

Wyatt Earp

Program Transcript

Narrator: Wyatt Earp loved cowboy movies. In the 1920s he would travel from one end of Los Angeles to the other just to watch the latest releases. Wyatt was always glad for an escape from the monotony of his tiny bungalow. But even more, he hoped the movies would vindicate him. Forty years earlier, in an Arizona mining town, Wyatt and his brothers were drawn into a bitter conflict that echoed through the West. Tombstone and the OK Corral had haunted him ever since.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: His one brother had been maimed, another murdered. He went out and got the guys who did it. There weren't any doubts, there weren't any questions, he believed he'd done right, but it would always come back to him.

Narrator: Wyatt had long since grown tired of the looks and questions, of wondering whether the strangers just wanted to shake the hand of a killer. He spent his days imagining a movie that would set them all straight, starring Hollywood's most famous cowboy, William S. Hart. "If the story were exploited on the screen by you," he wrote Hart, "it would do much toward setting me right before a public which has always been fed lies about me." Hart never made Wyatt's movie, and Wyatt didn't live to see his redemption. But within a few years of his death, writers and filmmakers turned Wyatt Earp into a new kind of western hero. This story of a man who took the law into his own hands answered a deep longing in a society that had been transformed by vast, impersonal forces.

In the retelling, Wyatt Earp came to embody a time and place where a man controlled his own destiny, and the explosion of violence at the OK Corral became a celebrated chapter in the winning of the West.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Paul A. Hutton, Historian: Wyatt Earp becomes the symbol of western law and order, the town taming marshal, absolutely dedicated to the law, and to all that means: to the settlement of the West, to the coming of civilization, to the end of savagery, to a place where schoolmarms and churches will replace the gambling dens and saloons that infest western towns.

Narrator: Tombstone and the OK Corral would become part of America's creation myth, and Wyatt one of its most enduring heroes.

But that myth left out the confusion and loss that haunted the real Wyatt Earp. "The good Lord," he once said, "owes me an explanation for the things that have happened in my life."

Narrator: Wyatt Earp had never belonged anywhere. He was born in Monmouth, Illinois in 1848, the third of Nicholas and Virginia Earp's five sons. But Nicholas was a roamer: he dragged his family across the West, from Illinois to Iowa to Missouri and back, only to pull up roots again for the crossing to California.

Andrew Isenberg, Historian: The generous way to describe Nicholas Earp, Wyatt Earp's father, was that he was colorful and that he was larger than life. The more accurate way to describe him, or at least to round out the picture, was that he was a deadbeat. He skipped out on debts, he was a drinker, he was something of a bully. I think that being Nicholas Earp's son was not an easy thing to be.

Narrator: Adversity and isolation hardened the bonds between the Earp brothers, so when Virgil and James left to fight for the Union in 1861, thirteen-year-old Wyatt was desperate to go along. As it was, Wyatt had to stay behind. He would spend his formative years watching over his little brother Morgan.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Casey Tefertiller, Writer: Morgan appears to be a little bit more outgoing, a little friendlier, could get along with people. But for Wyatt it was different. Wyatt was dour. He didn't laugh, he didn't get along with people very well.

Narrator: Wyatt was with his family in California when news came of the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. The industrial Leviathan that had been created by the war, the vast machinery of the federal government, the waves of immigration – all of the forces that had brought victory to the North were about to be unleashed in the West.

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: The victory of the Union in the American Civil War is a victory for the forces of incorporation for the West. But what happens after the Civil War surprises even those that dreamed of settling the West because it happened so rapidly. What had taken three hundred years to accomplish now is wrapped up in a generation.

Narrator: Wyatt left his father's home at the age of seventeen, as the United States set about expanding its reach into the vast western interior. He was a loner, with no plan and nothing to fall back on. Like thousands of rootless young men, he saw only opportunity in the West. Like them, he could have no sense of the speed and breadth of the coming changes. And like many of them, his life would be altered forever by the violence that attended that transformation.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: "Hell-on-wheels" was a term that was given to the towns that were built in advance of the Union Pacific. They're the gamblers and the saloon men and the prostitutes and all sorts of other predators who were trying to live off of the, the workers on the railroad. So it was a rough and difficult environment.

Narrator: By 1869, twenty-one-year-old Wyatt had been tempered by years in the work camps and boomtowns that dotted the West. He had slowly made his way back across the continent, hauling goods and grading track for the transcontinental railroad. That year he rejoined Virgil

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



and Morgan at their father's home in Lamar, Missouri, and for the first time started putting down roots.

Wyatt took a job as the town's constable, and courted Urilla Sutherland – the hotel-keeper's daughter. He was an attractive suitor: strikingly handsome, with blue eyes and blond hair. He had a stable job, and he sweetened the pot by lodging prisoners at the Sutherlands' hotel. The young couple married at the beginning of 1870, and by summer were expecting a child. They bought land on the outskirts of town and set about building a life of modest respectability.

But it all went to pieces a few months later, when Urilla died of typhoid, along with their unborn child.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: He was still kind of raw anyway. And this seems to have sent him over the edge.

Narrator: Wyatt sought out the saloons, gambling houses and brothels that flourished on the thinly policed frontier. Within months he was thrown in jail for stealing horses in Indian Territory. But he didn't stick around to stand trial: he climbed out through the roof of his cell and headed to Peoria, Illinois.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: He gets arrested three times in the Peoria area for his adventures in prostitution. So he's kind of going down a bad hole.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: It's not clear that he was a pimp. His role seems to have been more that of an enforcer.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: He was one tough SOB. If a troublemaker came in causing problems Wyatt Earp could come up to him and beat the living crap out of him.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Narrator: When Earp wasn't roughing up the clients, he was spending time with one of the prostitutes, a woman named Sarah. Sarah would disappear quietly from Wyatt's life within a year or two, but she was only the first in a string of women from that world.

Anne M. Butler, Historian: To find Wyatt Earp in these multiple relationships with prostitutes is just a common factor of his daily life. It's not an unusual thing for him to associate with prostitutes.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: You can see from this the influence that Urilla's death seems to have had on him, he just goes wild for a period of time.

Narrator: Wyatt's home was a tiny room on a dank, floating whorehouse on the Illinois River. The woman who called herself his wife was a working prostitute. The fact was, he had no other trade, and no reason to expect anything else from life. So when his brother James opened a brothel in Kansas, it was only natural that Wyatt should make his way there.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: Dodge City and Wichita, they're cow towns. The herds would be driven in, the Texas cowboys would come in and after a couple of months on the trail they'd wanna have a good time so they went to the brothels, went to the saloons, they'd run around shooting their guns and doing various things. It was the fun at the end of the trail.

Narrator: "Everything goes in Wichita." That's what the signs said, and it wasn't far from the truth. Wyatt Earp was right at home. There was plenty of work for a whorehouse bouncer, at least during the summer cattle drives. But the trade ground to a halt in the fall, leaving him at loose ends. So in October 1874, he took work helping an off duty police officer track down some thieves who had stolen a man's wagon.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Andrew Isenberg, Historian: They go off, encounter the thieves, draw their weapons, force these men to turn over the stolen property, they return to Wichita. The story is written up in the Wichita Eagle and Earp gets praised publicly. And this is a real turn around for Wyatt Earp. Now he's on the other side.

Narrator: Wyatt was hooked – every summer he signed on again as deputy marshal, first in Wichita, and then in nearby Dodge City. As a lawman in the cattle towns, he was expected to walk a fine line.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: The job of a lawman in Dodge City wasn't to break crime and do things like that, it was to keep the Texas cowboys from getting themselves into trouble so they could wake up the next morning and spend more money.

Jim Dunham, Historian: He really doesn't have gunfights. He hits 'em on the head with his, with his barrel of his Colt. That steel barrel coming across the side of your temple definitely will knock you unconscious if it's, if it's hit pretty hard. It's like, like a lead pipe.

Andrew Isenberg, Historian: He was much taller than average. He was about six feet tall in an era when Americans were not that large. He was, he was strong.

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: Having some bulk to you was, was a very good thing when you're walking into a room in which a lot of people are packing iron and everybody is drinking copiously. You wanna impress everybody when you walk in.

Narrator: Wyatt Earp did shoot to kill one time. On a hot July night in 1878, Dodge was going full tilt at 3am, when a group of Texans rode by the Commy-Kew theater, firing dozens of bullets through the crowded building. Wyatt and several other men returned fire as the riders disappeared into the night, killing one of the cowboys. No one knew whose shot had hit home, but Earp was troubled by the incident. Still, he could take satisfaction from reading about it

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



in the wildly popular National Police Gazette, which catered to America's growing fascination with the West.

Andrew Isenberg, Historian: Wichita is a very important moment in Wyatt Earp's life. He reinvented himself in Wichita as, as a police officer, as a kind of symbol of civic respect. A law firm in Dodge City gave Wyatt Earp a printed New Testament. And they inscribed it to him, "To Wyatt Earp, in slight recognition of your many Christian virtues." And I think a little memento like that was the kind of thing that meant a lot to Wyatt Earp. It meant that he had transcended that transient upbringing that he'd had. It certainly meant that he had achieved a kind of social acceptance. And I think he wanted that throughout the rest of his life.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: I think there came a point where Wyatt simply decided that he'd outgrown all of this. He wanted something more than simply busting heads.

Narrator: He was thirty-one years old. In the cattle towns he had seen wealth and power, had watched the deference shown visiting cattle barons, and he wanted to be part of it. He was ready for the next chance, and Virgil provided it, sending news of an enormous silver strike in a remote corner of the Arizona desert. In the fall of 1879, Wyatt Earp set out across the country once more, to rejoin his brothers in the next boomtown.

It was a story tailor-made for a man of Wyatt's disposition. In 1877 a lone prospector ignored soldiers' warnings that he would find only his tombstone in the hills outside their encampment, and headed into the Arizona desert.

He soon stumbled into an outcropping of silver so rich that in places it was visible to the naked eye. In no time, as one local wrote, "men of every shade and character" had rushed to the scene in a "mad career after money."

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Katherine Benton-Cohen, Historian: It was a genuine, real-deal boom camp. It was growing by leaps and bounds, by the thousands each year.

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: Here were immigrants from China, from England, from South America, from all parts of America and around the globe coming in search of fortune. And here grew up a society that wanted to see itself as the new great city of the West.

Narrator: In fact, Tombstone's future did look bright. Apart from a few raids by the Apache leader Geronimo, the Indian menace was a thing of the past, and there seemed to be no end to the silver. Tombstone was even acquiring an air of respectability.

Andrew Isenberg, Historian: There are professionals, there are merchants, they bring their wives, there are ministers. It's the Victorian age and there's a Victorian elite in every one of these towns. And they set the kind of social standard for everyone else.

Katherine Benton-Cohen, Historian: You had fancy restaurants and fancy hotels but you also had this very makeshift, violent, dirty mining camp where people were trying to make a living. And those things coexisted uncomfortably.

Narrator: There were only a few hundred people in Tombstone when Wyatt Earp first arrived; within two years there were seven thousand. Wyatt had never seen anything like it: exotic delicacies, gourmet restaurants, an oyster bar, a bowling alley, even an ice cream shop on Fourth Street where he liked to stop in every day.

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: This was the generation that Mark Twain labeled the Great Barbecue. This is the Gilded Age. It's a nation on the make, and Wyatt Earp was on the make.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: Wyatt's first plan is to not do any more lawing, as he called it. He'd

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



had his fill in Kansas. And he wanted to cash in, man. He, you know, this was the new boomtown and he wanted to get in on the ground floor and he was gonna work this baby any way he could.

Narrator: It had only been two years since the discovery of silver, but already the Earps had missed the first rush of opportunities. The lone prospectors of the early days were long gone, forced out in the blink of an eye by vast mines and mills run by capitalists from New York, San Francisco, and London.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: The mines in Tombstone really brought an industrial attitude to southeastern Arizona that had never been there. There had been other mines and stuff but this was a very sophisticated thing.

Narrator: The Earps had come to Tombstone on a couple of wagons they planned to convert to stage coaches, but no sooner had they arrived than they were forced to sell out to competitors who sabotaged coaches and poisoned each others' horses.

With no one to rely on except each other, the Earp brothers cast around for opportunities, dabbling in mining claims, water rights, and gambling concessions. For Wyatt every venture seemed to bring home the same lesson: Tombstone's riches were beyond the reach of a rough-edged young man with no capital, skills, or connections.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: And so then they're looking around, and all of a sudden they said, you know, we need a shotgun rider on the stage. And it paid pretty good. So he couldn't turn that down. There he is, back to lawing.

Narrator: "That," Wyatt recalled, "is the cursedness of a shotgun messenger's life – the loneliness of it." As he loaded the Wells Fargo strongbox underneath the driver's seat he knew what passengers and drivers alike were thinking. "Without him and his pestilential box,"

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



he said, “their lives would be 90 per cent safer, and they know it.” When Wyatt was offered a job as one of Tombstone’s deputy sheriffs in the summer of 1880, he was glad to leave the stage business behind.

William B. Shillingberg, Writer: There’s no question that he was the most effective deputy in Tombstone. He could go out, ride eighty miles to bring a prisoner back. And, and he did on several occasions. And it was recognized by the people in Tombstone. They thought, “Okay now we, we have someone here that we can rely on.”

Narrator: Earp soon began to realize that Tombstone’s politics could be treacherous for a lawman. The area was deeply divided. On one side were the mostly Republican townfolk who worked the mines; on the other were the ardently Democratic ranchers who’d arrived before the silver strike, and who were deeply suspicious of the newcomers. This ranching crowd ranged from legitimate operators to straight-up outlaws. Somewhere in between were the cowboys.

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: “Cowboy,” in the 1870s and 1880s, was a derisive term. It’s a term used for a lawless element. The cowboys tended to make a living working for the various ranchers, getting day jobs whenever they could, and especially by going down to Mexico and stealing cattle and running them north of the border.

Andrew Isenberg, Historian: Legal authorities in Arizona weren’t terribly bothered by the fact that there were crimes going on in Mexico. And this willingness to look the other way allowed a lawlessness among the cowboys to go unchecked. That made being a police officer in Tombstone a much bigger challenge than being a police officer in Dodge City or Wichita.

Narrator: Truth be told, Wyatt Earp had a lot in common with the cowboys: they looked like his past. But he saw his future in the class that was on the rise in Tombstone, and throughout the West. He couldn’t know it, but he had enlisted in a much larger conflict.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Paul A. Hutton, Historian: The new Republican establishment that is attempting to settle the West wants law and order, and they want to be able to get statehood, and they want to be able to get investment from the East. Men like Wyatt Earp work for this establishment. They work for the railroads. They work for Wells Fargo. They work for the mining companies.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: He's an individual struggling to, to fit in. And one of the ways that he does that is by taking the side of business. He is an instrument, so to speak, of the modernizing forces in America. He may not have thought of himself as such, but he becomes a foot soldier in the struggle to establish a new way of life.

Narrator: With Wyatt serving as deputy sheriff, Virgil as deputy U.S. marshal, and Morgan filling in as shotgun guard, the Earps were serving the cause of Tombstone's establishment. They had earned respect, but by no stretch had they gained admission. Virgil's application to the Masons was declined, and the Earp women were shunned by polite society. Wyatt's own proclivities did nothing to further the cause.

William B. Shillingberg, Writer: He loved saloons and gambling. He loved the atmosphere of it. He loved it to the end of his life. He would be skirting the boundaries of the underworld his entire career.

Narrator: Wyatt's closest friend outside the family was a man with a fearsome reputation and a mysterious past. Earp had met Doc Holliday in Kansas, and Doc had come to Tombstone at Wyatt's invitation. John Henry Holliday had grown up in a good Georgia family, and was setting up shop as a dentist when, at the age of twenty-three, he suddenly cut all ties with his former life and headed west. Tuberculosis, a frustrated love affair with a cousin, a murder warrant – nobody knew for sure what had driven him away. Whatever the case, he lived as if he had nothing to lose.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Gary L. Roberts, Historian: His southern background is, is, is an interesting part of his character because I think it, it defined who he was. He had a, what you might call a, a code that he brought with him and maybe a chip on his shoulder as well.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: Wyatt would always say that Doc had saved his life in Kansas. And we can't find the exact details but that's the kind of thing that you don't really lie about. He could do a lot of really clever things and be a pleasure to be around, but then he'd have a little bit too much to drink and he'd be one of the most rotten people you could imagine.

Jim Dunham, Historian: Wyatt got a lot criticism both from his, from his family, from his brothers and from the people around him that he would stay close to Doc cause Doc is the most disreputable of the, of the bunch. Wyatt probably would have been a lot smarter politically to distance himself from Doc.

Narrator: In the spring of 1881, Earp thought his chance had finally come along. Booming Tombstone was about to become the seat of a new county. The territorial governor would be appointing all of the new county's officers, including the sheriff. A county sheriff had influence, and made a good salary. But what really drew Wyatt's attention was the fact that the sheriff got to keep some of the taxes he collected.

Jim Dunham, Historian: It's estimated that, that he might have made thirty thousand dollars in a single year. And if that's true you're talking about, the average cowboy works for a dollar a day. And here's a man making thirty thousand dollars a year.

Narrator: Wyatt assumed that his northern, Union roots would give him an edge with the Republican governor. But he was out of his depth in the murky waters of territorial politics. Wyatt was baffled when the governor paid off some favors by appointing a local Democrat, John Behan, as the new county's sheriff.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Casey Tefertiller, Writer: When you'd meet Johnny Behan you'd really like him. He had the best jokes; he'd offer you the best cigars. And that's why everybody loved Johnny and believed in him. What they didn't understand was Johnny was a pretty rotten law officer and probably corrupt.

Narrator: When his first term was up, Behan was going to have to stand for election. Earp was sure that he could beat Behan at the polls. The status, money, and influence Wyatt longed for were finally within reach.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: You've got the cowboys drifting into Arizona; you've got more rustling going on against Anglo ranchers in Arizona; and you've got the Mexican government bringing troops to try and close the border.

Katherine Benton-Cohen, Historian: There was a real sense that something was coming to a head in Cochise County. It was very clear that something bad was going to happen.

Narrator: On a warm spring evening in 1881, as the Benson stage was making its run through the desert in the gathering darkness, a group of cowboys suddenly appeared in the road ahead. The driver urged the horses onward, and the robbers opened fire, killing the driver and mortally wounding a passenger. The shotgun guard managed to steer the coach out of the ambush, but by the time word got back to town, the robbers were long gone.

William B. Shillingberg, Writer: There was pandemonium and, and all people running around, everybody wanting to get into a posse. They wanted someone to pay for this.

Narrator: Until now, the cowboys had been somebody else's problem. But if they got away with murdering townspeople, then no one would be safe. What's more, the stage was Tombstone's lifeline, its only link with the outside world.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



William B. Shillingberg, Writer: Wells Fargo put out a notice on these people, wanted dead or alive. No one thought anything of it. A private corporation could do this.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: They were dead serious on this. They wanted these guys brought in. They really needed an example made here.

Jim Dunham, Historian: Wyatt in the back of his mind thinks to himself, “If I can catch these guys and get the credit for catching these guys, that’s gonna be a terrific thing that will be on my side when I run for sheriff.”

Narrator: Virgil, Wyatt, and Morgan set out with Johnny Behan toward the wilds of the Dragoon Mountains.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: They went almost 400 miles. One horse died. They had to walk back. That’s how far these guys went to trail these guys.

Narrator: 60 hours without food, 36 hours without water, and an 18-mile walk through a scorching desert convinced even Wyatt that the trail had gone cold. But he had another plan.

Earp made an offer to Ike Clanton, a rancher who often bought stolen cattle from the cowboys, and knew their comings and goings. If Ike would secretly turn the suspects over to Wyatt, he could keep the Wells Fargo reward money. Ike was interested, on one very important condition: Earp couldn’t tell a soul. If the cowboys ever got word that Ike had betrayed them, he’d be a dead man.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: This seemed to be a good deal for Ike because he’d make a lot of money; it seemed to be a good deal for Wyatt because he’d catch the robbers, which would give him kind of a heads up when he ran for sheriff.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Narrator: The plan came to nothing: the three suspects were all killed in unrelated disputes before Ike could reach them. There would be no reward for Ike, and no glory for Wyatt. What was left was a dangerous secret between them. Ike was left to wonder whether Earp would reveal that he had double-crossed the cowboys, whether he would be their next victim. Over the course of a long, hot summer, Ike's nerves began to unravel. On the morning of October 25th, 1881, Ike Clanton made his way into Tombstone to confront Wyatt Earp.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: Ike comes in and he starts drinking, as these guys were wont to do. And I mean really drinking. I mean drinking all night, going from saloon to saloon to saloon and drinking. And of course he gets his mouth open and he starts talking about things he shouldn't be talking about.

Narrator: As one whiskey faded into the next, Ike was engulfed by his worries. Doubt became paranoia, antagonism became hatred. That evening he narrowly avoided a gunfight with Doc, and then took Wyatt aside. "You mustn't think I won't be after you all in the morning," he warned. Wyatt brushed him off and went home to bed.

Later that night, Ike found himself playing poker with Johnny Behan, and, of all people, Virgil Earp. For hours he numbed himself with the game's familiar routines. But as dawn broke and everyone else went home, Ike was alone with his fears again.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: Wyatt gets woken up and told that Ike's causing some problems. He doesn't pay much attention. Virgil is also awakened to be told that. Virgil doesn't pay much attention. They get down to the street and find out that Ike has been going from saloon to saloon to saloon telling people, "When those Earps wake up that's when the ball will open. I'm going to kill me an Earp."

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: When you're dealing with someone like Wyatt Earp, you really just don't casually say, 'I'm going to kill you.' You just don't do that.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Narrator: Ike wasn't the only one fanning the flames. Rumors were swirling: some said they'd seen Ike in the telegraph office – maybe he'd wired for backup. There were reports that a dozen or more cowboys were waiting to ambush the Earps. Tombstone's newly formed vigilance committee was eager to teach the cowboys a lesson.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: As the Earps were standing outside Hafford's Corner wondering what was going on, several members of the vigilante committee would come up and say to Virgil, who was the chief of police, "Do you want help? Do you want assistance? What can we do to help you?" Did it ratchet up the situation? You bet it did, because Virgil is almost in a situation where he has to, he has to act or he looks weak.

Narrator: Outside Hafford's saloon, Wyatt, Virgil, and Morgan were joined by Doc Holliday, who had heard the rumors. "We're going to make a fight," Wyatt said. Doc volunteered to go along, but Wyatt told him it was none of his affair. "That's a hell of a thing for you to say to me," an indignant Doc replied. Then Virgil handed Doc a shotgun.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: Virgil made a bad mistake in choosing Doc to go with him, not because Doc was going to go off half-cocked or create a, a problem but basically on, because of his reputation.

Narrator: In fact, there was no mob of cowboys. In a small lot near the edge of town, behind an enclosure known as the OK Corral, Ike Clanton and his younger brother Billy had been joined by ranchers Frank and Tom McLaury.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: It's a miserable day and it's blowing, you can see the dust blowing out across there between the buildings and stuff. And the guys are probably hugging the building there just to kind of stay out of the cold and the dust. And so then these four guys come walking right up to 'em, I mean this close to 'em. They could touch each other.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Gary L. Roberts, Historian: And Virgil says, “I’ve come to arrest you. Throw up your hands.” At this point, the best evidence suggests that Frank says, “We will,” and goes for his gun and, and that Billy Clanton also goes for his gun.

Jim Dunham, Historian: A gunfight is chaos. And yet sometimes under the greatest of stress things just sort of slow down. And probably to them when it was happening seemed like it was lasting for half an hour or an hour when it was only probably thirty seconds.

Narrator: In the confusion, Ike Clanton charged up to Wyatt and grappled with him for a moment. Wyatt, realizing that Ike didn’t have a gun, shoved him aside and said “the fight’s commenced – go to fighting or get away.” Ike broke and ran.

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: The incredible presence of mind on the part of Wyatt Earp not to shoot that guy, who was running right at him in the middle of a gunfight, is just absolutely astonishing to me.

Narrator: It was over within thirty seconds. Frank McLaury was dead in the middle of the street. Tom McLaury had collapsed at the base of a telegraph pole. Ike’s brother Billy lay mortally wounded, trying desperately to reload his pistol until someone finally grabbed it from him. Virgil, Morgan, and Doc had all been wounded. Ike Clanton – the man who had started it all – had kept running until he was arrested several blocks from the scene. The only man to come through without a scratch was Wyatt Earp.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: Right after the gunfight it seemed almost like the town, and like the West as a whole, was celebrating the actions of the Earps. They were considered heroes for taking action against those dirty cowboys.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Narrator: “The people of Tombstone have reason to congratulate themselves that they have marshals who are dead shots,” crowed the San Francisco Exchange, “and we hope the Tombstoners appreciate the fact.” But not everyone took their cue from San Francisco money men. In the small towns and farms outside Tombstone, many saw the Earps as unprovoked killers, and the dead men - the McLaurys in particular – as innocent victims.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: The McLaurys are kind of a tragic part of this story. I don’t think they were as bad as history has portrayed them because they get lumped in with the Clantons. But they, they got in with these guys and they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Narrator: Trouble was brewing in the countryside. The day after the gunfight, the bodies of Frank McLaury, Tom McLaury, and Billy Clanton were displayed at the undertaker’s beneath a sign reading “Murdered in the Streets of Tombstone.” Their funeral procession was the largest in the town’s history.

Andrew Isenberg, Historian: This is an enormous public spectacle, and many people come in from the surroundings areas. And it’s a kind of quiet demonstration of resolve from the cowboy faction.

William B. Shillingberg, Writer: The lines of animosity that were created by that gunfight were far, far deeper and, and potentially lethal than any disagreements that had happened before.

Narrator: Rumors of assassination were everywhere: the Earps were said to be targets, along with Doc Holliday, the mayor, the Wells Fargo agent. The mayor wired a request to the governor for weapons to arm the Vigilance Committee. The governor upped the ante: he wanted the U.S. Army to crack down. “Give us use of the military,” he wrote President Chester Arthur, “and we will give you peace.” Washington couldn’t help but take notice of Tombstone’s troubles.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Katherine Benton-Cohen, Historian: They're really intensely interested in this issue. The cowboys were robbing and murdering Mexican citizens at a time when the last thing they wanted to do was stir up what one official called an international controversy if not war.

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: It was obvious that the cowboys would strike again. It was obvious that there would be more trouble.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: Ike Clanton was eager to exact any degree of revenge he could.

Bob Boze Bell, Writer: The cowboys come up into town, they sneak up to a drugstore that's under construction right across from the Oriental Hotel. And they wait in there. And here comes poor Virgil, he's just talked to Wyatt and he leaves and he comes out the door. And they spin him around completely. Blows his arm in two, okay. And he doesn't leave his feet. He walks back across the street and falls in his brother's arms, Wyatt's arms.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: Wyatt immediately wired to become a deputy U.S. marshal. And he took his posse and they went looking for Ike Clanton. Wyatt built a huge bonfire to give light, and he took a human hostage, he took a, a human shield, one of the cowboys, grabbed him, pulled him to his chest and went house to house kicking in the doors.

Narrator: Rather than wait for Earp to find him, Ike surrendered to Sheriff Behan and stood trial for attempted murder. But Ike had stacked the deck: a parade of friends swore that he had an alibi the night Virgil was shot, and nobody could prove them wrong. The judge reluctantly let Ike go.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: I think there was definitely a sense of betrayal. Wyatt believed that he should have had the community support because they'd been the ones calling for tough enforcement against the outlaws. I think it was a shocking situation for the Earps.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Narrator: After the trial was over the judge took Wyatt aside. “You’ll never clean up this crowd this way,” he said, “Next time you’d better leave your prisoners out in the brush where alibis don’t count.”

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: Wyatt doesn’t take the advice. What Wyatt does is he sends one of his friends down to Ike saying, let’s end this right now before there’s any further bloodshed. Let’s, let’s end this altogether. Ike refuses.

Narrator: Late on the night of March 18, 1882, Morgan and a friend were playing pool at Hatch’s Billiard Parlor while Wyatt sat watching. He had heard talk of trouble and had come along rather than leave his brother alone. As Wyatt looked on, Morgan walked around the table to line up a shot, leaving his back to the glass door at the rear of the room. One bullet narrowly missed Wyatt’s head, but Morgan pitched forward onto the table, and then collapsed in a pool of blood on the floor. As Wyatt, Virgil, and Doc laid him out, he asked to be sure that his legs were straight and his boots off. Within an hour he was dead.

Jim Dunham, Historian: Something changes in Wyatt Earp after Morgan dies. He does not care. He is going to bring vengeance upon them.

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: The cowboys had come after him. They’d shot Virgil. They murdered Morgan. Wyatt Earp suddenly became a whole different person.

Narrator: On his 34th birthday, Wyatt made arrangements to send Morgan’s casket to their father’s home in California. Virgil was still bedridden, but he and the Earp women had to leave too.

As they waited in the gathering darkness for Virgil’s train to pull out of Tucson, Wyatt spotted two men with rifles lying on a flatcar in the distance. He wasn’t taking any chances – he

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



crept up and recognized Ike Clanton and Frank Stilwell. The two men made a break for it. Ike got away, but Earp ran Stilwell down.

William B. Shillingberg, Writer: He caught him on the railroad track and put the double barrel shotgun to him and Frank hit the ground begging and he just squeezed off a shot. Blew open his belly. Fired another shot and tore up a leg. Other bullets were fired through him. He was found the next morning by a railroad worker. A fellow by the name of George Hand later said he was the most shot up man he ever saw.

Narrator: Wyatt Earp left Tombstone with Doc Holliday and a heavily armed posse, and headed into the wilderness to hunt down the rest of his suspects. Although Earp was now wanted for the murder of Frank Stilwell, he was being quietly supported by the powerful men who had once shunned him.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: Essentially after the death of Morgan Earp, Wyatt had a blank check from the powers in, in, in the territory of Arizona. He's getting money from banks, he's getting money from some of the mine owners, he's getting money from Wells Fargo, he's getting money from the federal government.

Narrator: Tombstone's business establishment was quietly backing Wyatt, but they weren't the only game in town. County Sheriff John Behan had a warrant for the arrest of Deputy Marshal Wyatt Earp in the Stilwell killing, and was tracking him with a posse of his own. Word had it that Behan had even deputized the notorious outlaw Curly Bill Brocius. Wyatt Earp was now both lawman and outlaw, hunter and prey.

The morning after he left Tombstone, Wyatt came across a cowboy he knew only as Indian Charlie at a wood camp in the mountains, and shot him down in cold blood.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Jim Dunham, Historian: Well, he had heard rumors as to who killed Morgan. And it's real interesting because he doesn't take the time to make absolutely one hundred percent sure who's involved. He just says these guys are part of this cowboy gang. And he goes after 'em.

Paul A. Hutton, Historian: He had a list. And he especially wanted to get Curly Bill Brocius who he saw as a, the leader of the cowboy faction.

Narrator: The day after the Indian Charlie killing, Earp and his men were approaching a watering hole in the desert when they were ambushed by a group of cowboys. In a hail of gunfire, unaware that Doc and the others had retreated, Wyatt closed in alone on the cowboy leader.

"From the instant I laid eyes on Curly Bill," Earp later recalled, "I was seeing and thinking clearly. Nothing that went on in that gully escaped me."

Casey Tefertiller, Writer: As best we can understand what happened Curly Bill's shot hit the skirts of Wyatt Earp's coat. Wyatt Earp came forward with his shotgun, took aim at Curly Bill and fired and left Curly Bill with his chest shattered.

Narrator: "What a comment on the United States government," the Arizona Star declared, "that a band of so-called officials rove over the country murdering human beings out of a spirit of revenge." Newspapers across the West gave daily reports of Earp's Vendetta, reinforcing doubts about the rogue lawman. With every headline, Wyatt became more of a liability to the businessmen, bankers, and politicians who were backing him.

Gary L. Roberts, Historian: The political temperature was heating up. I'm sure he would have liked to have had another chance at Ike Clanton or, or some of the other leaders of the cowboys. But that, that just wasn't going to happen.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Narrator: Wyatt and his men scoured the area for more than a week, but the cowboys had scattered. Time was running out. In mid-April, Earp snuck back to the outskirts of Tombstone for a covert meeting with his patrons.

Jim Dunham, Historian: Wyatt was in trouble. Wyatt had now completely gone off in a, in an area that he had no legal right to be. The people who wanted law and order now saw him as a problem. They were glad to have him leave.

Narrator: On April 13th, 1882, twenty-eight months after he had arrived, Wyatt Earp left Arizona Territory. He waited in Colorado for help from the wealthy supporters who had spurred him on. “We look for a pardon in a few weeks,” Wyatt told a reporter, “and when it comes I’ll go back. I’m going to run for sheriff this fall.”

The pardon never came. In the fall of 1882, six months after leaving Arizona, Wyatt Earp finally gave up and drifted west to San Francisco.

Narrator: A few weeks after Wyatt left, President Chester Arthur finally threatened to impose martial law in southern Arizona. But the crisis had passed: even as Wyatt hunted Morgan’s killers, the Grand Central mine was flooding. Within a few years all of the big mines had closed down, and the outlaws disappeared along with the silver. Tombstone became almost a ghost town: only the ranchers were left behind – including Ike Clanton.

Wyatt never caught up with Ike, but another lawman did in 1887. Ike was wanted for a series of felonies; he was once again trying to make a running exit when he was finally gunned down.

Doc and Wyatt had shared every danger and hardship, but they fell out soon after leaving Arizona. Doc had been living on borrowed time ever since he contracted tuberculosis back in

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Georgia; and it finally killed him in 1887. He died among strangers at a hotel in Colorado, at the age of 36.

Wyatt and Virgil also went their separate ways.

William B. Shillingberg, Writer: After the aftermath of that fight, the family relationship started to break down. And they were never the never quite the same again.

Narrator: Wyatt Earp had lost almost everything in Tombstone, but in the aftermath he found his lifelong companion.

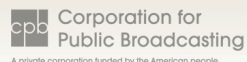
Josephine Marcus, a striking beauty who had come to Tombstone as Johnny Behan's wife, was waiting when Wyatt arrived in San Francisco. He and Josephine would never reveal how their relationship had begun, but it would last until death finally parted them 46 years later.

Like Nicholas and Virginia Earp before them, they roamed the West, always chasing the next boomtown. They ran saloons in Idaho gold towns, followed the gold rush to Alaska, and played the horses in San Francisco before making their way to the biggest boomtown of all, Los Angeles.

But like Nicholas and Virginia, they never found what they were looking for. Wyatt listed himself as "capitalist" in the city directory, but he could only wonder at the rich and powerful. He remained a loner, an outsider, to the end of his days.

Despite all the hardships and disappointments, Wyatt never lost the quiet charisma that had inspired both loyalty and hatred in Tombstone. "He did not seem or look old," a friend recalled. "Somehow like a mountain, or desert, he reduced you to size."

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Gary L. Roberts, Historian: He is a figure who in many ways is more important than some of the other western icons, because his life so clearly represents the essential conflict that's taking place in America during that time.

Narrator: Wyatt Earp died at home on January 13, 1929. He died unsure of what his legacy would be, and without ever making sense of the forces that had shaped his life. His last words, whispered to Josephine: "Suppose, suppose."

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.

