

Common Mystics Podcast

Season 2 Episode 10: James Beckwourth- Little Known Legend of the American Frontier

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00:00:53 On this episode of Common Mystics, we introduce you to a larger than life American legend out of the wild American west. I'm Jennifer James, I'm Jill Stanley. We're psychics. We're sisters. We are Common Mystics. We find extraordinary stories in ordinary places, and today we have a doozy for you out of the American frontier.

00:01:17 Jennifer? Jill. I'm going to address our listeners for a moment. I just need you to hold tight. Okay? I don't like where this is going. You guys? I have heard a disturbing truth about my sister. She has not seen Forrest Gump. Like for real.

00:01:39 Really Jill? We're going to lead with this? Excuse me. Excuse me, I'm not talking to you right now. She hadn't seen it. That's true. She hadn't seen it, and the problem with this episode is that our subject this week is in so many parts of American history, like on the frontline, similar to Forrest Gump, and Jennifer doesn't get that pop reference. I don't get the reference. So, anyway, let's get into it.

00:02:11 Yeah. This is another edition of our Common Mystics road trip to our brother's in Topeka, Kansas, and so we left the Osage native area and we were traveling and we were setting our intentions to find another verifiable story that gives voice to the voiceless that was unknown to us.

00:02:34 Exactly. Well done. Well done. We were actually driving around the Tulsa, Oklahoma area. It was very strange because we had intersected the Arkansas River so many times. At one point, I said to Jennifer, if this is the Arkansas River right now, I do not know where we are because I didn't understand how we kept criss crossing over this river. Yeah,

00:03:19 It was insane. Anyway, um, your hits, Jill, what, what were you feeling when we were in the car?

00:03:27 I, when we were in the car, had remembered a quote that popped in my head from a special about the Donner party, and one of the surviving members-- Ohhh-- I know, one of the surviving members of the Donner party had written her cousin and said, "Don't trust no cuts." So, I kept feeling like a passage or a cut as they referred to in the Donner party, which was like a short cut off the beaten track to get through a mountain range. So, it was like a shortcut or they called it a cut or a passage through a mountain.

00:04:03 Very, very cool. What else? What else were you feeling? Well, as we kept criss-crossing and intersectioning-- and intersecting, the Arkansas River, I kept feeling and hearing blood in the water. There's blood water. Ooh. Creepy. And then I was picturing our grandfather watching boxing, like a violent sport on tv, hand-to-hand combat. Yeah.

00:04:26 Very cool. Yeah. What were you getting? So I have to tell you that this was one of the few times when, while we were in the field on an adventure, I actually was having a mediumship experience. Why are you smiling at me right now? It's true. He totally came onto me. Hey, I wasn't doing anything.

00:04:50 No, seriously. Jennifer was being picked up on, in spirit, by James Beckwourth, is what was happening. Exactly. Jill! And she was getting all flushed, and all describing this very handsome man, who is rugged. Let me tell you, for real.

00:05:07 I was getting the impression of an African-American man dressed in old time clothing, and he had a hat on and he kept showing himself to me and I didn't recognize the hat he was wearing. And I remember writing down in my notebook, "preacher" question mark. And then he showed me a cowboy hat, and I wrote down "cowboy" and I circled it in my notebook. And that's when she began to get flushed. That's when it happened. She was like I don't understand. He, um, I, I felt like I was communicating with him, Jill, because I said in my head, of course-- Your phone number? Are you, are you married? I can't see a ring. Okay. Go on.

00:06:00 I asked him if he was, was enslaved, and I didn't understand the answer. Like he didn't say yes, he didn't say no, but what he did make me understand was that he was important. He was an important, um, he was a guide. I felt like he was a rancher, a cowboy. Um, he also showed me a horseshoe, but he gave me the impression that he was very, very important, which isn't in my logical mind, that's not consistent with someone who would be enslaved. Right? Right. Um, the other thing that I was getting, um, is the image of Elvis Presley in the movie, "Flaming Star."

00:06:41 I remember that movie. I do. And if you weren't already intrigued now, you're now you're really into it. Right. Because of course, he was hot. Ooh, oh, let me just take a minute. In "Flaming star," Elvis, his character is half white and half native American, and the conflict in the movie is that he doesn't belong in either society. So, that's what I was getting when we were in the car, driving around Tulsa and the Oklahoma area.

00:07:20 Yeah. So, um, not that I have to tell you this, but Jennifer really jumped at the opportunity to do the research and really took the lead. I did. I did. So I started looking up--I was going to say, what did you find? But you already got there. Go on. See, I told you, she's very excited about this story. Okay.

00:07:42 So I-- you know what, we grew up with a lot of old west stuff in the house. I watched every episode of The Old West narrated by Kenny Rogers on the History Channel. Like I would watch it, but when I was getting ready for work. Yeah.

00:07:56 Right, and if you haven't figured this out by now, we are well-versed in old movies and westerns were a big part of our upbringing, right? Mom had

00:08:06 The Time Life series of old west books that were like leather clad with really elaborate illustrations that we grew up reading and playing with. Do you know who I'm talking about? She bought them off the TV? She did get them off the TV.

00:08:21 Anyway, so I didn't know of any African-American pioneers of the old west. But you wanted to know? But I sure wanted to learn about some.

00:08:32 Well, I found this man named James Beckwourth and Jill, let me tell you just a little synopsis of who he was. Okay. He was an American mountain man, fur trader and explorer. And he was known as quote, unquote, "Bloody Arm." Like that was his nickname, Bloody Arm, because of his skill as a fighter. Now, interestingly, he narrated his life story to a man named Thomas Bonner. Thomas Bonner was an itinerant judge, who would stay with Beckwourth for a little bit of time. And his book about his life was published in 1856 and it was called, "The Life and Adventures of James P Beckwourth, Mountaineer, Scout, and Pioneer and Chief of the Crow Nation of Indians." Do you believe that?

00:09:23 I cannot believe that. And I'm really intrigued because it would seem like someone who was involved in mountaineering, scouts, pioneer and being a native chief would have come up during, I know, some of those Kenny Roger narrated episodes. Right, you'd think? Also in

1856, it seems like a black man narrating his own story is a little unheard of, like, that seems pretty special. The only other black man I can think of from the 1800s is literally Frederick. Um, help me, Fred...? Frederick Douglass. Thank you. Frederick Douglass as the only other African-American man I know from that time period. Yeah. So help me. He's major.

00:10:08 How did we not know about this guy? Um, well, I can't answer that question for you now, but I can tell you a little bit about what I learned about his life. Would you please? Absolutely, Jill.

00:10:21 So according to Wikipedia, his early life, um, started in 1798. He was actually born into slavery in Virginia.

00:10:33 Now, this is pretty interesting because his mom was an enslaved African-American woman, and his dad was the master. His dad was Sir Jennings Beckwith, who was a descendant of Irish and English nobility. So are we! You two have so much in common. Right?

00:10:56 So, nobody knows much about his early, early life, but we do know that Sir Beckwith moved the whole family to Missouri around 1809, when James was young and this master, Sir Beckwith, took the mother and all of their children. So, he had fathered a bunch of children with James' mom. The master, Sir Beckwith, acknowledged his mixed race children as his own, but legally he was his master. It's still very special. It really is. Until his father, by deed of emancipation in court, in three different years, emancipated James Beckwourth, and made him legitimately a free man.

00:11:43 So um, two things.... that he was sincerely doubling down on wanting his children free, but as you were saying, how he moved his family to Missouri? When you said that, in my head psychically, I got that he did that for the benefit of his children, not just to, um, not just to like learn and be, but not to be a part of the slavery institution by which they were born. To kind of move them away from that, and to give them an opportunity to live a life as a free man.

00:12:14 Yeah, Jill. That's exactly what I learned through the research. Tell me. Back then, Missouri was kind of a frontier in 1809, and the first thing he did, he got James an apprenticeship with a blacksmith. That's cool. So that he could learn a trade.

00:12:32 Very cool. I know, right? So he was really, he really loved his kids. It seems. Not like a master. He was a father. He was a father. That's right. Yeah. That's sweet. So, um, ask me if he was a blacksmith for his entire life then. Jennifer. So he wrote an entire biography about him being a blacksmith? Yeah. I don't know. That'd be kind of boring. And then I took the horse.... No, it was nothing, nothing like that. In fact, he was actually fired, um, as a blacksmith

00:13:11 I was fired from McDonald's, so I understand. Okay. Okay. So, you're just like him. Mm hmm. In 1824, still a young man, Beckwourth joined General William Ashley's Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and he worked as a wrangler during the expedition to explore the Rocky Mountains.

00:13:32 Jennifer? Yes. General William Ashley put an ad into one of the St. Louis papers saying he was looking for 100 enterprising, young men to ascend the Missouri River for one to three years. Wow. And only a hundred men were able to get the position. So they actually called those 100: Ashley Williams 100. Seems kind of exclusive. Like, he must have been scrappy. He must have had some skills. For sure. Well...

00:14:06 Well, in 1825, something happened that would change his life. What? Well, in 1825, he was captured by the Crow, the Crow people while trapping. Now Jill, according to his account, he was mistaken for the long lost son of a Crow chief, and so they admitted him into

the nation. Well, that's lucky. Seems to be. Sure. He learned the Crow language, their customs, their ways of living, and he married.... Oh, I don't know between two Crow women and 10 Crow women, depending on the account or the source. That's quite the spread.

00:14:43 Right, right, right. Wow. And apparently one of his wives was a Crow chief's daughter. My goodness. So he, he seems to be kind of a player.

00:14:54 So, uh, 2 to 10 women? Mm hmm... It doesn't seem like he really took women that seriously. No offense, James Beckwourth, but it seems like, I don't know Papa was a rolling stone.

00:15:08 It does seem like that. And you know what? He did father many children, um, while he was with the Crow and he didn't really talk too much about his romantic liaisons in his memoirs, but there is one romance that stands out. Tell me. It was with a young warrior Crow woman named Pine Leaf. Cute. I know. I love her.

00:15:31 She had a twin brother who was killed by the Black Feet, and she swore that she would take no man as her husband, until she killed 100 enemy warriors with her own hands. That'd a girl! You get it! You get them! And Beckwourth really admired her. This is what he said about her. Are you ready? Mm hmm.

00:15:56 He said, "Whenever a war party started, Pine Leaf was the first to volunteer, to accompany them. Her presence among them caused much amusement to the old veterans, but if she lacked physical strength, she always rode the fleetest horses and none of the warriors could outstrip her." Wow. "And when I engaged in the fiercest struggles, no one was more promptly at my side than the young heroine. She seemed incapable of fear. And when she arrived at womanhood, could fire a gun without flinching and use the Indian weapons with as great dexterity as the most accomplished warrior."

00:16:39 Oh my goodness. She's.... she sounds feisty. I like her. I like her, too. Now, he was totally after Pine Leaf. I mean, he was wooing her and courting her. Well, she sounds like a catch. I'm sure he wasn't the only one. He, he was actually gaining prestige in the Crow society.

00:17:00 Oh, so he wasn't too shabby? They would be like a power couple? Well, yeah, kind of, like who's a power couple today? Today? I was going to say Brad and Angie, but you know, they...oh...

00:17:10 I know.... All our references are so dated. Um, Kristen Bell, Dax Shepard and Kristen bell. Good one. They're cute. Just go with that. Okay. Are Kim and Kanye still together? No.

00:17:20 Oh, crap. See? All our references are so old. Let's keep going. No, he was quite a catch because Jill, he actually rose in Crow society from warrior to chief. So, he was respected. He had prestige. He ascended to the highest ranking chieftaincy in the Crow nation. Yeah. I mean, he was a big deal. He participated in raids and led raids sometimes against, uh, white parties and sometimes against other native nations. Um, but yeah, no, he totally would have been a catch. Did she ever give him a chance?

00:17:56 Well she would rebuff him again and again, she was quoted as saying that she would marry him quote, "when the pine leaves turn yellow" or "when you find a red headed Indian." I like her, but... I know I like her too... but his perseverance did eventually pay off, and here's why. Beckwourth returned from a misadventure when he was out raiding and everybody thought that he had been killed, but when he came back alive, that's when Pine Leaf renounced the warpath and finally agreed to marry him. Oh my God. That's sweet.

00:18:36 Well, that is really cute. I wish she would have held out though, to be honest. Yeah, me too, because guess what? Five weeks later, he ended up leaving the Crow and he never saw her again. Five weeks later? Mmm hmm.

00:18:51 James, you're killing me, man. I know. He must've been much more interested in the chase than the conquests.

00:18:58 Five weeks? Poor Pine Leaf. Poor Pine Leaf. Why did he leave? Well, after being with the Crow, he returned to St. Louis, because, remember when he was a boy and he lived in Missouri? It was a frontier and he was expecting the same thing, but he got there and he was totally out of place and he did not stay there long. Plus, his father had died, too, so there was really nothing there in Missouri for him. Gosh. So, from then he didn't stay in Missouri. He went to Florida because, guess what? There was the second Seminole war happening in Florida in 1837.

00:19:33 So he went to go join the war? Yeah. He went to go fight in the war, um, as a soldier and a courier. Um, he was there for 10 months scouting and carrying dispatches, um, until the war settled down into a routine.

00:19:48 So, did he fight with, or against the Seminoles? He fought for the United States army. He enlisted, oh, volunteered, and fought against the Seminoles. I know after having lived with the Crow, you'd think that he'd have some empathy, you know, more allegiance to the native peoples. Yeah. Very strange. But he didn't. Okay, go on. So, uh, once the fighting kind of lulled, he was, he found it unendurable in Florida and these are his own words. He said, "now we had another long interval of inactivity and I began to grow tired of Florida. I wanted excitement of some kind. I was indifferent of what nature, even if it was no better than borrowing horses of the Black Feet. The Seminoles had no horses worth stealing or I should certainly have exercised my talents for the benefit of the United States." Yeah. So basically, he would rather be out stealing horses than waiting, just living Florida with no, uh, you know, combat. He really seems like an adrenaline junkie.

00:20:52 He kind of does. He kind of does. It seems like he needs that sense of danger. Like, he likes living in chaos. That's where he feels at home.

00:21:01 So, he left Florida and from 1838 to 1840, he was employed as an Indian trader to the Cheyenne on the Arkansas River. Not in Oklahoma. He was on the Arkansas River, closer to the Colorado area. He dealt with Cheyennes, Arapaho, Sioux... all of whom were traditionally the enemies of the Crow. Oh. And remember he, yeah, remember he was, he was living as a Crow for like 9 years. He had at least 9 to 11 Crow wives. Exactly.

00:21:34 Exactly. And now he's going back and he's all like, yeah. I used to be Crow and now-- Hey Cheyenne, I'm your friend.

00:21:43 Exactly. Exactly. Well, he, of course, tried to ingratiate himself with the Cheyenne, and he put out this, this display of like, bravado to try to like, win them over. What did that look like? Well, I have a quote here. It's pretty ridiculous. Are you ready? He said, "I have come to the Cheyenne's, who are the bravest people in the mountains, as I do not wish to be killed by any of the inferior tribes. I have come here to be killed by the Cheyenne's. Cut up and thrown out for their dogs to eat, so that they may say that they have killed a great Crow chief." So, he's identifying as a great Crow chief here. Wow. But he's also like, he's also stroking their egos. Totally. Yeah, for sure. There was another trader at the time, who was in the same village and

he heard this and he said to Beckwourth, "You are certainly bereft of your senses. The Indians will make sausage meat of you."

00:22:45 I agree with him. Why would he identify himself as a Crow? He should have just been like, "Hey, I'm James from... I'm James from the block, Hey, what's going on?" You know what I mean? Like, why would he be like, "I am a great Crow chief, kill me if you will."

00:22:59 You know what you'll see again and again? That he was a master self-promoter. So anyway, um, it worked, Jill. It totally worked. He won over the Cheyenne with his bravado and also 20 gallons of whiskey. Ooh. Yeah, and thanks to Beckwourth's skill with diplomacy and winning over the Cheyenne, his employers enjoyed a successful fall and winter trade season with them.

00:23:25 So, that worked out. It sounds like he had a great career with them, and they must have really appreciated him.

00:23:30 Well, not so fast. What? Uh, it was that year in 1840, so, like that same year, he decided, you know what, I don't need to work for anybody else. He quit the company and became, and became his own entrepreneur and his own independent trader. Wow. Yeah. So, now he's a competitor and he actually kind of made some enemies there. I can see that. Mm hmm. It's like, um, I don't know, when Natalie Merchant left the 10,000 Maniacs, like, I don't need the group to go out on my own, or Beyonce leaving Destiny's Child, you know. I'm trying to update my reference a little bit. Kind of.

00:24:11 That's still old. Anyway, so he, together with his partners, built their own trading post in Colorado, and Jill, that would become Pueblo, Colorado.

00:24:22 You know, I looked that up, and there's no mention of James Beckwourth on Pueblo Colorado's website as far as its history. It made me sad. Interesting. I know. It made me sad. Go on. Oh, oh. And a side note. Also during this time he married a woman named Louisa Sandoval.

00:24:42 That's 10 to 12 wives, right there. I told you, he was a player. Yeah. Hate the game, not the player. Now, he's coming onto you in spirit. He's like, "Well, hello! Where are you guys driving to?" I know, I know, he really did. I am blushing. Your daddy issues are on full display.

00:25:07 Oh.. I like a smooth talking man with many ladies that just keep skipping town. That's what I'm all about. Dad wasn't African-American. He wasn't, but everything else seems pretty consistent.

00:25:21 Oh. Okay. Alright. Okay. Well, more on that later. See our bonus episode on Jennifer's daddy issues. Coming soon.

00:25:36 Okay. 1844. Then, he moves to Mexico. So, he just picks up. He's done. He's done with Pueblo Colorado. And his wife. And he moves to Mexico, and engages in the Mexican American war in 1846. My goodness. During the conflict, he stole reportedly 1,800 Mexican horses as spoils of war. Wow. Yeah, and he served as a courier with the US army. So, once again, joining the army to engage in the war,

00:26:10 He's on the forefront of history. He sure seems to be. Alright, speaking of that, there's another historical event coming up, which he also plays a role in. Tell me. And that, that is the Gold Rush of 1848.

00:26:24 Well, anyone who is a part of American history during that time was a part of the Gold Rush.

00:26:29 You know what? I would say that it would make total sense that he would go to California during this time, because we've already established, he's kind of an adrenaline junkie, and an adventure seeker, and this would be the place to be. Mm hmm. So, he goes to California and he opens a store at Sonoma, but then sells it, moves to Sacramento, and makes a living as a professional card player.

00:26:53 Again, the Forrest Gump of the wild west.

00:26:56 Now two years later, 1850. And this is really important. Are you ready? Mm hmm. He discovered a pass through the Sierra Nevada mountains. Yes. You might remember, or you might, you might already know and many of our listeners would know that during the Gold Rush, countless people were rushing out west and it's difficult to do that in a wagon, through the mountains. I wouldn't do it. And everything wasn't well mapped. So, remember the Donner party, you referenced it earlier? They're delicious. Tell us what happened with the Donner party.

00:27:39 Apparently they were on, they were on track to make it to California before winter set in, but someone, one of the guides said, "Hey, I have a shortcut for you. There's a cut through here and you should make it faster." The guide gave them directions, but didn't actually go through the shortcut with him, with them, and they ended up being snowed in and had to resort to cannibalism to survive.

00:28:09 Right. Yeah. So, Beckwourth found a low elevation pass, a trail that spared settlers and gold seekers, about 150 miles. He saved them 150 miles and also some very steep passages that were very dangerous, just like the Donner pass. So this was, this was major that he, uh, he established this trail that would make travel more quick and safer. That's amazing. I know it, I think it is. Apparently this trail, so he established it and then he was working on improving it. And he was supposed to be paid by the local municipalities, like the town of Marysville. But guess what? Marysville didn't pay him because they had two huge fires and they were basically broke. So he didn't get paid for the, um, his, his trail, the Beckwourth Trail. But aside: In 1996, the city of Marysville named a park after him because of his outstanding contributions to their community.

00:29:14 Well, that's nice. I think so. No, I really do appreciate them making a right on that. Mm hmm. Totally.

00:29:20 Okay. But of course he just didn't stay a guide--he's killing me-- in the Sierra. He is literally killing me. He actually settled down a little. This should make you feel a little better. He settled down and became a rancher in the Sierra Valley. He had a ranch, a trading post and a hotel in the settlement of which is now called Beckwourth, California.

00:29:42 Oh, good. I know, right? He's got a little community named after him. Now, it was there in the winter of 1854 and 1855 that an itinerant judge, Thomas D. Bonner, stayed in his hotel, and that's when Beckwourth told him a story that would later become his book. Very cool. Mm Hmm. Alas, he did not stay a rancher. Four years later, he went back to Colorado territory, became a storekeeper and then was appointed a local Indian agent. That sounds cool. Um, well, yes and no. He was a scout for the third Colorado Cavalry Regiment. Uh oh. What? He served in a campaign against the Cheyenne and Apache. Uh uh. And he led a military militia to annihilate those indigenous inhabitants for the American settlers. That's crazy. It's heartbreaking. It was called the Sand Creek massacre and an estimated 70 to 160 friendly Cheyenne men, women and children were murdered by the militia. That is crazy. Horrible. So odd because he was just friends with a Cheyenne a couple of years ago doing business.

00:31:04 Yeah. I know there's something about him. He has many accomplishments and he's, he really, he sounds like an adventurous guy, but it sounds a little off to me. All these wives, this adrenaline junkie, his ability to switch sides. Living with the Crow, fighting with the Americans against the Seminoles, now leading or being, participating in a raid to kill friendly Cheyenne's. I don't know about this guy, Jen.

00:31:34 Well, he's definitely an interesting psychological study. I'll give you that. Well outraged with his association with the Sand Creek massacre, the Cheyenne banned him from trading with them forevermore. Well, good. Good for them. Now, by now, uh, Beckworth is in his sixties. Okay. So, he's not a young man anymore. He returned to trapping. He was again employed by the US army as a scout during Red Cloud's War in 1866. And then soon after that, he passes away in Montana while leading a military column to a Crow band. Um, he gets severe headaches and a nosebleed and modern historians think that it's a result of severe hypertension. In any event, he passes away in 1867, and a personal friend of his, Williams-- William Byers, was also the founder of the Rocky Mountain News. And he claimed in his paper that the Crow people had poisoned Beckwourth. He said that the tribe felt that they could no longer trust him because of his involvement in the Sand Creek massacre. Well, Byers had no supporting evidence of this, but I mean, I guess it's a reasonable assumption to make.

00:32:49 I agree, 100%. Like I said, it seems, well, the whole, his whole death, there's not a lot of information. Um, a lot, not a lot of facts out there about, about his death and the circumstances surrounding it, but what we do know is he did, he was given an honorary Crow funeral and he is apparently laid to rest in Crow Indian settlement burial ground in Wyoming. Okay, I have a couple of questions for you. Do you?

00:33:17 I do, because I want to know how come we hadn't heard more about him? Like we literally are right back where we started. He really did- he's not my cup of tea. He's more on your-- He's my cup of tea. He's more your taste, but I don't understand why we didn't hear about him.

00:33:39 I think from the very beginning, his autobiography was viewed as unreliable and you know, early historians, even right after his death were like, this is just a bunch of tall tales. You know, his, and you know, his numbers were off. He exaggerated his accomplishments, but still there are independent witnesses who corroborate a lot of what he's talking about. Okay, stop. So, he's not a complete liar. He's just, he's just telling tall tales.

00:34:12 Okay. So I have a question. Is there anyone else telling his story? Was this just the only reason why he's known in history is because he himself documented his story with the judge that has spent time with him in California?

00:34:26 So, remember he was a mountain man and a trapper, and something you might not know about mountain mens- about mountain men in the 1800s was that they would get together for what is called a rendezvous. Mmmm. At a rendez-- and it's not what you think. It's not. At a rendezvous, the mountain men would get together and they would trade and then they would tell stories. So it's kind of like, um, kind of like a business convention, only like camping.

00:34:59 Conference, a conference like the most boring conference ever. Well, during these rendezvous, the very first one was in 1825. And as early as 1825, he had already established himself as a master storyteller. Now, what does that mean? He would tell these embellished heroic, improbable tales of himself. He would basically sit around the campfire and just tell these larger than life stories about his accomplishments and his feats. And, um, you know, it rubbed

some people the wrong way. Were they jelly? They, maybe they were jelly. They, he was known as quote unquote, "a gaudy liar." Like that's what he was referred to as by the other mountain men. But also Jill, he did stand out. He was six feet tall, strongly built. Settle down. Oh my goodness,

00:36:02 Give me a moment. He wore his dark hair to his waist, and he had braids and ribbons and earrings, gold chains, Crow leggings. So, I mean, he was an eccentric, he stood out. So you have this big, strong, muscular man, you know, who's dressed in this elaborate fashion, telling these outrageous stories.

00:36:27 He rubbed people the wrong way. So it sounds literally like you're describing Lenny Kravitz, like Crow leggings.

00:36:36 Yeah. So, like I said, by the time it was 1866, his book had already been widely read for a decade, and by the 1870s, less than 10 years after Beckwourth's death, historians were already calling his memoirs little more than campfire stories and just really chalking it up to exaggeration

00:36:58 But this is the thing, we already established that during that time in the 1800s, even newspaper accounts were highly, were written in a hyperbolic, very hyperbolic way. That's true. So, why was the stories- I mean, remember Pauline Cushman, her stories, she perpetuated her own stories to make money. Why was his information or his stories that he was putting out under such scrutiny?

00:37:25 I mean, that's a really good question because I mean, think about, like Jim Bowie, who else Jill?

00:37:32 Oh gosh, Annie Oakley. Pat Garrett, Davy Crockett. Buffalo Bill. There are books and books and books written about the tall tales, the legends of these people. Oh, Jesse James. Exactly.

00:37:47 Not only were their stories not put under that same scrutiny, but they were also perpetuated and told again and again so their legends expanded, right? James Beckwourth didn't have that luxury. He's just sitting there pounding on his chest, being like, Hey guys, this is what I'm doing. And everyone's like, oh. Exactly. You're just a gaudy storyteller.

00:38:08 Exactly. So why do you think he wasn't believed?

00:38:12 There must be something different about him? Something obvious, something I just can't place what would make him different? What do you think? He was six feet tall. Was it the leggings? Do you think it was his leggings?

00:38:33 I think his leggings are, they sound pretty hot. I want to get myself some Crow leggings. He sounds fashion forward. He really does. He was way ahead of his time. I don't know. I think he was tall. Six feet tall. That's unusual. That's unusual now, if you're a woman,

00:38:52 Why do you think it is? Well it's obviously Jill, because he was an African-American. He was a man of color. He was a man of color during a period of history where slavery is alive and well. Oh, that's the elephant in the room.

00:39:09 You know that he experienced prejudice and racism. You know it. Of course. People looked at him, they were probably like, prove that you're free. You know what I mean? Like who do you think you are? Exactly. Exactly. I mean, when you look at it that way, it's no wonder that he was a self promoter. Who else is going to promote him?

00:39:29 It's really disheartening. He did have-- I know that you don't like him as much as I do, but I think he's fascinating. I don't think anyone likes him as much as you do. Maybe Pine

Leaf, but besides that. Seriously. Honestly, him personally aside, because I do have some issues with his character, but a lot of people in history, I have issues with their characters, but I appreciate their contribution to history and to the American experience.

00:39:59 And their contributions have been reported on and printed and are there for us to learn about and read.

00:40:07 Right. Even the Brady Bunch had an episode about Jesse James. Right? Right, and he was an outlaw. He wasn't even a good guy. Right. So, these people have been in pop culture again and again, but this man was largely forgotten through history. We don't- we hadn't heard his name before he started flirting with you in the car.

00:40:25 That's true. That's true. And, but I will say that modern historians and um, when I say modern, I'm talking about the, after the Civil Rights movement hit in the sixties, the 1960s, modern historians do look back at his memoirs as a valuable account of life at the time.

00:40:45 Well, sure. I think it's valuable in several ways, not just for the overall American experience, but when you think of the wild west, I don't think of, of anyone of color other than the natives and maybe Hispanic people or Mexican people being there. Right? Right. I, I literally said when we started this story, the only black person that I can name from the 1850s, like off the top of my head is, uh, Frederick Douglass. Right? The fact that not only was he a slave, a man born into slavery, such a, had such a pivotal role in an American history during a formative time. Right? We don't know anything about him and his contributions because he was black.

00:41:34 We don't. You and I don't. Nope. And anyone who had the same sort of white education that we did, probably doesn't either. And now everyone can flirt with him in spirit the way Jennifer has.

00:41:51 Yeah, and let's not forget though, Jill and I didn't say this before, but he was the only African-American in the west to record his life story. The only one. That is huge. Think about all of the others, all of the other African-Americans throughout history, from the very beginning, that made pivotal contributions to the birth of this great nation, and we don't even know about them and they weren't self-promoters perhaps, and maybe, maybe that's part of why. So, who do you think our voiceless is?

00:42:29 Getting us back on track. Sorry. Um, definitely your new boyfriend. Definitely. James Beckwourth. Absolutely, but also all those other African Americans whose stories were woven in the foundation of this country that hadn't been told. That will be, that will be lost forever. I know, it's sad.

00:42:52 It is sad. And it's unfortunate for all of us, to be quite honest Because that, yeah, no for sure. That history shapes our current identity. I know. Yeah.

00:43:03 And by omitting these types of tales, perpetuates inequality at best, and at worst, just straight up racism. These are the stories that would help integrate societies in different cultures within America, because we're not all one thing.

00:43:21 We're not all one thing, and we're all part of the same story though.

00:43:24 I know. We're all part of this story. We just don't have all of the, we don't have all the, all the pieces.

00:43:32 Well, I am so glad that James came to you. Well, I am too. Well. I'm so glad that Dennis is such a good man that when I told him James Beckwourth was flirting with you in spirit,

he was okay with it. Yeah, he's totally fine with it. Yeah, he's like, that's totally cool. Yeah. No, my husband is-- He's like, I get it. We're in an open spiritual relationship.

00:43:58 Oh. So no, seriously, what I love about the way James Beckwourth came to me... is that in spirit, he has the same personality that it sounds like he had in life. I mean, all of his images were so strong. The African-American man wearing the hat, like a cowboy, literally that was him. You, the pass through versus the established area, when you were thinking of a pass through? He made a shortcut. In 1850, he discovered the Beckwourth Pass. And I had a similar image with the fact that he was a guide helping people pass through. That's true. Jill, you also had an interesting hit having to do with like violence, boxing and, and punching and also blood in the water. Explain that. Well, Beckwourth was known as "bloody arm" because of his, he was a skilled fighter. Isn't that crazy? Yeah. And we were driving around and over the Arkansas River and he worked on the Arkansas River as an Indian trader to the Cheyenne. You sure did. And let's not forget my image of the horseshoe, which Jill?

00:45:06 Self explanatory. Oh my gosh. Is it? He was a blacksmith apprentice. Yes. He was a blacksmith and they make horseshoes. . Also, the rancher reference. He was a rancher. And then Elvis's character in the movie Flaming Star. And if you weren't already intrigued, this is what really got you.

00:45:29 Half native and half white. And he didn't fit into either world. And of course, Beckwourth also was of mixed race, with an enslaved African-American mother and a white father. He didn't really fit in anywhere. And maybe that's why he moved around so much. Maybe that it's something to do with it, Jill. . Maybe he was trying to heal. You leave him alone. Wow.

00:45:58 Wow. We'll start working on the daddy issue bonus. He does love me. I don't understand the whole daddy issue joke.

00:46:09 Are you serious? Do you, have you, you don't remember dad? We should talk about this away from the microphones. Well, you brought it up. Our father was a womanizer, who was very good at communicating and was a terrific salesperson, and then moved around a lot so much that we haven't seen him since [we were kids].

00:46:29 Oh shit! You might be onto something. Someone just turned on the lights. I am laughing too hard. I'll get you Dr. Lisa's number. Don't worry, we'll talk off air. So, let's finish this up. Transition. Jennifer, there's a fascinating quote that you've found. Can you please read Devin Flores quote for me? Right.

00:47:03 The reason that this is so poignant is because modern historians are finding value., like I said, in James Beckwourth's contribution, and this is one of them, Devin Flores of historyofcolorado.org. He says, "Today, Jim Beckwourth memoirs are still in print. They remain an interesting and valuable historical document providing a detailed and source of social history. A look into both native American and early United States society. From the point of view of an individual, who was an African-American man and freed slave was not entirely either." Ooh, I like it. Jill, please tell the people where they can find us.

00:47:49 Please check out our website, commonmystics.net. Find us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter at Common Mystics Podcast. Please listen to us on Amazon Music, Audible, Stitcher, Spotify, Tuned In, Google Podcasts, and Apple Podcast, where you can leave us a positive review, so other people can find us. Thank you so much. Thank you for being part of my therapy today.

00:48:18 Thank you. And good night, we have a lot more to talk about. Bye.

