



5-6-2016

The Lewis and Clark Journey: Burning Bridges and Building Empires

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The Lewis and Clark Journey: Burning Bridges and Building Empires

Sean Ferguson
HI-398-Independent Study
May 6, 2016

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the expedition of Lewis and Clark from 1804 to 1806 as they crossed the territory of Louisiana. Their journey has become one of the most important symbols of American history and its memory has been far reaching. More specifically, this paper aims to examine more closely the interactions that Meriwether Lewis and William Clark had with the Native Americans. Thomas Jefferson had an extensive list of requests and instructions for the two explorers. While this paper will not analyze all of Jefferson's requests, there are two that will be featured in this paper for such analysis. The first topic that will be discussed is the attempt by Lewis and Clark and the rest of the Corps of Discovery to create a lasting environment of peace and harmony between the Native Americans of the previously unexplored western frontier and the government and citizens of the United States of America. The second topic that will be discussed in this paper is the attempt of the explorers to build a commercial relationship with these same groups.

Jefferson had several goals that Lewis and Clark attempted to achieve, but perhaps the two listed above were the most important. The relationship that existed between the United States and the Native Americans defined much of early American history. From the British settlement at Jamestown to Custer's Last Stand, the natives and the American settlers have had a complex and tightly intertwined relationship. To make things even more complicated the thousands of native tribes located in North America also had extremely complicated cultures and relationships between themselves.

When the United States won its independence from Great Britain it had to decide how it would conduct itself with the natives. On the one hand, vague boundaries and informal treaties and alliances could have provoked violence between the Americans and the native tribes. Each had something to gain from the removal of the other. The United States could have expanded

itself much more easily, and its settlers would not have had to worry about attacks from those they viewed as savages. The natives, on the other hand, had thrived for many years before the arrival of Europeans. The intentions, weapons, and diseases that they brought with them were catastrophic for the natives. As it was, the United States and other European powers frequently traded pieces of land in the Americas among each other without even acknowledging native claims to these same pieces of land.

At the same time, however, both the natives and the Americans could have benefitted from a peaceful relationship with one another. If they could have reached a peaceful agreement with each other, the natives could have felt that their land and other interests would be off limits for American settlers who had previously had no second thoughts about native concerns. Likewise, American settlers living in the westernmost boundaries of the United States could have lived without the fear of impending native attacks.

Jefferson and the rest of the United States government also had an interest in keeping peace between different native communities and tribes. Jefferson, in particular, believed that the United States could benefit from the Native Americans, and he believed that intertribal peace was one of the easiest ways to assure a good relationship with the American people. The last thing that any American citizen wanted was constant violence on the outskirts of their borders.

Just as important as maintaining peace at the beginning of the nineteenth century was the opportunity for commercial intercourse. Trade was extremely important for both the natives and for the fledgling United States of America. Heavily in debt and struggling to find a foothold in the world economy, the Americans had a great potential ally and trading partner in the native populations. For centuries, the British and the French had made a fortune on the fur trade in what would become Canada and the Northern United States. The natives had seemingly endless access

to some of the best furs and pelts in the world. While the Europeans had exploited this for years, the Americans hoped that they could engage in active trade. This also would have expedited the peace making process as two separate entities that had collectively succeeded and grown because of the relationship between them would certainly have even more to gain with a strong peace between them.

The prospect of trade was also enticing for Native Americans. The natives were generally seen as poor people by the American government that lived almost entirely off the land on which they lived. Jefferson and the American people firmly believed that the opportunity to trade with the natives would help them end their nomadic lifestyle. The natives would have been able to settle, sell needless pieces of land, produce their own food, and domesticate animals.

Furthermore, having been exploited by European powers in the past, they could have traded with the Americans for weapons to defend themselves. Creating permanent settlements and great trading posts in native villages was a primary concern of Jefferson, Lewis, and Clark on the Corps of Discovery's journey from May 14, 1804 to September 23, 1806.

The first point to be dissected will be Jefferson's insistence that the explorers either instituted or maintained friendly relationships with the Native Americans. This essay will explore two central questions related to this theme: Did Lewis and Clark satisfy Jefferson's request to promote and instill peace between the native tribes of North America? Did Lewis and Clark foster a peaceful relationship between the Native Americans and the citizens of the United States and/or the American government? The answer to both of these questions is a resounding no. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark failed to promote any sort of lasting peace between the different tribes on the frontier of the western United States. Furthermore, Lewis and Clark were

unable to produce a definite and permanent peace between the Native Americans and the citizens and government of the United States.

The second part of this paper deals with Lewis and Clark and how they helped contribute to trade between the native populations and the United States of America. Essentially I will be asking if Lewis and Clark built the foundations for an extensive trade between the natives and the United States. The answer to this question is that they did, in fact, open the lines of communication that eventually led to a prosperous and lucrative trading relationship.

There is a wealth of evidence to support these conclusions. When analyzing the goals of Jefferson, there is a small collection of letters written from Jefferson to other parties articulating the plans that he had. The first is Jefferson's Secret Message to Congress. This letter, written in 1803, showcases Jefferson's determination to bring peace to the native people of North America. He wrote about promoting the "greatest good" for both the United States and the Indian nations. His goals included creating a domestic lifestyle for the natives and sending a search party to explore their lands and sow the seeds of friendship between the native people and American citizens.

When examining the expedition and their desire to start a trade, the analysis begins, again, with examining the goals of Thomas Jefferson and his vision. Jefferson's Secret Message to Congress can again be utilized and even more extensively this time. It seems that one of the primary objectives that Jefferson had was creating "commercial intercourse" between his own nation and the Native Americans. He talked about the fact that the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers were just waiting to be used for this purpose to begin a prosperous trade with the western nations. Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis is another document that is also filled with language that points toward his insistence to create a trading empire between the two parties. He asked the

explorers to take careful notes about the extent of the possessions of each tribe that they came across and what goods they had that they would be willing and able to trade. While he discussed many points throughout the document, he made very clear the impression that he wanted the explorers to leave on the natives. He asked them to treat the natives with the best possible conduct emphasizing the advantages – economically and otherwise – that a friendly disposition would have toward the natives.

Perhaps the most useful of primary sources is the journals of Lewis and Clark. These pieces were written by the explorers throughout their journey capturing details from all stages of their trip. While Jefferson’s Secret Message to Congress and Jefferson’s Instructions to Lewis outline the president’s desire to create a peaceful environment for the natives and for American citizens, it is the journals of the expedition members, primarily, that showcases how these objectives were approached. This paper showcases several entries from the journals of both Lewis and Clark.

Several secondary sources will be used as well. Brad Tennant wrote an article in the February 2009 edition of *We Proceeded On* about the encounter that Lewis and Clark had with the Teton Sioux. He wrote about the lead up to this meeting and the different factors that could have led to the dangerous energy created from it.¹ Anthony Brandt is a historian who collected important passages from the journals of Lewis and Clark and combined them into one book. He also wrote some of his theories and research to go along with the information that the explorers provided in his book, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark: Newly Abridged by Anthony Brandt*. Brandt wrote about some of the relationships that different tribes had with each other that Lewis and Clark did not fully understand. Brandt argued that because of their failure to grasp the

¹ Brad Tennant, “Reading Between the Lines,” *We Proceeded On* 35, no. 1 (February 2009): 6.

complexities of native relations, they could not have hoped to create peace.² Furthermore, he wrote about the attitudes that the natives had toward warfare and how central it was to their culture. Since it was so vitally important to their way of life, he argued that there would be no way of eliminating war without tearing apart the fabric of native life's foundation.

James P. Ronda's book *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* is an esteemed piece of literature that follows the journey of Lewis and Clark as they interact with many different native tribes. This was one of the most important books that I used throughout the entirety of the paper. The information inside it was essential to formulating my thesis and Ronda wrote extensively about the most important tribes that Lewis and Clark interacted with.

Gunther Barth wrote a book called *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from the Journals Arranged by Topic* in which several journal entries are taken from Lewis and Clark and notes from the author are also introduced to emphasize certain points and give background on a variety of topics. In this book is a speech that Clark had planned to give to the Yellowstone Indians that never materialized. Nevertheless, the information in the speech is very similar to speeches that would have been given to native councils throughout the entirety of the journey. In it Clark wrote about the hope that he and the people of the United States had that a great deal of trade could take place with Indian nations.³

Robert J. Miller's *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny* lambasts Jefferson for his purchase of the Louisiana Territory. The premise of this book is that Jefferson was merely claiming territory to keep European powers out of North America so that the United States of America could exploit the Native

² Anthony Brandt, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark: Meriwether Lewis and William Clark* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Adventure Classics, 2002), 256.

³ Gunther Barth, *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from the Journals Arranged by Topic* (Boston: Bedford, 1998), 129.

Americans with a so called “Doctrine of Discovery” – a set of unwritten rules for imperial powers to follow when claiming territory.

Other sources, however, like *Into the Wilderness: The Lewis and Clark Expedition* by James Holmberg, *Lewis and Clark in Missouri* by Ann Rogers, and a wealth of primary sources would disagree with Miller’s conclusions though. These books would argue that Jefferson did have the United States’ best interests in mind, but he was not willing to trample on the unfortunate natives that lay between him and the west coast of the United States.

The paper will begin with a chapter on the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson had dreamed of exploring the western half of the continent for decades before his vision was realized. This chapter will elaborate on the different iterations of the expedition as it played out in Jefferson’s mind. His rationale for sending explorers out west changed from the 1780s through the turn of the century and the Louisiana Purchase chapter will follow his rationale through the years and commentate on the developments that helped the journey evolve into reality. This section of the paper will explain the importance of the Louisiana Purchase and what Jefferson and the explorers hoped to accomplish.

The second chapter will cover the failed attempts of Lewis and Clark to create peace between different native tribes and between the United States and these tribes. This chapter will recount several instances in which the Corps of Discovery acted with hostility toward native tribes. It will also showcase incidents in which native tribes engaged each other in violent warfare. While the explorers were not present to witness any warfare, they were informed that violence had broken despite their attempts to prevent it. Finally, this chapter will display that Lewis and Clark lacked the necessary experience and diplomatic ability to make peace possible because of the extent to which warfare was ingrained in native culture.

The final content chapter will deal with the successful attempts of Jefferson, Lewis, and Clark to create a sustained and productive trading relationship between the United States and several native tribes. It will begin by describing Jefferson's intentions before selecting instances during which Lewis and Clark attempted to create interest in trade with the natives. Finally, it will present the reader with the conception of the American Fur Company and explain how this company came to be and how it created a dominant trading empire between the United States and the native tribes of the west.

The Evolution of Louisiana

Under the rule of Great Britain, the American colonies expanded only as far west as the Appalachian Mountains. English governors were intent on keeping their influence on American settlers and worried about losing it the farther west they travelled. After the United States of America gained its independence, it gradually expanded farther west into lands previously unknown. By 1800, the western boundary of the United States was defined as the Mississippi River until further notice.

What lay beyond that was a virtual mystery. By the end of the eighteenth century, the United States was independent, but North America was a busy place with foreign powers continually trying to lay claims to the land. Britain still had a tremendous presence north of the United States in Canada with a western border that extended beyond the western border of the United States. They also controlled territory in the Caribbean. The Spanish had claims in present-day Florida, the Southwest United States, and much of South and Central America. Additionally, Louisiana, in the center of the continent, had just been added to the French Empire along with some of their Caribbean possessions.



Map of North America - 1803

Throughout the late eighteenth century, Jefferson gradually became more involved in American politics. Between the years of 1780 and 1800, he worked as a member of Congress, a foreign minister, the Secretary of State, and Vice President. Ever since the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, he had dreamt of exploring all the land that lay west of the Mississippi River. Throughout the next fifteen years, “Jefferson tried to send explorers into the West but each try failed.”⁴ Three of these attempts happened between 1783 and 1793. While in some cases, preparations were beginning to take place for these explorations, none of them ever truly materialized despite the power and influence that Jefferson held. It is, however, worth mentioning some of the stated objectives of these trips.

The first mention of such an idea that Jefferson had created was recorded in 1783. He wrote to George Rogers Clark, a former soldier, hoping that he may be willing to explore the west. Jefferson wrote, “I find they have subscribed a very large sum of money in England for exploring the country from the Mississippi to California. They pretend it is only to promote knolege. I am afraid they have thoughts of colonizing into that quarter. Some of us have been talking here in a feeble way of making the attempt to search that country.”⁵ Of course, the United States had only just won independence. A fragile and unstable nation, one could understand the concern of the country’s leaders at the thought of Britain gaining territory on the other side of the Mississippi. Such action could seriously threaten the future existence of the United States. As Jefferson later admitted, though, the newly formed United States government could not do much to counteract any potential move made by foreign governments west of the Mississippi. There

⁴ James Holmberg, *Into The Wilderness: The Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 4.

⁵ Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, in *Letters of the Lewis & Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, by Donald Jackson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 654, 655.

was not enough money in the newly formed republic to make any sort of effort against it. At this point, any attempt at exploration by an American sponsored party was simply not an option.

In this instance, Jefferson's intention was to prevent other nations from staking out claims on what he hoped to be future American territory. No mention of natives, mapping, botanical research, or geographical exploration was ever made by him in his letter to George Rogers Clark. In fact, it was Clark who wrote back mentioning accommodations that Jefferson had not taken into consideration. He argued about the proposal for such an endeavor,

“Large parties will never answer the purpose. They will alarm the Indian Nations they pass through. Three or four young Men well qualified for the Task might perhaps compleat your wishes at a very Trifling Expence... They must learn the Language of the distant Nations they pass through the geography of their Country antient Speech or Tradition, passing as men tracing the Steps of our four Fathers wishing to know from whence we came. This would require four or five years, an Expence worthy the attention of Congress, from the Nature of things I should suppose that you would require a genl. Superintendant of Indian affairs to the westward as the greatest body of those people live in that quarter.”⁶

Clark was essentially saying that only a very small band of travelers would be able to complete Jefferson's task without causing hostilities with other native or European nations. He may have had a point as the United States had no rightful claims on the land that Jefferson wanted to pursue. This would suggest that only a small party would be able to encroach on the territory for fear of being noticed or, more menacingly, for fear of being mistaken for a small force of soldiers. Furthermore, not much had been known of natives in the Midwest and beyond since American citizens had little or no reason to venture out that far while the French and English would have had the fur trade in mind trying to expand their own colonial borders.

Another one of the men that Jefferson recruited in 1793 was named Andre Michaux. He was a French botanist and had travelled extensively across the United States leading, Jefferson to believe he was a man up for the challenge that lay ahead. The American Philosophical Society (a

⁶ Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, 656.

group founded by Benjamin Franklin for the promotion of useful knowledge of the sciences and humanities) agreed to finance Michaux's journey. In 1793, Jefferson wrote to Michaux laying out instructions to carry out his mission. He wrote, "The chief objects of your journey are to find the shortest & most convenient route of communication between the U.S. & the Pacific Ocean, within the temperate latitudes, & to learn such particulars as can be obtained of the country through which it passes, its productions, inhabitants & other interesting circumstances."⁷ Furthermore, Jefferson stressed that Michaux should attempt to learn "the names, numbers, and dwellings of the inhabitants, and such particularities as you can learn of their history, connection with each other languages, manners, state of society and of the arts and commerce among them."⁸ The purpose of Michaux's trip was much more focused on the geographical state of the west. Jefferson further writes as part of the mission's goals, "You will, in the course of your journey, take notice of the country you pass through, its general face, soil, rivers, mountains, its productions animal, vegetable, and mineral so far as they may be new to us and may also be useful of very curious."⁹ This makes sense in the context of the time. By 1793, the United States had only been an independent nation for ten years. George Washington had only been president for four. While the purpose of the expedition would evolve throughout the next decade to be far more extensive, the United States was just beginning to get its bearings, and the documentation of Indian tribes and American relations with them would not become a serious concern until much later. By 1793 native relations in foreign territories would have to take a back seat.

As it turned out, however, Michaux had far different intentions those of Jefferson. At the time, the Spanish ruled most of North America. As Michaux began travelling and arrived in

⁷ Jefferson to Andre Michaux, in *Letters of the Lewis & Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, 670.

⁸ Jefferson to Andre Michaux, 670.

⁹ Jefferson to Andre Michaux, 670

Kentucky, it was revealed that he was secretly being supported by France to raise an army to attack Spanish land beyond the Mississippi.¹⁰ By the time these plans were discovered, he was recalled by the French government and the expedition cancelled.

(Several years later, in the late 1790s, Jefferson began a bid for the Presidency after having won the Vice Presidency in 1796. He ran against incumbent president John Adams and won in what is sometimes referred to as the Revolution of 1800. By the time he took office as President, he still had his sights set on this expedition. As President, he now had Congress' ear and used this to his advantage.

Jefferson, determined as ever, turned next to Congress in January of 1803. France had taken control of Louisiana after the Spanish handed it over in 1801. After twenty years as an independent republic, however, Jefferson must have felt that it was time to explore the west. Enormous quantities of land and natural resources may have been just out of his reach. Furthermore, the trade possibilities with the natives must have been tempting to exploit. He raced to put together another expedition, but first had to turn to Congress for help.

In a secret message to Congress written on January 18, 1803, he wrote to explain the necessity of such an expedition and to ask for Congress' approval and appropriation of funds. He began by explaining the current relationship between the native tribes within his borders and the United States. "The Indian tribes residing within the limits of the U.S. have for a considerable time been growing more and more uneasy at the constant diminution of the territory they occupy, altho' effected by their own voluntary sales: and the policy has long been gaining strength with

¹⁰ Donald Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 669.

them of refusing absolutely all further sale on any conditions...”¹¹ He explained that while the natives had been selling their own land to the American government of their own free will, they had more recently become more aware of the fact that the United States was consuming more and more land, threatening their wellbeing and possibly their own existence. Thus, it has become common among the different tribes within American territory (east of the Mississippi) to withhold all of their land and cease selling to the Americans.

This could potentially cause a lot of problems for the American government. The American population was very rapidly expanding at this point. This could understandably cause problems in the future as a large population would require more land, especially given Jefferson’s desire to create a nation of farmers. Jefferson, therefore, had designed a plan. “In order peaceably to counteract this policy of theirs... two measures are deemed expedient. To encourage them to abandon hunting, to apply to the raising of stock, to agriculture and domestic manufacture, and thereby prove to themselves that less land and labour will maintain them in this, better than in their former mode of living.”¹² The first part of Jefferson’s plan was to encourage the natives to abandon hunting in favor of domestic farming. This, he argued, would make settling easier rather than foraging for food. It would also provide a more reliable source of food. Additionally, he wanted to teach and encourage the natives to begin producing their own goods which, in theory, would give them something that the Americans would be willing to trade for. It would also give them an economy comparable to most of the “civilized” world up to that point and potentially give them the ability to assimilate into American society.

¹¹ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, in *Letters of the Lewis & Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, 11.

¹² Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 11.

The second part of Jefferson's plan was "to multiply trading houses among them, and place within their reach those things which will contribute more to their domestic comfort than the possession of extensive, but uncultivated wilds."¹³ By establishing trading posts and villages, the natives would be forced to settle into individual locations. Thus, with a settled society that engaged in active agriculture, manufacturing, and trading, the natives would no longer have need for the extensive lands that they then occupied. This would theoretically make selling land to the Americans a very attractive endeavor. In this proposal Jefferson tried to explain to Congress the effectiveness of this strategy and hoped that it would help the United States build a presence on the Mississippi River just as prominent as their presence on the Atlantic coast. The funds raised from the use of this land and the relationship with the natives would be exceedingly useful for the young American republic and, as Jefferson argued, the natives that resided within American territory as well.

Even though the absorption of native land had not yet begun Jefferson eagerly turned his attentions even farther west in his letter. "The river Missouri, and the Indians inhabiting it, are not as well known as is rendered desirable by their connection with the Missisipi, and consequently with us. It is however understood that the country on that river is inhabited by numerous tribes, who furnish great supplies of furs and peltry to the trade of another nation... The commerce on that line could bear no competition with that of the Missouri..."¹⁴ In this passage, he demonstrated his interest in the Missouri River region as a gateway to additional advantages to the United States. With no first-hand knowledge, he acknowledged that he had heard of Indian nations that had furs and peltry in amounts unseen in American history. Reaching

¹³ Jefferson's Message to Congress, 11.

¹⁴ Jefferson's Message to Congress, 12.

these natives and establishing a relationship with them would be his eventual goal. Surely the Mississippi was enticing, but the Indians farther west offered even more promise in trade. Additionally, it was still possible in the minds of many Americans that the Missouri River could offer an avenue through the continent all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

Jefferson recommended that a small party to travel along the River Missouri to accomplish these goals. “An intelligent officer with ten or twelve chosen men... might explore the whole line, have conferences with the natives on the subject of commercial intercourse, get admission among them for our traders as others are admitted, agree on convenient deposits for an interchange of articles, and return with the information acquired in the course of two summers.”¹⁵ He clearly had accepted the view of Michaux by this point regarding the composition of an exploring party. However, the territory of Louisiana was still owned by France, and they would not likely approve of a foreign expedition crossing their land. Hope was expressed that whoever should lead this expedition would be able to hold council with the natives and try to open trade negotiations. As stated above, Jefferson believed that both sides would be able to benefit from a trading relationship. Thus, he felt strongly that sending an expedition to explore the west would also be to everyone’s benefit. As he puts it, “While other civilized nations have encountered great expense to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge, by undertaking voyages of discovery, and for other literary purposes, in various parts and directions, our nation seems to owe the same object, as well as to its own interest, to explore this, the only line of easy communication across the continent, and so directly traversing our own part of it.”¹⁶

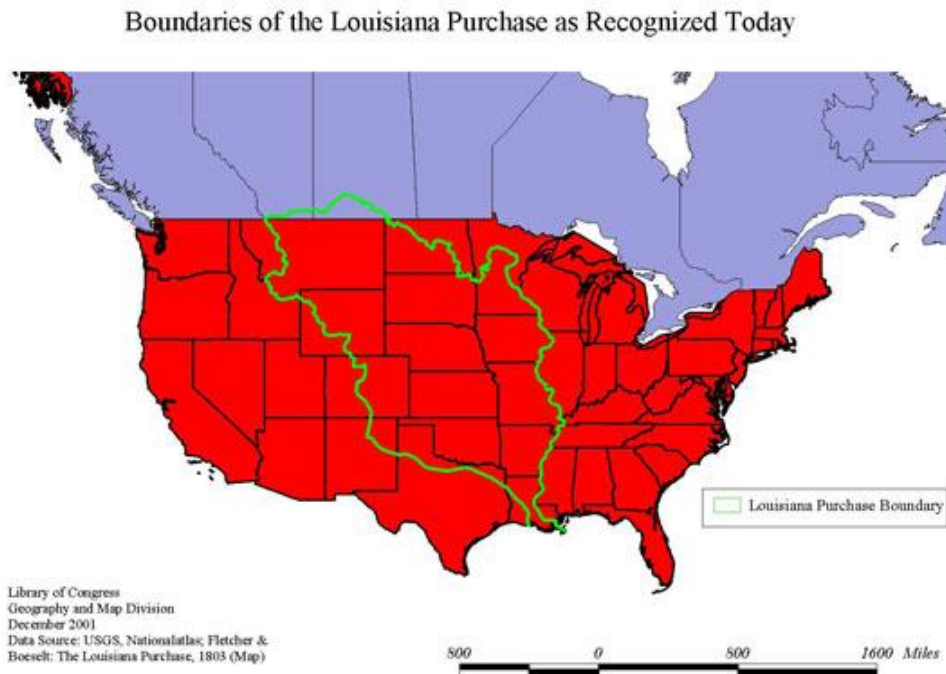
In his mind, America was falling behind. For centuries, other developed nations spent vast resources of wealth exploring the world, colonizing, and making a profit on what they took. It was now time for the United States to make a stand and do the same on what he hoped would

¹⁵ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 13.

¹⁶ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 13.

become their own territory one day. The Missouri River would be the perfect river to explore because it lead, as far as anyone knew, all the way across the continent and it would allow the expedition to encounter the natives that lived along the river. From there, negotiations could be opened and relationships formed for mutual benefit down the road. By the start of 1803, Jefferson's goal was now to engage in trade with the natives that could be found in the west.

Later in 1803, there was a very crucial development. Though the French had just received the territory of Louisiana three years earlier, they were already looking to sell the territory. On April 30, 1803, the United States purchased the territory of Louisiana for the relatively cheap price of fifteen million dollars. Thanks to this purchase, the United States now owned most of the territory that Jefferson had been hoping to explore for the past twenty years.



Many debate the purpose of the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson would have stated that he bought the land to keep foreign powers off of the continent. With an international agreement backing his claims to the Louisiana Territory, foreign powers would have to leave American land

alone. Furthermore, Jefferson now had land for the rapidly expanding American population. As he had already written in his secret message to Congress, “In order peaceably... to provide an extension of territory which the rapid increase of our numbers will call for, two measures are deemed expedient.”¹⁷ Clearly, American expansion was part of his rationale for growing the territory.

One controversial piece of literature on the topic is Robert J. Miller’s *Native America Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny*. In it, Miller talks about the legal maneuvering employed by people like Thomas Jefferson to reach an end game that favored the conquest of Native America in the future. The so called “Doctrine of Discovery” was an implicit contract – an unwritten rule – that gave certain nations rights over what to do with newly discovered lands that were already being inhabited by natives. Jenny Morsman wrote a review for Miller’s book in the *Great Plains Quarterly* scholarly journal in which she writes, “Miller himself identifies ten elements of the doctrine, by which competing European empires and eventually the United States worked out which among them had a legitimate preemptive, and exclusive claim on the future right to purchase specific lands from the Indians inhabiting them, should those Indians ever decide, or be somehow persuaded, to sell.”¹⁸ It is Miller’s opinion that Jefferson and the United States would go on to use the Louisiana Purchase as a tool to keep other European powers away from the included native territory. Their sole purpose was to lay claim to the western United States so that European powers would understand that the United States had exclusive claims to do what they pleased with the Natives. Any expedition sent out by the American government would merely act as American figureheads

¹⁷ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 11.

¹⁸ Jenny Morsman “Review of *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny*. By Robert J. Miller” *Great Plains Quarterly* 29, no 1 (January 2009) 147.

for a government intent on wreaking havoc on these savage civilizations. Whatever Jefferson's intentions were, after the purchase of the Louisiana Territory he now had the legal jurisdiction to organize an expedition to cross what was now American Territory.

His next order of business was finding a trustworthy companion who was capable of exploring the territory. Meriwether Lewis was an old family friend of Jefferson's. In 1801, Jefferson had asked Lewis to act as a personal secretary at the White House. In a letter to Lewis, Jefferson wrote, "in selecting [a private secretary] I have thought it important to respect not only his capacity to aid in the private concerns of the household, but also to contribute to the mass of information which it is interesting for the administration to acquire. Your knowledge of the Western country, of the army and of all its interests and relations has rendered it desirable for public as well as private purposes that you should be engaged in that office."¹⁹ Some historians have suggested that Jefferson was using this position to groom Lewis for a future expedition. As historian Ann Rogers writes, "Historians disagree on whether Jefferson was already considering him to lead a western expedition, but Lewis's two years at the White House and Monticello gave him a background in science, diplomacy, Indian relations, and other fields that would later serve him in carrying out the president's plans for an American reconnaissance of the Northwest."²⁰ By 1803, Lewis had the tools necessary to lead a westward expedition. Additionally, the exploration of the new territory no longer needed to be kept secret since it belonged to the United States.

Like Jefferson, Lewis also sought a reliable companion to make Jefferson's vision a reality. Lewis had spent time as an army officer in the 1790s and turned to an old friend to help with Jefferson's mission. William Clark was Lewis' superior officer for a while and the two

¹⁹ Jefferson to Lewis, in *Letters of the Lewis & Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, 2.

²⁰ Ann Rogers, *Lewis and Clark in Missouri*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 2.

became quite friendly. As with Lewis, Clark's military background would surely be a valuable asset on this journey. Jefferson agreed and a letter from Lewis was sent to Clark asking him to lead a group across North America with his old friend.²¹

On June 20, 1803 Thomas Jefferson wrote to Meriwether Lewis asking him to lead the band of men that would eventually come to be known as the Corps of Discovery. There were several goals for Lewis' mission. Some included exploring the Missouri River, reaching the Pacific Ocean, and recording latitude and longitude. Mapping the geography of the west was still an extremely vital aspect of the journey. Just as important by 1803, however, was making a good first impression with the Native Americans. Jefferson was very clear to spell out his directions to Lewis in this document.

“The commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knolege of these people important. You will therefore endeavor to make yourself acquainted, as far as a diligent pursuit of your journey shall admit, with the names of the nations & their numbers;

- the extent & limits of their possessions;
- their relations with other tribes or nations;
- their language, traditions, monuments;
- their ordinary occupations in agriculture, fishing, hunting, war, arts, & the implements for these;
- their food, clothing, & domestic accommodations;
- the diseases prevalent among them, & the remedies they use;
- moral and physical circumstance which distinguish them from the tribes they know;
- peculiarities in their laws, customs & dispositions;
- and articles of commerce they may need or furnish, & to what extent.

And considering the interest which every nation has in extending & strengthening the authority of reason & justice among the people around them, it will be useful to acquire what knolege you can of the state of morality, religion & information among them, as it may better enable those who endeavor to civilize & instruct them, to adapt their measures to the existing notions & practises of those on whom they are to operate.”²²

²¹ James Holmberg, *Into the Wilderness*, 7.

²² Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis, 62.

Jefferson had obviously placed a lot of emphasis on how important trade with the natives could be to the new American economy. His thorough instructions asked a lot of Lewis. Most importantly, the names and locations of all the tribes located on the Missouri between St. Louis and the Pacific Ocean were to be recorded. After this, the explorers were to assess the situation that the natives found themselves in. What diplomatic relationships did they have with other tribes? What goods did they have? How did they survive? Essentially Jefferson wanted to know what these people were like and what they had to offer.

Jefferson continued by writing

“In all your intercourse with the natives treat them in the most friendly & conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit; allay all jealousies as to the object of your journey, satisfy them of it's innocence, make them acquainted with the position, extent, character, peaceable & commercial dispositions of the U.S., of our wish to be neighborly, friendly & useful to them, & of our dispositions to a commercial intercourse with them; confer with them on the points most convenient as mutual emporiums, & the articles of most desirable interchange for them & us. If a few of their influential chiefs, within practicable distance, wish to visit us, arrange such a visit with them, and furnish them with authority to call on our officers, on their entering the U.S. to have them conveyed to this place at the public expense.”²³

In this passage, he urged Lewis to maintain a friendly disposition with the natives. The purpose of the expedition could easily have been confusing and potentially dangerous to the natives so Jefferson urged above all to maintain good relations with them. Furthermore, he asked Lewis to take an inventory of what they had to offer the Americans for future commercial intercourse and try to encourage them to become active in trade with the United States government emphasizing that they would always be willing to negotiate and have a friendly relationship with the newcomers. He even asked Lewis to arrange for delegations of tribal chiefs to travel back to the nation's capital to have a conference with the country's leaders.

²³ Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis, 63.

Thomas Jefferson was absolutely the party most responsible for the conquest and discovery of all that lay west of the Mississippi River. While he was obviously not part of the expedition that made the journey, it had been his vision to organize said journey since 1783 and during the subsequent 20 years. His job was made difficult, especially by the sheer logistical complications of the journey. Such a trip required funds and materials that were not necessarily readily available during the early days of the American Republic. Beyond this, foreign powers had been looking to assert their dominance in the western half of America. During the infancy of the United States, there was no chance of standing up to such imperial powers. The Louisiana Purchase, in 1803, however, truly opened the door for Jefferson's dream to become realized. With America claiming the territorial rights of Louisiana, Jefferson, Lewis, and the United States of America could finally stake their claim on the territory and explore their options out west while focusing on maintaining a stable peace among the natives and opening a lasting and successful trade with them as well.

The Wilting Olive Branch: Failed Peace

With the purchase of Louisiana in April of 1803, a plan could be drawn for a successful expedition of the western territories of the United States. Jefferson already knew that he wanted Meriwether Lewis to be the man to carry out his mission. The question remained: What needed to be done on Lewis and Clark's great conquest of the west? The purpose of any such journey had evolved in Jefferson's mind throughout the previous twenty years. Initially, the main goal was to claim as much territory as possible to keep threatening foreign empires as far away from the United States as possible. Jefferson then wanted the trip to encourage natives living in the west to abandon land that could be used for future American expansion. By 1803, the natives were feeling threatened by constant American expansion through the selling of their land – a practice that Jefferson claimed was voluntary on their part. For their own feeling of security, most tribes decided to stop selling their land to the United States. As Jefferson wrote in his Secret Message to Congress on January 18, 1803,

“The Indian tribes residing within the limits of the U.S. have for a considerable time been growing more and more uneasy at the constant diminution of the territory they occupy, altho' effected by their own voluntary sales: and the policy has long been gaining strength with them of refusing absolutely all further sale on any conditions, insomuch that, at this time, it hazards their friendship, and excites dangerous jealousies and perturbations in their minds to make any overture for the purchase of the smallest portions of their land.”²⁴

Jefferson hoped that he would be able to send unofficial ambassadors to spend time with the natives. These ambassadors would show the natives the advantages and comforts of a settled, domestic life. Being able to farm rather than hunt within the “uncultivated wilds” would render much of their land unnecessary which, they could sell at a profit for what Jefferson believed was everybody's advantage. Jefferson also hoped they could create specialized occupations such as carpentry or fur trading and trade with the Americans, once more, to everyone's advantage.

²⁴ Jefferson's Message to Congress, 11.

In the final iteration of Jefferson's vision, trade was the driving force behind the expedition. In his instructions to Merriwether Lewis, Jefferson asked the explorer

“to make yourself acquainted, as far as a diligent pursuit of your journey shall admit, with the names of the nations and their numbers;
The extent and limits of their possessions;
Their relations with other tribes of nations;
Their language, traditions, monuments;
Their ordinary occupations in agriculture, fishing, hunting, war, arts, and the implements for these;
Their food, clothing, and domestic accommodations...;
And articles of commerce they may need or furnish, and to what extent.”²⁵

As far as the American government was concerned, the natives in the west had plenty to offer them and they felt that a mutually beneficial relationship could follow. While trade was the ends that the government hoped to reach, though, peace among the natives was the means by which they intended to get there. This chapter will examine efforts to achieve this during the Lewis and Clark mission. Unfortunately for the expedition and the United States of America, Lewis and Clark ultimately failed in bringing a lasting peace between the United States and the western natives as well as a lasting peace among the different tribes that were found in the west.

When Lewis and Clark arrived in Missouri just ahead of the start of their journey, they were given a map by a former French surveyor. This map provided Lewis and Clark with the names and locations of almost every single tribe that resided along the Missouri River – the path that Lewis and Clark planned to take in an attempt to reach the Pacific Ocean.²⁶ This was, of course, crucial as a navigational tool for the explorers on their journey. It also prepared them for the tribes that they would undoubtedly encounter along the way.

As a way to break the ice and present a friendly disposition toward unfamiliar natives, Lewis and Clark tried to be as prepared as possible. Gifts were given to symbolize peace and

²⁵ Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis, 62

²⁶ Ann Rogers, *Lewis and Clark in Missouri*, 22.

well-being between the two parties. Another common practice was the recitation of speeches that Lewis and Clark had written to explain their journey's purpose and the hopeful goals of their expedition for the future. These speeches were presented in English, and the group relied on translators or an informal sign language to communicate its message to whomever they were speaking. Another part of being prepared was talking to traders from Canada and the Louisiana Territory about the different tribes that would be encountered throughout the next two years. Lewis and Clark learned a lot from different traders and often used their information to prepare for such encounters.

One of the tribes that the Corps of Discovery anxiously awaited meeting was the Teton Sioux. The Teton were located in present day South Dakota. By 1803 they had a horrific reputation among western traders for acting ruthlessly toward traders and harassing them until they were forced to surrender some of their goods. The Teton were extremely important in Jefferson's eyes though, and he made sure to emphasize their importance to Lewis and Clark as well. Historian James P. Ronda explains,

“Jefferson's general instructions emphasized intertribal peace, trade contacts, American sovereignty, and the collection of ethnological material. But he had a special interest in the Sioux. Of all the Indians east of the mountains known to whites, it was the Sioux that the president singled out for the explorers' particular attention. Jefferson's concern with the Sioux was based on his appraisal of both their military strength and their economic potential. The martial power of the Sioux nation on both sides of the Missouri was well known. Jefferson was equally sensitive to the economic possibilities and imperial rivalries present in any Sioux-American negotiations.”²⁷

This passage explains the significance that Jefferson placed on the Sioux.

With the position that the Sioux held, geographically, on the Missouri River, they inherited a great deal of wealth and power. The Mandan and Hidatsa tribes in present-day North

²⁷ James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 29.

Dakota were tribes that had a great deal of goods, mainly furs and peltry that were plentiful in northern Louisiana, that Jefferson wanted to trade with in the future. In order to get through to them, though, the Teton Sioux would have to be either subdued or negotiated peacefully with. Any sort of blockade or obstruction that the Teton put up given their military power would cripple American attempts at active trading relationship with natives farther up the Missouri. Thus, the fate of the relationship between the United States and the Mandan and Hidatsa, as far as Jefferson and the Corps knew, rested in the hands of Lewis and Clark and their interaction with the Teton.

The Corps of Discovery first encountered the Teton in late September of 1804. From their days in St. Louis, Lewis and Clark had heard about the reputation that the Teton had earned. As, historian Brad Tennant writes,

“While wintering at Camp River Dubois in 1803-1804, Lewis and Clark visited with many St. Louis merchants and fur traders who warned them that the Tetons often harassed traders and demanded heavy tolls for traveling through Teton Sioux country. In addition, while holding council with the Yankton Sioux on August 30-31, 1804, one of the Yankton chiefs warned that the Tetons would not "open their ears" to listen to Lewis and Clark. Such counsel contributed to a negative opinion of the Tetons by Lewis and Clark.”²⁸

Essentially, Lewis and Clark knew they were heading into an uphill battle before they stepped foot in the Dakotas. Additionally, after having some of their horses stolen by one of the Sioux the beginning of the meeting was already unusually tense. Furthermore, on September 25, 1804, Clark wrote in his journal, “Met in council at 12 o’clock and after smoking, agreeable to the usual custom, Capt. Lewis proceeded to deliver a speech, which we were obliged to curtail for want of a good interpreter.”²⁹ It seemed that matters were only growing worse for Lewis and

²⁸ Brad Tennant, “Reading Between the Lines,” 6.

²⁹ September 25, 1804, off Teton River [Clark] in *The Journals of Lewis and Clark: Meriwether Lewis and William Clark*, by Anthony Brandt (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Adventure Classics, 2002), 68, 69.

Clark. Not only had the Teton been portrayed as hostile and had already started off on the wrong foot by stealing materials that the expedition needed, but Lewis was not even able to communicate with them. This, of course, was one of the most important goals of the expedition – to open the means of communication with the natives that they encountered. Without being able to do so, no significant relationship could be formed, and trade most certainly could not be conducted on a consistent and lasting basis. All of these factors and Jefferson’s emphasis of good relations with the Sioux has since led Ronda to write, “With its tangle of economic, military, and imperial interests, the Teton Sioux negotiation was perhaps the most demanding piece of Indian diplomacy assigned to Lewis and Clark.”³⁰ From this point onward, communications were much smoother, native tribes were more accepting and friendly, and much more was accomplished.

Later on the same day, tensions reached a peak with the Teton. As Clark wrote,

“Invited those chiefs on board to show them our boat...We gave them _ glass of whiskey which they appeared to be very fond of...and soon began to be troublesome... I went with those chiefs in on of the pirogues with five men, three (of us) and two Indians...as soon as I landed the pirogue, three of their young men seized the cable of the pirogue (in which we had presents, etc.) The chief soldier hugged the mast and the second chief was very insolent both in words and gestures...declaring I should not go on, stating he had not received presents sufficient from us.... I felt myself compelled to draw my sword and made a signal to the boat to prepare for action. At this motion Captain Lewis ordered all under arms in the boat. Those with me also showed a disposition to defend themselves and me. The grand chief then took hold of the rope and ordered the young warriors away. I felt myself warm and spoke in very positive terms.”

This was one of the most anxious moments of the entire campaign that Lewis and Clark experienced. After exchanging gifts and attempting further accommodations for the Teton chiefs, a sort of drunken brawl nearly ensued. Clark believed the guilty chief of feigning his drunkenness, but it did not matter. This was a moment in which the Corps truly demonstrated that they were out of their depth. While Lewis spent years as Jefferson’s secretary, there was no

³⁰ James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians*, 30.

amount of training that he had received in either Indian Relations or formal diplomacy that had properly prepared him for this situation. Luckily, he and Clark were able to relieve some of the pressure of this situation. When the surrounding Teton, eager to defend their chiefs and perhaps take further advantage of Lewis and Clark lowered their weapons, the boat was taken farther downriver by the expedition's members. While this encounter was one of the most dangerous throughout the two years that Lewis and Clark were in the west, it would not be the last encounter that demonstrated the lack of depth that the two explorers possessed in this arena and it would not be the last interaction that failed to end itself peacefully.

The most violent encounter that the expedition faced did not happen until the return trip on the way back from Fort Clatsop. In July of 1806, Lewis and Clark had split up. Clark explored the Yellowstone River, and Lewis went to explore the Great Falls of the Missouri River. Lewis encountered a group of Blackfeet Indians on July 26.

“He dreaded the fierce Blackfeet, who dominated the upper Missouri, just as the Sioux controlled the lower. Convinced that the Piegan (of whom the Blackfeet were a part of) would rob him and his men, he was ready to defend the party's property with his life. He also tried to forestall any anticipated theft by giving a speech urging the Piegan to make peace with their neighbors and to trade at a soon-to-be-established post on the Missouri.”³¹

This meeting had much of the same build up that the encounter with the Teton had. Only this one was entirely unplanned. Lewis and Clark expected that the Blackfeet, much like the Teton, were going to be a dangerous tribe that would not take a liking to the explorers. He knew that given the opportunity, they would take advantage of the Americans leaving them without supplies and transportation in a desolate, deserted land.

While Lewis gave his speech which promised trade, prosperity, and peace, the Blackfeet had other ideas in mind. Lewis wrote in his journal on July 27, 1806,

³¹ Gunther Barth, *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from the Journals Arranged by Topic*, (Boston: Bedford, 1998), 178.

“This morning at daylight the Indians got up and crowded around the fire, J. Fields who was on post had carelessly laid his gun down behind him near where his brother was sleeping, one of the Indians the fellow to whom I had given the medal last evening slipped behind him and took his gun and that of his brother unperceived by him, at the same instant two others advanced and seized the guns of Drewyer and myself... R. Fields as he seized his gun stabbed the Indian to the heart with his knife the fellow ran about 15 steps and fell dead; of this I did not know until afterwards, having recovered their guns they ran back instantly to the camp... I then drew my pistol from my holster and turning myself about saw the Indian making off with my gun I ran at him with my pistol and bid him lay down my gun... I pursued the man who had taken my gun who with another was driving off a part of the horses which were to the left of the camp... I called to them as I had done several times before that I would shoot them if they did not give me my horse and raised my gun, one of them jumped behind a rock and spoke to the other who turned around and stopped at the distance of 30 steps from me and I shot him through the belly.”³²

This scuffle was the only incident in which blood was spilt during the whole of the campaign. It had very far reaching implications though. It showed that many of the native tribes of the west would continue to be hostile toward any settlers or even explorers until and unless they found they could get something out of these people encroaching on their territory. It can also be used as evidence that the speeches that Lewis and Clark gave had very little effect on those that they were addressed to. This is important to note because one could question the effectiveness of the expedition as a whole if the speeches that the explorers gave were never listened to. If the explorers could not convince the natives to act peacefully toward each other in the days and months following a council, how could they hope to have any lasting effect on native policy or diplomacy?

One speech that has survived the Lewis and Clark expedition was one that Clark gave to natives who lived on the Yellowstone River, referred to as the Yellowstone Indians or the Crow Indians. Likely, this speech was a template for others throughout the journey. Giving these speeches must have been a rather awkward encounter. These white settlers would have shown up and had to explain to natives who were living in America for hundreds of years that they were

³² July 27th 1806. Sunday in *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from the Journals Arranged by Topic*, by Gunther Barth (Boston: Bedford, 1998), 182, 183.

now under foreign control without even having been a part of any sort of negotiations or receiving any compensation for their land. All they were going to receive were small trinkets as gifts from Washington and more requests from Lewis and Clark on how to behave in the future. In this one undated speech, Clark refers to natives as children (often red children) and calls the president of the United States “the chief of all white people” or “Your Great Father”. Some historians have argued that Lewis and Clark did not really treat natives as equals but rather as savages (as they are referred to in the journals of Lewis and Clark). This sort of language could be used as an argument for that since the language is quite patronizing, and any native who picked up on that would be less inclined to act benevolently toward the United States. In one excerpt from this speech, Clark said,

“Children Your Great father the Chief of all the white people has derected me [to] inform his red children to be at peace with each other, and with the quite people who may come into your country under the protection of the Flag of your great father which you those people who may visit you under the protection of that flag are good people and will do you no harm.”³³

In this passage, Clark asks for the natives to be peaceful with each other and with any American settlers that may come into their territory. Clark says that any American trying to enter their lands are good and noble people who will do nothing to harm them. Clark may have been candid and sincere when drawing this conclusion, but if that was indeed the case, one would be forgiven for calling him naïve. If he knew better, then his lies are an attack on the trust that the natives placed in him.

There was yet a third implication of the Blackfeet encounter. Namely, the scuffle “has been attributed to the long-continued hostility of the Blackfeet to the whites.”³⁴ Anything that

³³ Clark’s Exploration: Speech Prepared for the Yellowstone Indians in *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from the Journals Arranged by Topic*, 129.

³⁴ July 27th 1806. Sunday, 182.

would cause hostility and violence down the road was a direct violation of Jefferson's wishes. The idea that this could have led to trouble in the future is certainly a failure on the part of Lewis and Clark to complete their mission peacefully regardless of whether or not they had control of the situation.

Lewis and Clark were not entirely alone in their shortcomings to create peace. Thomas Jefferson also became heavily involved in the diplomatic process during the expedition's journeys. Throughout the expedition's travels, the Corps of Discovery often asked the tribes they encountered to send delegates to Washington to meet with Jefferson. This was most likely an attempt to foster better relations for trade and peace by speaking with the man who really wielded all the power. In a message to one Indian delegation on January 4, 1806, during the expedition's journey, Jefferson spoke about the recent history of the Louisiana Territory and about some of his goals for the future.

"We are become as numerous as the leaves of the trees, and, tho' we do not boast, we do not fear any nation. We are now your fathers; and you shall not lose by the change. As soon as Spain had agreed to withdraw from all the waters of the Missouri & Mississippi, I felt the desire of becoming acquainted with all my red children beyond the Missipi, and of uniting them with us, as we have done those on this side of that river in the bonds of peace & friendship."³⁵

Jefferson encouraged the natives that they were better off under American subjugation. The American people, in his mind, were strong and prosperous and he believed that the natives could find the same kind of results if they could only find peace.

Here Jefferson expressed his hopes to be united in "peace and friendship" with all of the natives. Again, it is hard to discern Jefferson's true intentions in instances like this. He would later go on to say

³⁵ Jefferson to the Indian Delegation in *Letters of the Lewis & Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, 281.

“If you will cease to make war on one another, if you will live in friendship with all mankind, you can employ all your time in providing food & clothing for yourselves and your families... I have given this advice to all your red brethren on this side of the Missipi, they are following it, they are increasing in the numbers, are learning to cloth & provide for their families... we live in peace with all nations; and all nations esteem & honour us because we are peaceable & just.”³⁶

Here Jefferson essentially promised that any problems the natives face would go away if only they could learn to stop fighting with each other. After peace was reached, they could provide more than they could have ever needed. He says that the natives east of the Mississippi have already found peace and are modernizing and assimilating at a very fast rate becoming robust and strong along the way. Most of this is hearsay. Jefferson believed that peace was the only way to get what he really wanted from the natives giving them false promises of progress and wealth if they could get along.

The natives, of course, wished to trade with the United States and among each other.

Later on the same day, January 4, 1806, they made a rebuttal to Jefferson’s speech.

“You tell us to be in peace & amity with our Brethren: we wish to be So: Misunderstanding sometimes breaks peace & amity, because we listen too much to those men who live yet amongst us & who do not belong to your family, but when we will have but your own Children with us, then it will be easy for you to maintain the peace of your red children & we will all acknowledge that we have good fathers.”³⁷

The natives do express their desire to live peacefully. They know that they could probably benefit from the conclusion of constant warfare. Additionally, they most likely felt that they could use American trade to their advantage and that the best way to kick start this trade was to be at peace with one another and with any white settlers. They do go on to refute some of what Jefferson has said though.

“Meditate what you say, you tell us that your children of this side of the Mississippi hear your Word, you are mistaken, since every day they rise their tomahawks over our heads, but we

³⁶ Jefferson to the Indian Delegation, 282.

³⁷ Indian Speech to Jefferson and the Secretary of War in *Letters of the Lewis & Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, 285.

believe it be contrary to your orders & inclination, & that, before long, should they be deaf to your voice, you will chastise them.”³⁸

The delegation contradicts all that Jefferson says. While he argued that Americans came in peace and had no intentions of doing harm to the natives, much like William Clark would later argue to the Yellowstone Indians, this delegation is aware of different actions that settlers are taking. While they admit that Jefferson also wants peace, he needs to do a better job of communicating that to his own people.

I hope by this point that it has become evident that the efforts of Lewis and Clark to create peace between settlers and natives had failed. This was not the only attempt at peacekeeping though. The expedition also tried to create peace between different tribes. Perhaps the most relevant example was in the late fall of 1804. The Corps of Discovery were in present-day North Dakota en route to meet the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes. “One part of their mission was to divert Indian trade to St. Louis and its American traders. One key to that, from the American point of view, was to rearrange Indian alliances on the upper Missouri to isolate the troublesome Sioux and force them to stop blockading the river and allow the St. Louis traders free access to the Mandan villages and beyond.”³⁹ In the minds of Jefferson and the explorers, the Teton Sioux were a nuisance to the United States and to every single other tribe along the Missouri. With the Sioux removed, the Americans believed that they would be able to conduct trade with the upper Missouri tribes. They also believed that it would lead to peace and stability in the region.

To help realize this vision, they brought a chief of the Arikara tribe with them to meet with the Mandan and Hidatsa. The Arikara was a tribe along the Missouri that Lewis and Clark

³⁸ Indian Speech to Jefferson and the Secretary of War, 285, 286.

³⁹ Anthony Brandt, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 104.

considered to be under the control of the Teton. The explorers believed that if they could negotiate a truce between the Arikara and the Mandan, the Teton would lose one of their most powerful allies and be cut off from any native alliances. On October 29, 1804, Clark wrote in his journal “We at the end of the speech mentioned the Arikara who accompanied us to make a firm peace. They all smoked with him... In council we presented him with a certificate of his sincerity and good conduct, etc.”⁴⁰ Clark believed that this meeting was essentially a formal truce that would end any hostilities between the Arikara and the Mandan. Once again, he failed to truly understand what was happening and the effects that this would have in the future.

As Anthony Brandt writes,

“The Arikara were thought to be subject to the Sioux, prisoners of Sioux policies; if the Arikara could be brought into the orbit of the Mandan it would tend to break the stranglehold the Sioux had on travel up the river. But in fact the Sioux-Arikara were, like the Mandan, a sedentary agricultural people who raised corn and horses. They traded these with the Sioux for goods such as guns and ammunition, which the Sioux had received for furs traded to the British companies in Canada. It was common for the Arikara and Sioux braves to go on warring raids together. Even if the Sioux appeared to be dominant, the two tribes were allies and needed each other.”⁴¹

Here Brandt demonstrates that Lewis and Clark did not know the true extent of the Arikara’s intentions. While they believed that they could somehow sway the Arikara to engage in an ironclad truce with the Mandan, they did not realize how important the Teton were to the Arikara. The complexities of native policy went way over their heads, and it is no surprise that this truce did not last as long as it took for the expedition to reach the Pacific and travel back to the Mandan villages in 1806. Clark wrote in his journal upon revisiting the Mandan villages. On August 15, 1806, his journal reads,

“when he Saw us last we told him that we had made peace with all the nations below, Since that time the Seioux had killed 8 of their people and Stole a number of their horses. He said that he

⁴⁰ October 29, 1804, Monday [Clark] in *The Journals of Lewis and Clark: Meriwether Lewis and William Clark*, 95.

⁴¹ Brandt, 104.

had opened his ears and followed our Councils, he had made peace with the Chyennes and rocky Mountains Indians, and repieted the same objections as mentioned. That he went to war against none and was willing to receive all nations as friends. He Said that the Ricaras had Stolen from his people a number of horses at different times and his people had killed 2 Ricaras.”⁴²

The truce that Lewis and Clark had supervised almost two years before had fallen to pieces. The Arikara chief that the expedition brought to Fort Mandan in the fall of 1804 clearly had no interest in keeping his end of the bargain. The Mandan chiefs had told Clark about how the Arikara had stolen horses and goods and how violence had erupted between the two tribes over the course of the last two years.

It must have been incredibly frustrating for Lewis and Clark to watch their hard work be torn to shreds by natives who had no motivation to keep peace. It was probably impossible for the explorers to understand. In their minds, peace had innumerable advantages and would allow them to trade, farm, live without fear, and put them on good terms with the Americans. The Mandan chiefs were too afraid to even travel down the Missouri for fear of what would happen when they approached Sioux territory.

Anthony Brandt offers his own reasoning to explain the rampant violence that occurred in the Louisiana Territory among the native populations. He writes,

“Among the Shoshones as well as all the Indians of America, bravery is esteemed the primary virtue, nor can anyone become eminent among them who has not at some period of his life given proofs of his possessing this virtue. With them there can be no preferment without some warlike achievement.”⁴³

This is a very powerful statement that the author makes. It essentially indicates that the most glorious achievements and the greatest showings of dignity and integrity can only be provided through warfare. By the early 1800s, it was an integral part of native culture. Without

⁴² Thursday August 15th 1806 in *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from the Journals Arranged by Topic*, 153.

⁴³ Anthony Brandt, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 256.

war, the native society would be broken. For this reason, along with many others, Lewis and Clark were doomed from the start. They could never hope to change centuries of culture and history through a handful of meetings, speeches, and empty promises.

The Expedition of Lewis and Clark may have been an overall success, but the truth is that the two explorers failed to bring peace to the natives as Jefferson would have wished. There were several instances throughout their journey where they were involved in violence themselves. This includes the famous Teton confrontation and the attack of the Blackfeet. Thomas Jefferson, himself, tried to bring peace to the situation, but as Indian delegates pointed out to him and the Secretary of War, there was plenty of fighting in the west between different tribes because of their misunderstanding. Furthermore, there was even conflict between settlers and natives despite the fact that both Jefferson and the explorers argued that all white men came in peace under the flag of the United States. Finally, Lewis and Clark failed to create any sort of lasting or legitimate peace when it came to intertribal warfare. The most blatant example of this was the violence between the Arikara-Sioux alliance and the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes. Even though the expedition had supposedly negotiated a peace that would end Arikara hostilities, thievery and killings still pursued only a year and a half later. In a sense, Lewis and Clark were doomed from the start. Lewis' training could never have prepared him to handle the intricacies of Indian diplomacy. He was clearly out of his depth during most interactions and the language and cultural barrier never helped matters. Jefferson would have been naïve to think that the Corps of Discovery could have accomplished this goal and established a viable and reliant series of peace treaties across the western United States. Furthermore, the warlike culture of the natives would take many more years to end. Particularly at a point in time when a new, expanding world power was stretching itself onto their lands, the natives were not about to lay down their arms. Given

the obstacles they had to overcome, it is amazing that the explorers accomplished as much as they did, but the creation of peace and mutual agreement between tribes or between the natives and the American government is not an achievement that can be added to that list.

Pleasant Exchange: The Beginning of Trade

Jefferson and the Corps of Discovery had always wanted to maintain peaceful relationships with the natives. While they ultimately failed in achieving that goal, it was one of the primary concerns of the expedition's journey. The other main concern of Jefferson and the explorers was creating a trade network between the United States and the natives that would bring prosperity to both parties. This became one of Jefferson's main arguments to Congress for sponsoring the expedition and it became one of his obsessions once in office. Jefferson was fixated on building a sustained, lucrative, and profitable trade with the natives. It also became the primary focus of the Lewis and Clark expedition and the focus of a lot of interaction between the United States and Native Americans in future decades.

Jefferson wrote in his secret message to Congress,

“[We must] multiply trading houses among them, and place within their reach those things which will contribute more to their domestic comfort than the possession of extensive, but uncultivated wilds... In leading them thus to agriculture, to manufactures and civilization, in bringing together their and our settlements, and in preparing them ultimately to participate in the benefits of our government (explain), I trust and believe we are acting for the greatest good.”⁴⁴

Jefferson explained that trade could be used as a means to try to convince the natives to let go of the land that they controlled. By 1803, the tribes east of the Mississippi were beginning the practice of refusing to sell their land to the United States. So much had already been purchased from them that they felt threatened by American presence and the power that may have come with that.⁴⁵ That was, at least, Jefferson's opinion. He believed that the natives would be more inclined to sell their land to the United States if they no longer had a need for it. First he proposed an agricultural lifestyle which would eliminate the need for extensive hunting lands. Second, he advocated the genesis of a trading relationship. As he said, “Experience and reflection will develop to them the wisdom of exchanging what they can spare and we want, for

⁴⁴ Jefferson's Message to Congress, 11.

⁴⁵ Jefferson's Message to Congress, 11.

what we can spare and they want.”⁴⁶ He hoped that by beginning to trade, both sides would be able to benefit materially from what each would bring to the table. In the case of the natives, they would be able to supply furs, and the American traders could provide an assortment of other goods from guns to metals and trinkets for which the natives would want to trade. This would eliminate their need for raw goods for which they needed their land. Instead, they could just trade for what they wanted. He stated that he wanted the natives to “participate in the benefits of our government.”⁴⁷ Essentially he recognized the wealth of the United States compared to the meager economies of the natives and he knew that they would be able to benefit from the influx of goods that they would receive from a defined trading relationship.

Of course, with the reluctance of the natives to sell land, it can be assumed that there was plenty of tension between the two parties at the start of the nineteenth century. This was an obstacle that Jefferson hoped could be overcome with the beginning of some sort of communication with the natives during an expedition. Perhaps an expedition or a delegation could bring the natives and the Americans to find common ground rather than inflicting policies aimed at weakening each other, but the natives had plenty of other options when it came to trading partners. The most notable option was the French fur traders operating out of Canada. They had been engaging in trade with the natives since the middle of the seventeenth century. This relationship had been present much longer than the American Republic had even existed.

Additionally, British and private American traders offered competition to the American government. This was probably Jefferson’s biggest obstacle to overcome. Not only were relations tense between the American government and the natives, but when there were other lucrative and friendly parties with which to trade, the American government was not particularly

⁴⁶ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 11.

⁴⁷ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 11.

appealing to most tribes. Jefferson had a plan to overcome this adversity. As he suggested to Congress, “We consequently undersell private traders, foreign and domestic, drive them from the competition, and thus, with the good will of the Indians, rid ourselves of a description of men who are constantly endeavoring to excite in the Indian mind suspicions, fears and irritations towards us.”⁴⁸ He expressed hope that a public trade could be set up with the Indian nations of the Missouri Valley. Public traders would travel to trading posts that could be set up by Jefferson’s planned expedition. Here they would attempt to sell their goods and slash their prices to attract attention and business. Jefferson hoped that this would eventually drive out any competition from both foreign and domestic traders. After getting rid of the competition, he hoped that both parties would be able to engage in an open dialogue and restore friendlier relations. He expressed awareness that there were parties trying to stir up anxiety of the American government. These foreign traders or even foreign governments would be able to benefit from conflict between the natives and the United States. Not only would the United States be a weakened nation, but the nations could have even profited by selling firearms to the natives in the event of a conflict between the two sides. By eliminating these parties from competition, he hoped that he could put an end to this anxiety and prove to the natives that the American government intended to operate in the best interests of both themselves and their trading partners.

After making this point, Jefferson wrote about the fact that the Missouri River and its inhabitants were not very well known by the Americans. As he wrote, “The river Missouri, and the Indians inhabiting it, are not as well known as is rendered desirable by the connection with

⁴⁸ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 11

the Mississippi, and consequently with us.”⁴⁹ While noting the desire to explore this territory, he also noted an advantage that the Americans would have in the fur trade over the other traders with which they were in competition.

“It is however understood that the country on that river is inhabited by numerous tribes, who furnish great supplies of furs and peltry to the trade of another nation carried on in a high latitude through an infinite number of portages and lakes, shut up by ice through a long season. The commerce on that line could bear no competition with that of the Missouri, traversing a moderate climate, offering according to the best accounts a continued navigation from its source, and, possibly with a single portage, from the Western ocean, and finding to the Atlantic a choice of channels...”⁵⁰

In 1803, the natives had plenty of furs to trade, and they spent most of their time and energy trading to the French and British fur traders in Canada. While this was certainly easier to carry out in the warm summer months than transporting materials to the United States farther downriver, it was considerably more difficult in the winter and early spring. The waterways which connected the natives to the Canadian traders froze seasonally making trade very difficult for part of the year. The American economy, seen from this perspective, was an alternative to native tribes. They were able to transport their goods following the Missouri and flowing straight into the Mississippi reaching American territory without ever having to encounter land. From here, they could even have continued onto the Atlantic Ocean and conducted business elsewhere. It was at this point, that Jefferson suggested to Congress that a small band of explorers may be assembled to embark on this journey and bring peace and prosperity across the American continent.

In 1803, when the French Empire decided to sell the territory of Louisiana to the United States of America, Jefferson had the legal jurisdiction to justify an exploration across what would now become part of the American territory. His subsequent list of instructions to Lewis

⁴⁹ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 12.

⁵⁰ Jefferson’s Message to Congress, 12.

detailing the duties he was meant to perform on this expedition focused on the possibility of trade. He wrote,

“The commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue, renders a knowledge of those people important. You will therefore endeavor to make yourself acquainted, as far as a diligent pursuit of your journey shall admit, with the names of the nations and their numbers;
the extent of their possessions;
their relations with other tribes of nations;
their language, traditions, monuments;
their ordinary occupations in agriculture, fishing, hunting, war, arts, and implements for these;
their food, clothing, and domestic accommodations... and articles of commerce they may need or furnish, and to what extent.”⁵¹

He knew that in order to successfully trade with the natives, he first needed to become knowledgeable about the different tribes in the west. In order to do so, Jefferson asked Lewis to learn their names, locations, and populations. Furthermore, he asked if Lewis could make note of the possessions that the natives had. This became important further in the future as the United States determined what the natives needed that could be supplied to them and also what the natives had with which the Americans could be supplied. Jefferson also made other requests for information out of Lewis and the Corps of Discovery along the lines of clothing, occupations, and other matters of demographics before asking again for the goods that these tribes had for which they could trade.

The role of Lewis and Clark in instigating some sort of trade was a curious one. They were not directly trading with the natives for anything more than what they needed to cross the continent. Instead their job was mainly to begin a relationship that would eventually foster into a lasting trade affiliation. They were important though because their interactions with the natives would set the standard for American interaction.

⁵¹ Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis, 62.

One of the main tribes that Jefferson was interested in trading with was the joint Mandan and Hidatsa villages in present-day North Dakota. As historian James P. Ronda states,

“The Mandan and Hidatsa villages have been aptly described as ‘the central market place of the Northern Plains...’ Forming the upper exchange center in the Missouri Trade System, the Mandan and Hidatsa villagers served as brokers in an international economic and cultural trade network that faced in three directions and stretched over thousands of miles.”⁵²

The Mandan and Hidatsa had been at the center of North American trade for nearly a century when Lewis and Clark embarked on their journey. They possessed goods from all over the world. This included Spanish horses, French furs from Canada, and English guns, which were used to keep the Mandan and Hidatsa safe and secure from their enemies.

Jefferson believed that the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes were two of the most important native tribes for the expedition to visit. To make it that far up the river, however, Lewis and Clark had to navigate through other native territories along the Missouri. The most notable encounter happened with the Teton Sioux. The Teton Sioux were a tribe located in present-day South Dakota and they held a lot of influence in the Louisiana Territory.

“Jefferson's general instructions emphasized intertribal peace, trade contacts, American sovereignty, and the collection of ethnological material. But he had a special interest in the Sioux. Of all the Indians east of the mountains known to whites, it was the Sioux that the president singled out for the explorers' particular attention. Jefferson's concern with the Sioux was based on his appraisal of both their military strength and their economic potential. The martial power of the Sioux nation on both sides of the Missouri was well known. Jefferson was equally sensitive to the economic possibilities and imperial rivalries present in any Sioux-American negotiations.”⁵³

As pointed out in this passage and in Chapter 2, the Sioux were very powerful, and they had a reputation for imposing their power upon unsuspecting traders passing from the Mandan villages toward the United States. Surely they had some goods that were worthy of trading for, but the

⁵² Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians*, 75.

⁵³ Ronda, 29.

crown jewel of trade lay farther north. Unfortunately, the only way to reach the Mandan and Hidatsa was to go through the Sioux territory.

The meeting with the Teton nearly ended in bloodshed. To try and improve matters, Lewis and Clark tried to summon the help of an Arikara chief. The Arikara were another native tribe who resided on the Missouri River and they were aligned with the Teton Sioux. Lewis and Clark were under the impression that the Arikara were almost subjects of the Teton and believed that if a peace could be negotiated between this chief and the Mandan then the Teton would be cut off from any native support and the Missouri River would be able to blossom into a trade highway. As Ronda writes,

“The Arikara were thought to be subject to the Sioux, prisoners of Sioux policies; if the Arikara could be brought into the orbit of the Mandan it would tend to break the stranglehold the Sioux had on travel up the river. But in fact the Sioux-Arikara were, like the Mandan, a sedentary agricultural people who raised corn and horses. They traded these with the Sioux for goods such as guns and ammunition, which the Sioux had received for furs traded to the British companies in Canada. It was common for the Arikara and Sioux braves to go on warring raids together. Even if the Sioux appeared to be dominant, the two tribes were allies and needed each other.”⁵⁴

Clearly, Lewis and Clark did not understand the relationship of the Arikara correctly. The peace that Lewis and Clark hoped to create would never last.

On October 29, 1804, the explorers held a council with several Mandan chiefs. Here, like at many other councils that Lewis and Clark held, they gave a speech. The goals of these speeches were usually the same across the board and included the Lewis or Clark explaining that the United States now owned whatever territory the natives possessed, the explorers trying to create peace between the natives and the United States of America, and their attempt to try to convince the natives that trade between the two parties would be beneficial to both. In a speech that Clark wrote for the Yellowstone Indians he said,

⁵⁴ Brandt, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 104.

“The object of my coming to see you is not to do you injury but to do you good. The Great Chief of all the white people who has more goods at his command than could be piled up in the circle of your camp, wishing that all his red children should be happy, has sent me here to know your wants that he may supply them. . . . Your great father the Chief of the white people intends to build a house and fill it with such things as you may want and exchange with you for your skins & furs at a very low price . . . & has directed me to enquire of you, at what place would be most convenient for to build this house, and what articles you are in want of that he might send them immediately on my return.”⁵⁵

Clark first attempted to explain that he and Lewis were merely attempting to do themselves and the natives a favor through the success of their expedition. The main focus of the journey and of this speech in particular was to try to open up trade. In order to do so, Clark first demonstrated the great wealth of the United States by talking about the amount of goods that the president possessed. They then elaborated on their desire to build trading posts and villages in order to do business. Hoping to convince the natives that the trade would be worthwhile for both parties, Clark stated that any trade would be done at low prices and asked what goods the natives had that they would be willing to trade.

That speech was never actually given but its sentiments were echoed across the two year span that Lewis and Clark spent on the western frontier. After speaking at the Mandan villages, Clark invited the Arikara chief, which they had brought in an attempt to create peace, to smoke and consult with the Mandan and Hidatsa. “We at the end of the speech mentioned the Arikara who accompanied us to make a firm peace. They all smoked with him. . . . In council we presented him with a certificate of his sincerity and good conduct, etc.”⁵⁶ The explorers were almost certainly very excited about this “firm peace”. Unfortunately for them, this truce did not even last until the end of the expedition. On the return journey, Lewis and Clark revisited the Mandan

⁵⁵ Clark’s Exploration: Speech Prepared for the Yellowstone Indians in *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from the Journals Arranged by Topic*, 129.

⁵⁶ October 29, 1804, Monday [Clark] in *The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from the Journals Arranged by Topic*, 95.

and learned of more violence that took place between them and the Arikara, as discussed in Chapter 2.

While Lewis and Clark were not sent as Jefferson to be traders themselves, there were instances in which they engaged in trade. They did frequently exchange goods with natives in order to eat or to receive fresh horses to continue their journey. Some of the most remarkable cases took place when the two explorers acted as physicians. The native populations had been greatly reduced thanks to diseases brought over by Europeans but even common infections caused some native tribes to seek help from Lewis and Clark. Barth wrote, “In most cases the captains treated the sick Native Americans even handedly. In special circumstances, however, they did not hesitate to use the power their remedies gave them in a somewhat diplomatic way to obtain canoes, horses, or food.”⁵⁷ Lewis and Clark often performed medical practices or distributed medicines to sick natives without expecting anything in return. On occasion, however, they would certainly use their influence from curing a chief or handing out advice to barter for goods.

As the expedition visited the Nez Perce tribe on their return trip, the influence of Lewis and Clark as physicians became evident. As Ronda wrote, “Hope that ties to the Americans might bring a steady supply of trade goods, especially guns and ammunition, and some lessening of tensions with plains raiders clearly shaped the Indians’ behavior. Only slightly less important for expedition – Nez Perce relations were the medical services Clark provided to countless Indian men, women, and children.”⁵⁸ Of course the foremost concern in the eyes of the Nez Perce and most native tribes was the economic impact that the United States might have had down the road. Nearly just as important to these people, however, was the treatment that they

⁵⁷ Barth, 159.

⁵⁸ Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians*, 230.

received then and there from the explorers. Thanks to the expertise that Lewis and Clark offered the Nez Perce and many other tribes, the proposition of an extensive relationship with the American government became more appealing.

Another request that Jefferson had made of the explorers was that of sending native delegates to the United States for negotiations. During their second visit to the Mandan and Hidatsa communities Lewis and Clark tried to send delegates back to Washington to have discussions with Jefferson. This was a common practice throughout the journey as Jefferson had asked the explorers to set up as many meetings as possible. On January 4, 1806, one of these delegations met with the president and the secretary of war. Jefferson spoke first and said in his speech,

“As soon as Spain had agreed to withdraw from all the waters of the Missouri and Mississippi... I wished to learn what we could do to benefit [the red children] by furnishing them the necessaries they want in exchange for their furs and peltries... When [Lewis] returns he will tell us where we should establish factories to be convenient to you all, and what we must send to them. In establishing a trade with you we desire to make no profit. We shall ask from you only what every thing costs us, and give you for your furs and pelts whatever we can get for them again. Be assured you shall find your advantage in this change of your friends.”⁵⁹

Here Jefferson explained his intentions to do right by the United States and by the Indian nations “by furnishing them the necessaries they want in exchange for their furs and peltries.” Jefferson revealed he was the one who sent Lewis on a mission to gather as much information as possible about these people so that bonds could be established and trade could be commenced. He expressed hope that Lewis would return with a wealth of knowledge and be able to tell him what goods were in supply and demand along the entirety of the Missouri River. Immediately after, Jefferson attempted to convince the natives that he intended to operate in everyone’s best interest and sell at low prices rather than holding the natives hostage to their own economic strength.

⁵⁹ Jefferson to the Indian Delegation, 281.

The delegates replied shortly afterward. “We believe that you wish to pity us and to prevent our wants by sending us supplies of goods, but look sharp and tell to your men to take not too much fur for a little of goods, should they act in that way we would not be better off than we are now with our actual traders.”⁶⁰ It is here that the natives wished to express their interest in trading as well. They wanted to reiterate Jefferson’s sentiments, however, and make sure that they would not be exploited by the United States. Any situation that ended like that would make life just as difficult for the natives as it had been since the Europeans arrived.

It seemed as though both sides were open to the possibility of trade, and in 1808 Jefferson wrote a letter to Meriwether Lewis. In it he explained his hope for the genesis of trade between the two sides. As he wrote,

“A powerful company is at length forming for taking up the Indian commerce on a large scale. They will employ capital the first year of 300,000 [dollars] and raise it afterwards to a million. The English Mackinac company will probably withdraw from the competition... Nothing but the exclusive possession of the Indian commerce can secure us their peace.”⁶¹

Here Jefferson explained the creation of a new company that would engage in trade with the natives. He hoped that by giving it the proper funds, it would be able to destroy any foreign competition. This was absolutely vital, in Jefferson’s mind, to America’s success. As he stated himself, “Nothing but the exclusive possession of the Indian commerce can secure us their peace.”⁶² This indicated that without exclusive commerce between the United States and the natives, peace would never be able to thrive on the North American continent.

This company that he mentioned was the American Fur Company. The American Fur Company was eventually founded in 1808 by a man named John Jacob Astor. Its purpose was to

⁶⁰ Indian Speech to Jefferson and the Secretary of War, 285.

⁶¹ Jefferson to Lewis, in *Letters of the Lewis & Clark Expedition with Related Documents 1783-1854*, 444,445.

⁶² Jefferson to Lewis, 445.

create a strong trade with the natives and drive out foreign competition strengthening the United States' hold on its land, assets, and native relationships. While trade was hampered by the War of 1812, the Americans greatly benefited through the peace treaty signed in Ghent in 1814 since provisions in earlier treaties that allowed Canadian traders to work in the United States were not repeated in the new treaty. Congress quickly took advantage of this fact and passed laws forbidding foreign citizens from participating in the fur trade.

Conditions made in previous treaties were not renewed by the Treaty of Ghent, and Congress took quick action. Within a number of years, the trade taking place with natives in Upper Louisiana was conducted almost exclusively with American parties.

From that point forward, the American Fur Company had little trouble fending off competition. Swagerty noted,

“American Fur Company officials gave no quarter to opponents – Red or White. They undercut White competition by inflating prices for furs, absorbing short-term losses in the interest of long-term stability and monopoly... Until the mid-1830s, American Fur Company management pursued mergers, price wars, and buyouts with other competitors... The American Fur Company also installed new modes of efficiency such as an elaborate credit system and more reliable order and delivery systems for furs and trade goods. Transportation innovations included the use of steamboats up the Missouri as far as Fort Union by 1832. The age of steam enabled rapid delivery to post sutlers and Indian traders.”⁶³

The American Fur Company acted ruthlessly toward its competition. It used its fiscal resources to slash its prices and eliminate other trading companies in the area. Inevitably most of these companies would be swallowed by the Company and later act as subsidiaries. Along with the cheap costs associated with the American Fur Company, it was also one of the most efficient traders in its day. The improvements made in transportation allowed for goods to flow quickly from American factories to native hands far quicker than ever before. The Missouri River

⁶³ William R. Swagerty, “Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West to 1870,” *Handbook of North American Indians*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), 369.

became the trade highway that Jefferson had always envisioned. The Company itself also made many innovations such as credit systems that made trade easier and more lucrative.

With the evidence provided, it is quite clear that trade between the United States and the natives became a very strong enterprise in the early 19th century. Jefferson, Lewis, and Clark were responsible for this development. Since the turn of the century, Jefferson had made native trade one of his main priorities. Once the territory of Louisiana was purchased he rushed to put an expedition together in order to realize his vision. Lewis and Clark were given strict instructions to encourage the natives to facilitate a trade network between themselves and American traders who they claimed offered peace and prosperity. Thomas Jefferson did his part too in negotiating with the natives. Their ideas were generally received well in the west, particularly in Mandan and Hidatsa territory – the bread basket of native trade. With the conclusion of the Corps of Expedition's journey, Jefferson set to work creating a national company that would finally bring a lasting trade to the western natives. The American Fur Company acted shrewdly and ruthlessly to eliminate foreign competition and most domestic competition by the middle of the century. Their innovations created an expedient and efficient network that brought about an extremely rapid exchange of goods and services that had never before been seen in North America. Their successes can be traced back to the Corps of Expedition and the mission it carried out between the years of 1804 and 1806, laying the groundwork for future productivity and prosperity.

Conclusion

This paper was meant to serve as an analysis of one of the great journeys in American history. Lewis and Clark began their expedition as virtual unknowns, and accomplished one of the great feats in the 250 year history of their nation.

They began with two important goals. The first was to create a lasting peace between their fellow countrymen and the natives of North America along with a lasting peace between the different North American tribes. The second goal was to form the foundations of a successful and productive trading relationship between the United States and the Native Americans. The first of these goals was heartbreakingly left unaccomplished. The explorers, in all honesty, were too far out of their depth and the violence that had plagued the development of the United States would continue throughout the next century as many Americans worked, whether knowingly or not, to exterminate the native races that dotted the Great Plains and beyond.

The creation of a strong and productive trade network became the lasting legacy of the Lewis and Clark epic. Their ability to find common ground with the natives and exchange goods allowed for the growth of the United States in a time when both growth and stability were greatly needed.

The Louisiana Purchase, as this paper explained, was a huge step toward accomplishing the goals of the Corps of Discovery. Jefferson had always wanted to control and explore the land that lay west of the Mississippi but for decades he had lacked the justification to do so. While he was eager to send explorers through the western wilderness to find ways to reach the great western ocean, he had two countries standing in his way (Spain and France) throughout the late eighteenth century. The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 brought the greatest single expansion the United States would ever see, and Jefferson used it to accomplish his new goal of building a trading monopoly with the natives rich in furs and peltry.

He believed that in order to carry this out successfully, it was necessary to create a peaceful relationship with the natives. He sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to conduct this mission of diplomacy after grooming the former for years in matters of geography, botany, and most importantly, Indian diplomacy. The two explorers painstakingly prepared for their journey and finally left Camp Dubois with the Corps of Discover in September of 1804. For two years, they met and held council with as many native tribes as they possibly could along the Missouri River and attempted to make peace with them by exchanging gifts, making speeches, and sometimes scheduling diplomatic discussions with other tribes. Unfortunately, this did not always have the desired effect. The explorers lacked a knowledge of language, diplomacy, and culture that held the native world together. War had become an integral part of native life – so much so that it was often used to determine social status. The peace treaties they thought they had created crumbled within months. For their part, Lewis and Clark even had tense meetings with some native tribes – including one that ended in the death of two Native Americans. Jefferson could do little to alleviate the violence and the two societies continued into the future with their tenuous relationship.

The legacy of the journey that Lewis and Clark embarked on in 1804 was the trading relationship that blossomed afterward. They laid the foundations for the ability of the United States and many of its traders to interact with the natives of the western plains. After the Treaty of Ghent was signed in 1814, Congress passed laws to keep foreigners out of the northwestern territories such as present-day Dakota. After the American Fur Company headed by John Jacob Astor was chartered, the American fur trade became a lucrative business that wiped out most British competition. Western Natives become stronger and richer with the goods that they

received from the United States and the United States profited as well from the furs that they were able to obtain from the west.

When speaking to the native delegation in Washington in 1806 Thomas Jefferson said, ““We are become as numerous as the leaves of the trees, and, tho’ we do not boast, we do not fear any nation. We are now your fathers; and you shall not lose by the change. As soon as Spain had agreed to withdraw from all the waters of the Missouri & Mississippi, I felt the desire of becoming acquainted with all my red children beyond the Missipi, and of uniting them with us, as we have done those on this side of that river in the bonds of peace & friendship.”⁶⁴ This statement was symbolic of the sentiments that he felt toward the United States and toward the native populations. While the natives and the Americans did not get along as he had hoped and often fought violently in the hundred years to follow, the United States did become a powerful and strong nation. Much of the credit for this realization should go to Lewis and Clark and the rest of the Corps of Discovery who trekked through the rivers, plains, and mountains of the virtually unexplored west. The records that they dutifully kept and the information that they logged on the two year journey that saw them cross an entire continent cannot be understated. These individuals accomplished one of the greatest and most important feats of American history and helped build the foundations for what would become a vast and powerful nation for centuries to come.

⁶⁴ Jackson, 281.

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