expectancy is half of what it is today.

But from adversity comes strength.

This settler's name is Abraham.

Abraham Lincoln.

If you work hard, You can do anything you wanna do.

The possibilities are endless.

To me, that was the American dream, as a kid.

Lincoln's family and thousands like theirs Have settled the West in four generations.

President Thomas Jefferson though it would take 1,000.

The forests are cleared: Five acres a family, a year.

In 1800, 23 million acres of Indiana is wilderness.

In 60 years, it's tamed, Flat, fertile farmland.

But there is more than forest to clear.

It's always been one of the deep flaws Of the American imagination, That it can't imagine a future For American-Indian people as Americans.

American-Indian people have to imagine that for themselves, And that's the hard part.

Keep walking.

Frontier president Andrew Jackson Declares a new policy, A policy that America will maintain For more than 100 years. The forced relocation of American tribal people Onto reservations.

You, keep moving! After years of Supreme Court battles, The bill passes Congress by a single vote.

Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, All forced off their nations by the point of a bayonet.

An episode in the conquest of the West That even some of the soldiers taking part find shameful.

US Army Private John G.

Burnett writes: The sufferings of the Cherokee were awful. The trail of the exiles was a trail of death.

They slept in the wagons and on the ground without fire.

I saw as many as 20 die in a single night of pneumonia, cold, exposure.

Move along.

Move along.

The march of 1,000 miles becomes a Trail of Tears.

It's a shameful act in American history And it's, in its own way, sort of an iconic act Because it really symbolizes What happened to the Native Americans? The West is open for business, But key to the transformation of the region Is a river 2,000 miles in length, Fed by rainfall from 31 states. Running from Minnesota to New Orleans, The Mighty Mississippi.

It's a lifeline connecting the West To the outside world.

If roads exist, they're muddy tracks.

This is the only trade artery, The interstate, That allows the pioneers and settlers to sell The produce they've sweated over.

A huge amount of goods are shipped out, But they're shipped out in The most nickel-and-dime way.

A farmer will build a flatboat, Fill it up with hogs, sassafras root, Ginseng root, tobacco-- Whatever it is you grow-- Put it on the flatboat, Use the power of the Mississippi To drift you down to sell them along the riverbank.

Aged 19, Abraham Lincoln Makes his first trip down the Mississippi, Poling his simple raft.

The current is too strong to return upstream.  
The primitive flatboats Are simply sold as lumber in New Orleans.  
Farmers have to walk the 800 miles home And begin again.  
But on that first journey, Lincoln sees the future.  
A new invention which will transform the Mississippi, The Midwest and America.  
The steamboat was the 19th century's Time machine, Just as surely as the airplane Was the 20th century's time machine.  
It shrunk distance.  
By shrinking distance, it enabled commerce.  
Even upstream, steamboats can travel 50 miles a day, Eight times faster, Eight times the cargo of a raft.  
But they're deadly.  
Over half the early models explode, Maiming and killing hundreds.  
But their number triples every decade.  
They make the Midwest America's economic powerhouse.  
Within 20 years, St. Louis alone swells from a few hundred To a population of 16,000.  
Over four generations, America has grown from A 100-mile-wide strip of colonies On the Eastern Seaboard to a continental powerhouse.

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