



### TERMS TO KNOW:

Before or after watching this episode, encourage students to define and review the terms below. Students may also want to make their own lists of new vocabulary words and identification terms as they watch.

- Dysentery
- Formidable
- Gradient
- Inert
- Nitroglycerin
- Redundant
- Stealthily
- Treaty



*America The Story of Us is useful for American History, Social Studies, and Media courses. It is appropriate for 7th grade students and above, and is an excellent resource for professional development.*

## EPISODE 6: HEARTLAND

### INTRODUCTION

In 1869, the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of America, more than two thousand miles apart, are linked by continuous metal rails. The Transcontinental Railroad – the world’s first – is one of the most ambitious human enterprises since the Great Wall of China, and much of it is built by Chinese laborers who immigrate to the U.S. in search of work and the promises of prosperity.

The railroad doesn’t just change the lives of Americans, it alters the entire ecology of the continent – and there are enormous casualties that result from this massive and transformative project. The vast Plains, where buffalo and Native Americans roam, become home to farmers who build houses of grass, and cowboys who trail their cattle thousands of miles to the railheads. Steel roads and now steel wire fences parcel up the Plains.



In less than a quarter of a century, the West is won – by the railroad, the fence, and the plow.






## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think President Lincoln decided to support the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, a very expensive project, even though the Civil War was still going on?
2. What were some of the benefits of the Transcontinental Railroad? What were the human costs of its construction? What groups of people built the railroad?
3. In this episode, the bison is described as a “mobile general store” for Native Americans on the plains. What does this phrase mean? What were the consequences of the destruction of the bison population for Native Americans?
4. Who was Theodore Judah and what was his significance in American history? Why was he called “Crazy Judah”?



5. What happened at the Battle of Little Big Horn? What was the outcome of conflicts between Native Americans and the U.S. military on the plains?
6. In 1886, Richard Sears established the first mail order catalog. Why do you think this development was a significant event in U.S. history?



Primary Source:

## AN EXCERPT FROM BLACK ELK SPEAKS:

“In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished.

The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion.

Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were.

The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our tepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.”

*(Excerpt from Neihardt, John. Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux. University of Nebraska Press, 1988.)*

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the images you find most interesting in this passage?
2. What do you think the hoop represents in this passage? What do you think threatened the sacred hoop?

### FURTHER EXPLORATIONS:

What else was going on during this time period? Explore the sites below to learn more about the era of U.S. history covered in this episode.

**More background on Wounded Knee**  
[www.history.com/topics/wounded-knee](http://www.history.com/topics/wounded-knee)

**Learn about the Transcontinental Railroad from the Smithsonian's America on the Move exhibit**  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove>

**A lesson plan with documents on the Homestead Act from the National Archives**  
[www.archives.gov/education/lessons/homestead-act](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/homestead-act)

**More background on the history of the Pony Express**  
[www.sfmuseum.org/hist1/pxpress.html](http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist1/pxpress.html)

**More information on the history of the bison from the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History**  
[www.amnh.org/exhibitions/virtual/bison/history.php](http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/virtual/bison/history.php)

### PLACES TO VISIT:

Interested in what you saw in this episode? Visiting historic sites is a great way for teachers, students, and families to learn more about the past. Explore these historic sites, or look for local historic sites in your town or city to visit.

**The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument**  
[www.nps.gov/libi/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/libi/index.htm)

**The Chisholm Trail**  
[www.onthechisholmtrail.com](http://www.onthechisholmtrail.com)

**The Donner Memorial State Park**  
[www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=503](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=503)

