

America Story of Us Ep. 4 Transcript Westward

America is exploding across the continent.

The economy is booming.

Cotton in the South industry in the North.

But the new nation is divided.

In the land where all men are created equal 4 million black Americans live as slaves.

And it's tearing the nation apart.

All over the world, the modern era is being born.

It's the Industrial Revolution.

America is racing to catch up.

In upstate New York, a man-made river is cutting through the wilderness.

The Erie Canal is the biggest construction project in the Western world in the last 4,000 years.

Over 300 miles long, dug entirely by hand, and America lacks a single qualified engineer.

The United States of America isn't about to let nature stand in its way.

I think of the spirit of America being imagination combined with tenacity.

There's a strong work ethic, a wonderful freedom of creation combined with the mental muscle and physical labor.

So to me, it represents the best of the human spirit.

But the land doesn't always cooperate.

A wall of solid limestone 60 feet high.

Just 30 miles from the finish line, Lake Erie.

The canal will change everything, linking the Atlantic Ocean to the whole middle of America.

It changes where people live, and why, and turns the North into a global economic powerhouse.

The man behind the canal is New York's gung-ho governor, DeWitt Clinton.

Born to wealth, he won't take no for an answer.

He wants to be president.

Instead, he runs New York for 20 years.

America was blessed with many inspirational leaders, and I think DeWitt Clinton had a real sense of how important New York could be for America.

Clinton's vision: to make New York rich.

Politically, the canal is a huge gamble.

It's savaged in the press as dangerous and too expensive.

They call it "Clinton's big ditch.

" But it will change New York forever.

It is a work more stupendous, more magnificent, and more beneficial than has hitherto been achieved by the human race.

Entrepreneurship is about doing things when you don't know what it's gonna look like, you don't know what it's gonna be made of, you just have this instinct that you can do it and it'll work.

Those guys had visions and did it.

50,000 men.

11 million cubic yards of rock.

Enough to fill the Rose Bowl 26,000 times.

Crews are filled with Irish immigrants.

David Gilroy makes five times what he can earn back home, but it's hazardous work.

They're literally moving mountains, and there's only one way through-- gunpowder.

A highly combustible mix of nitrate, charcoal and sulfur.

The wrong proportions can be lethal.

There's only one job that's more dangerous than lighting the fuse going back to relight it.

To cope, workers drink.

Whiskey calms the nerves- and clouds the brain.

An English tourist can't believe they're mixing alcohol and explosives.

The Irish laborers grew so reckless of life, that at the signal for blasting, they would just hold their shovels over their heads.

I think when you're brought up in America, you're brought up on the history of hard work.

There are so many immigrants that have died to build this country.

That's in our bloodstream, that's in our DNA as Americans.

We don't want their lives to go in vain.

Because of that, we usually work harder than anybody else.

Eight years of digging.

Nearly a thousand lives lost.

\$7 million, more than 100 million today.

The Erie Canal opens in 1825, a miracle of engineering, connecting East and Midwest.

It's an instant economic superhighway.

\$15 million of goods a year flow along the canal.

Villages along the canal boom into dynamic cities-- Buffalo, Syracuse and Rochester.

Goods crash in price, up to 95%.

A frontier that had to be self-sufficient can now buy anything they want.

Prosperity is on the move.

New York City becomes a boomtown.

Wall Street takes off as a global financial center.

The city quadruples in size and surpasses New Orleans as the nation's number-one port.

There's so much money around, the word "millionaire" is invented in 1840.

The Erie Canal still shapes New York today.

80% of the upstate population still lives within 25 miles of it.

Hundreds of miles to the south, a small plant is creating another economic boom.

Cotton.

But this one will eventually tear the nation apart.

Cotton is native to tropical regions, making the Southern states of the US a perfect breeding ground.

The valued part is the soft fiber which grows tightly around the shrub's sticky seeds.

There are 30 species worldwide.

Growing it's no problem, but processing the fiber before it can be spun into cloth is labor-intensive.

Especially, separating the seeds.

For years, it could only be done by hand.

One pound took an entire day.

A simple patent filed on March 4, 1794, changes all that.

The cotton gin.

It automates the process and deeply divides the country.

The cotton gin transformed not only America, but the world.

The concept of mass production using a machine just exploded

everywhere.

One man can now process 50 times more cotton.

Output skyrockets all over the South.

In 1830, America is producing half the world's cotton.

By 1850, it's nearly 3/4.

Called white gold, cotton supports a new lavish lifestyle in the South.

By 1850, there are more millionaires per capita in Natchez, Mississippi, than anywhere else on Earth.

The richest man in town owns 40,000 acres, nearly three times the size of Manhattan Island.

The South is thriving on the backs of humans owning other humans.

It's called slavery.

The North is implicated in the South's success.

The industrial North is profiting from Southern cotton, but turns a blind eye to slavery.

Many of them slave owners themselves, the Founding Fathers assumed slavery would soon disappear.

Slavery has already been abolished for 20 years in Britain and is outlawed across most of Europe.

But with the cotton explosion, slavery becomes critical to the Southern economy.

Each slave is now 50 times more profitable.

A slave who sold for \$300 before the cotton gin goes for nearly 2,000 by 1860.

People don't really realize this, but slavery was actually on the decline in the South prior to the invention of the cotton gin, but then once the cotton gin made it so practical to grow cotton, all of a sudden, every farmer in the South wanted to plant as much cotton as possible.

But overproduction is destroying the land.

Cotton heads west in search of fertile soil, bringing slavery with it.

But antislavery forces in the North want to keep the frontier free.

The stage is set for the first battles in the war over slavery.

Cotton is changing the way Americans live.

In time, it will blow the nation apart.

For the South, cotton is a gold mine.  
Now the North wants a piece of the action.  
It's a partnership that makes everyone rich, based on a new machine, the power loom.  
Raw cotton comes in, finished cloth goes out.  
All under one roof.  
The modern factory is born.  
Lowell, Massachusetts, is called the city of spindles, a textiles boomtown.  
Population explodes from 200 in 1820 to nearly 20,000 in just 15 years.  
More than a third of the town works in the mills.  
85% are single women between 15 and 25.  
Harriet Robinson is ten.  
When her father dies, she goes to work at the mill.  
I can see myself now, racing down the alley, between the spinning frames, carrying in front of me a bobbin box bigger than I was.  
Women earn money for the first time.  
Harriet's wages help support her family.  
Industrialization is changing everyone's lives.  
All the mill girls make good use of their money.  
The mortgage is lifted from the homestead, the farmhouse is painted.  
Mill girls help maintain widowed mothers and drunken or invalid fathers.  
We were paid \$2 a week.  
Oh, how proud I was when it came to my turn to stand upon the bobbin-box.  
When women really joined the workforce in the cotton mills and the thread factories, I think it gave women an opportunity to get out, be serious about being breadwinners. And it changed the whole fabric of America.  
The mills also revolutionize how Americans dress.  
Mass production of cheap cotton fabrics spawns America's clothing industry.  
Previously, most families made their own clothes.  
Now, people buy ready-to-wear.  
Eastern fashions replace buckskin.  
By 1850, men's clothing is the largest manufacturing

industry in New York City.

For me, what makes me proudest to be an American is that American spirit of productivity, optimism, this idea that the world doesn't have to be doom and gloom, that we can use technology to make our lives better.

Fashion isn't the only innovation to come out of the mills. Technology developed here will lead straight to Silicon Valley.

Looms pioneer punch cards to produce patterned fabric. Each hole in the card tells the loom to use a different-colored thread, a yes-no decision.

It's binary code, the basis of all modern computers.

The birth of the computer and Internet began in cotton mills with these looms.

You know, in every major development, I think, in the history of America, technology has been at the center of it. Despite 12-hour shifts, the factories offer a new world of opportunity for women.

They are reading more, talking more, educating themselves. Yeah, reading books on factory time was against the rules, but we hid books in apron pockets and wastebaskets.

Sometimes we pasted poems on our looms to memorize.

And for the first time in America, their voices are heard. October 1836.

Women from the Lowell Mills gather after work and organize. Their protest against wage cuts is one of the first strikes in US history.

And they will win.

The mill bosses back down.

A generation of young women go on to become teachers, writers and even college graduates.

Harriet Robinson will become a leading suffragette and testify before Congress.

They're the first wave in a movement that results in women getting the vote.

Their secret meetings at night are only possible with the light from lamps powered by an extraordinary creature.

Whale oil opened up the night, and like so many really transformative technological innovations, it expanded human freedom.

It created a way for people to get more, do more and achieve more.

Crude oil won't be discovered for another 20 years.

Until then, America runs on whale oil.

The whaling industry helped invent part of the Industrial Revolution and the classic American workaholic, work-round-the-clock kind of environment, where if you have more light to keep you going in those dark winter days, you could get more done, you could make more money, and you could kind of drive the economy forward.

Whales are among the largest creatures to ever live on Earth.

Up to 180 tons and more than 100 feet long.

A single whale can produce up to 3, 000 gallons of oil.

Even today, whale oil is used by NASA.

The Hubble space telescope runs on it.

Whaling is one of the North's biggest industries, bringing in \$11 million a year.

But the human cost is also high.

Half of all ships will eventually be lost at sea.

Few men are willing to take the risk.

But it's an opportunity for African-Americans.

20,000 freemen and escaped slaves take to the seas.

John Thompson is a runaway from Maryland.

I have a family in Philadelphia.

But fearing to remain there any longer, I thought I would go on a whaling voyage where I stood least chance of being arrested by slave hunters.

The equal opportunity offered in whaling is ahead of its time.

Here, a colored man is only known and looked upon as a man and is promoted in rank according to his ability and skill to perform the same duties as a white man.

The whaling industry offered an ex-slave like John Thompson the possibility of social and economic fluidity, mobility and acceptance in a way.

Even in the North, that was not possible for black people otherwise.

The man on the lookout cried out, "There she blows !" There were four whales in sight, not more than 3/4 of a mile

distant.

It takes hours to kill them.

They use state-of-the-art harpoons invented by runaway slave Lewis Temple.

The whale can only be killed by lancing him under the fin, which is a work of much skill and practice.

A monster, terrible in his fury, able to shiver the boat in atoms by one stroke of his tail.

And yet even the dangers at sea are preferable to the horror of life as a slave.

Punishment is savage for those who risk escape, but some will do anything to be free.

1841, New Orleans.

Ground zero for the slave trade.

It's auction day.

The day every slave fears the most.

In the first half of the 19th century, over half a million slaves are sold at auction.

It's a business worth \$2 billion to the Southern economy.

Since the cotton boom, the value of slaves has skyrocketed.

Now men cost \$1,000.

Women, 800.

Children, 500.

Solomon Northup, an educated freeman from the North, was kidnapped into slavery.

You, come over here.

He would make us hold up our heads, walk us briskly back and forth, while customers would feel our hands and arms and bodies, make us open up our mouths and show our teeth, precisely as a jockey examines a horse, which he is about to barter for or purchase.

Scars upon a slave's back were considered evidence of a rebellious or unruly spirit, and hurt his sale.

Take your top off.

90% of all African-Americans are slaves, 4 million men, women and children.

We had based this country on everyone having inalienable rights to freedom and equality, and yet we created a system of abject persecution.

Slaves are fattened for auction, like livestock.



Dark-skinned men are bought for the fields, light-skinned women for the house.

Traders lie about their ages, even dye a slave's gray hairs. For the plantation owners, it was like just going to your local supermarket to get sugar or flour.

They had become so desensitized to the humanity of the slave that they did not see them as human beings.

Buyers demand the most fertile slaves for breeding.

The most expensive are light-skinned teenage virgins.

Rape is common.

Eliza's from a state plantation.

She's being sold, with her two children, Emily and Randall.

In Louisiana, it's illegal for children under 11 to be taken from their parents.

Boy, come over here.

It happens all the time.

Show me your teeth.

You know, 140 years is not a really long time in the context of history.

So it's hard for me to believe that blacks didn't have any rights here, they weren't treated as human beings, they were treated like animals, essentially.

Sir, please ! Over half the sales at auction will tear a family apart.

If you've ever been eight, to think of being separated from your mother and your father and sold and you'll never see them again.

The horror of that, the poignancy of all of that, and yet that's the kind of thing that happened across the South up until the end of slavery.

Okay, my final offer, I'll give you 1,000 for that man, 900 for that man.

That woman there, \$700.

Please, buy my child ! Sir ! Sir ! I have seen mothers kissing for the last time the faces of their dead offspring, but never have I seen such an exhibition of intense grief as when Eliza was parted from her child.

Three miles outside Baltimore heading North.

A slave on the run.

The risk of capture is high.

At most, 1, 000 a year are successful.

Ears cut off; Achilles tendons slashed; branding; all are common punishments if caught.

Frederick Douglass has failed twice, but won't let that stop him.

Men like Douglass are the South's worst nightmare.

He has a better chance than most of passing as a freeman.

Unlike 80% of slaves, he can read and write.

Even in the 21st century, we're only three or four generations away from people that not only could not get paid for their labor, it was against the law for them to read and write, it was against the law for them to marry, it was against the law for them to name their children after themselves.

Ladies and gentlemen, please.

Long way to go.

Ticket.

Black Americans must carry documents proving they're free, or who they belong to.

Frederick Douglass has papers borrowed from a friend.

Ticket.

They won't hold up to careful examination.

My whole future depended on the decision of this conductor.

Someone get this chicken.

This moment of time was one of the most anxious I ever experienced.

Had he looked closely at the paper, he could not have failed to discover that it called for a very different-looking person from myself.

Frederick Douglass makes it to New York City-- and freedom, and becomes a leading figure in the antislavery movement.

He'll write a best-selling autobiography.

He'll meet and debate with Lincoln in the White House.

At a time when slaves are barely regarded as people, he will become an icon, a celebrity, the best-known African-American in America.

The best hope for escaped slaves is the legendary Underground Railroad and the tireless efforts of Harriet Tubman.

An escaped slave herself, she risks her life returning south

again and again to guide others to freedom.

A masterful escape artist, Tubman will do anything to avoid capture, even keeping babies quiet with opium.

That's a good boy.

Harriet Tubman is the Moses of our people.

She was a wanted woman, she was a hated woman, reviled by the white South.

Just imagine you've gotten out of slavery, you've escaped, and yet you come back, you have the courage and the care about other people to come back into a hell.

The South puts a \$40, 000 reward on her head, but nothing stops her.

Come on, y'all ! Come on ! Move or die.

Tubman is one of America's first civil-rights activists.

In the same month she dies, Rosa Parks is born.

Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman threaten everything the South stands for.

Tens of thousands of slave owners had to deal with, for the first time, the fact that these people are going to rebel.

She was far more effective as the symbol that they feared than the few hundred that she saved.

Nearly 60,000 slaves will escape, up to a \$50 million loss to their owners, but it symbolizes much more.

Now the South has a fight on its hands, and they're prepared to do whatever it takes to preserve their way of life.

The fight for the soul of a nation is just getting started.

Midway through the 19th century, America is entering the modern world.

In 20 years, there'll be Levi's Jeans, chewing gum and hot dogs.

But the nation is split, being torn apart at the seams dividing North and South.

Slavery became not simply a political issue, not simply an economic issue, but a moral issue as well.

It became the issue that defined North and South in the 1850s.

September 1850.

The Fugitive Slave Law brings the brutality of Southern slavery to the North.

Now, no African-American is safe, anywhere.

Gentlemen, you've made a mistake.

This is a place of business.

I'm a tailor, these are my clients.

I'm a freeman.

I'm not a slave, gentlemen.

The Fugitive Slave Law meant that if you were a slave and you managed to escape to the North, your master could come and get you, and you had no recourse.

Not only that, if you were a free Negro, they still could sell you down the river.

The search for runaway slaves had become a witch hunt.

Any African-American can be condemned simply with an accusation.

Even a freeman has no right to a trial by jury.

Federal magistrates get \$10 to rule them slaves, five to set them free.

Ordinary people are outraged by the new law.

Abolitionist newspapers and literature spread like wildfire.

Published in 1852, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" becomes the best-selling book of the century, after the Bible.

A passionate antislavery novel written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, an unknown housewife from Connecticut.

It mainly appeals to women who are becoming politicized for the first time.

Slavery is the burning issue of the day.

As America expands across the continent, North and South face off over each new territory.

Will it be slave-owning or free? The Northerners began to see that, wait a minute, they're not gonna keep slavery just in the South, they wanna take slavery West and to turn the country into a slave country.

Americans from all over the country are flooding into the new territories on the frontier.

Each becomes a battleground.

Will it be slave-owning or free? It comes to a head in Kansas.

A peaceful protest turns violent.

Emotions run high.

Towns are terrorized, stores robbed.

Homesteads burned.

North and South are polarized.

Neither side will back down.

One man will stop at nothing to abolish slavery.

John Brown.

A folk hero in the North a terrorist to the South.

He thinks he's fighting a holy war.

He believes himself to be God's chosen instrument.

He will murder for his cause.

John Brown is one of those controversial figures about whom almost anything you can say is true.

He's a terrorist, in our modern terms.

He's a revolutionary.

The divide between North and South is an open wound.

Kansas bleeds for two years, more than 200 dead.

America is on the road to war.

Slavery is tearing the nation apart.

America is built on a number of distinct fault lines, one, of course, was slavery and freedom, that was a fault line that had to be addressed.

In the South, slavery is a way of life, even for non-slave owners.

Antislavery forces in the North threaten their right to decide their fate.

There is still, in some areas of America, a great pride in being Southern and holding true to the original Southern attitude.

I think our clinging to the idea that slavery is a right and just a way of life, you know, it is a dark spot in our history.

Anger in the South grows more passionate every day.

The North claims the moral high ground, but they are getting rich off cotton, too.

Pretty much everybody agreed that a crisis was developing.

Not everyone knew that the crisis would include, in the end, the Civil War, but everyone understood that a showdown between the slave South and the free North was about to occur.

John Brown wants to light the fuse.

October 1859.

Passionate in his hatred of slavery, Brown prepares to take

the fight into the heart of the South.

His plan, to capture the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, the biggest collection of weapons in the South. 20,000 rifles, muskets and pistols, worth almost \$7 million today.

He wants to arm Southern slaves and lead a slave rebellion. He's fighting alongside his five sons, all of them willing to die for their cause.

The arsenal is poorly defended.

Breaking in is a pushover.

But his raid is based on local slaves rising up and joining the fight.

He needs a small army to carry off so many weapons.

Without slave reinforcements, it's a suicide mission.

Word gets out and local townsfolk attack the arsenal.

Not a single slave joins Brown and his men.

They are trapped and fighting for their lives.

I wanna free all Negroes in this state.

I have possession of the United States armory, and if the citizens interfere with me, I must only burn the town and have blood.

Radical abolitionist John Brown is trying to inspire a slave revolt.

No slaves have joined him, and now he's trapped.

At dawn, the US Marines arrive.

They storm the arsenal under the command of Colonel Robert E.

Lee.

Brown won't go down without a fight.

The soldiers overwhelm them.

The fight against slavery has only just begun.

But John Brown's crusade is over.

His sons are dead.

His trial captivates the country.

Charged as a criminal, he puts the institution of slavery on trial.

America is fatally divided.

Brown is convicted of treason and sentenced to death.

A terrorist in the South, a martyr in the North.

He's executed on December 2, 1859.

As the country prepares to elect a new president in 1860, many wonder if the nation can survive.

I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood.

Chicago, May 18, 1860.

A backwoods congressman comes out of nowhere to grab the new Republican Party's nomination for President.

Abe Lincoln's only claim to fame-- he's lost two elections to the Senate.

Personally, Lincoln hates slavery, but he is desperate to hold the country together.

What I admire about Abraham Lincoln is that he had his beliefs and he stuck to his beliefs at a time when it wasn't popular to do so, especially when it was black, white and very cut-and-dry, he stuck to his beliefs.

November 6, 1860.

Election Day.

The stakes couldn't be higher.

Abraham Lincoln will be elected president of a country hurtling towards war.

The South rebels, convinced he'll abolish slavery.

They threaten to leave the Union.

The battle lines are drawn.

The North is behind him.

For the South, Lincoln is the enemy.

An editorial in an Atlanta paper: "Let the consequences be what they may.

"Whether the Potomac is crimsoned in human gore "and Pennsylvania Avenue is paved ten fathoms "with mangled bodies, the South will never "submit to such humiliation and degradation as the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln.

" The South knew that Lincoln was gonna win, and it was just a matter of time, tick, tick, tick, before secession occurred.

The South wants no part of a Union with Lincoln in the White House.

But as he prepares to take office, the President-elect is still determined to avoid a civil war.

Lincoln was not happy about slavery.

He did not see that as congruent to "All men are created

equal.

" And he had given a speech, before he ever became president, on why that was so important to him. And I think that was coming to a head, and when he got elected, that was the final straw for the South.

December 20, 1860.

South Carolina secedes from the Union.

The ten other slave states soon follow.

Lincoln's victory makes war inevitable.

He's prepared to fight to preserve the Union-- and won't have to wait long.

In February 1861, a few weeks before his inauguration, the Confederate States of America are born.

Lincoln's principal objective was to save the Union and then we'll deal with slavery, but before too long, he had to both save the Union and deal with slavery.

Abraham Lincoln receives his first death threats before ever taking office.

He'll save every one, keeping a file in his desk "  
Assassination.

" On the journey to Washington, he'll wear a disguise, just to be safe.

He'll do anything to avoid war, except allow slavery to expand.

It is Lincoln who explains the case for freedom and says, "I'm not gonna attack slavery where it is, but I'm not gonna let it expand.

" At his inauguration, Abraham Lincoln reluctantly pledges that states with slaves will be allowed to keep them, but it's too tittle, too late.

A virtual state of war already exists.

The South mobilizes an army of 800,000 men against a Union army of 2½ million.

Five weeks after Abraham Lincoln takes office, the first shots are fired in the War Between the States.

It will spark a brutal and bloody civil war, the deadliest in American history.

In the next four years, more lives will be lost than in all America's other wars put together.



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(Note: link has Westward at first, but it's got both – see Division later one. Must have been a double episode of 3 and 4 when it ran).