

THE
FUTURE
OF
AMERICA'S
PAST

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Episode 1: The Revolutions

What does “freedom” mean to those outside the halls of power — and what did it mean during the era of the American Revolution? Host Ed Ayers visits sites in Boston and Philadelphia to put that question to curators, museum educators, a playwright, and a tribal preservation officer. He learns about the ways in which women, Native Americans, and African Americans made the words of the Revolution come true in their own lives. He discovers that some of the most inspiring stories of the Revolution spring from people who remained on its margins.

Episode 2: Red Chicago

On a hot day in 1919, an attack on African American teenagers near a Chicago beach stoked long-standing tensions between white and black residents. Violence erupted — and its aftermath shaped laws, housing, and opportunities for African American citizens for generations. Host Ed Ayers visits Chicago during the 100th anniversary of what became known as “Red Summer.” He meets a poet, performance artist, museum educator, and young people who are creating living memorials to a long-ignored past.

Episode 3: Transcontinental

High in the Utah desert in 1869, two locomotives met and a golden spike was hammered into new rails: the first transcontinental railroad was complete. To mark the 150th anniversary of this feat, Utah organized a statewide effort called “Spike 150,” with exhibitions and events engaging a diverse public. Host Ed Ayers visits to learn about the railroad’s promise of prosperity. He considers the human costs, with a descendant of a Chinese American railroad builder and a Native American tribal leader. And he discovers how the environment and photography played key roles on the rails.

Episode 4: School Interrupted

The Supreme Court decision outlawing school segregation began with a student strike in Prince Edward County, Virginia. Justice didn’t follow that ruling — white officials in Prince Edward County closed public schools rather than integrate. Host Ed Ayers learns about the drama that unfolded through conversations with two of the student strikers. He discovers how black women activists defied the school closures by starting grassroots schools, and he meets an author whose grandfather helped start a whites-only “segregation academy.” In a museum at the school that started it all, Ed talks with a descendant of strikers who inspires students today to take up the fight for justice.