

**Lewis and Clark across the Ages:  
Remembering the Legacy of the Corps of Discovery in U.S. History**

Lisa M. Reed

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## *Abstract*

This paper will explore the history of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and how they have been viewed through the years since their return. Specifically, it will look at the lack of celebration upon the Expedition's return in 1806, and how its popularity faded then returned numerous times up through the bicentennial in the early twenty first century. In 1806, Lewis and Clark were widely forgotten until the publication of their journals telling their story was made accessible to the public. They soon faded again from the limelight until the late nineteenth century when the centennial of their return came around, although not for reasons we might expect. They soon faded again until celebrations of the sesquicentennial in the 1950s, and their popularity since then has not diminished. The commemoration of the bicentennial was perhaps the most all-encompassing of the accomplishments that the Expedition had made, and focused more on Native Americans and the environment than ever before. This paper examines why the memory of Lewis and Clark changed throughout history, and what that says about the people and society doing the remembering.

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## Introduction

Lewis and Clark have been portrayed throughout the years as heroes and adventurers, accomplishing a feat that no man had ever before accomplished, and contributing significant amounts of information to the subject of science, much of which was not known before. In school social studies classes we learn of their two and a half year journey across the continent and back. We can study the journals they left behind to discover what they saw, who they met, and how they lived and traveled in an age so unlike our own. In modern times they're heralded as great discoverers. Countless books have been written about the Lewis and Clark Expedition, from scholarly records such as *Undaunted Courage* by historian Stephen Ambrose, to adventure stories like *Blazing West: The Journal of Augustus Pelletier 1804* by popular children's author Katheryn Lasky, to cookbooks such as *The Food Journal of Lewis & Clark: Recipes for an Expedition*. Numerous movies about them have been made, such as documentaries by Ken Burns and National Geographic as well as the comedy *Almost Heroes* and the drama entitled *The Far Horizons*. National monuments and parks have been established, and their journey west has been traveled by millions of people hoping to catch the adventurous spirit of the Expedition. But how we look at Lewis and Clark now widely differs from how they were celebrated in the past. This essay will explore how the Expedition was received when it returned from its journey in 1806, how Lewis and Clark were celebrated at the Portland World's Fair in 1905, and finally, how they were commemorated during the bicentennial that ran from 2003-2006. Lewis and Clark's accomplishments change with time. The Expedition has been used to justify the actions and decisions of the U.S. depending on the social and political concerns of the time period. In 1905 Lewis and Clark were used to justify the expansion of the U.S. westward once again in the Pacific and Asia. By the 1950s this shifted, and focus was placed more on conserving what the

Expedition saw in the early 1800s. This idea of preservation would continue to grow, culminating in the bicentennial celebration in the early 2000s. Examining how Lewis and Clark are viewed in history can tell us a lot of information about the country and its people, and what they perceive as problems and concerns during their lifetime. The story stays the same, but how it is interpreted changes with time.

### **The Expedition and its Return**

The journey all started with Thomas Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, and his subsequent need to explore and expand the U.S. across North America in order to stake claims on the land in contention with countries like Britain, France, and Spain. He commissioned the Corps of Discovery, and chose Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to lead the Expedition of just over thirty men westward into the unknown territory filled with Natives. Jefferson sent the expedition on its way west with specific goals in mind: to explore and discover the source of the Missouri, to find the most direct and convenient water route to the Pacific Ocean, to study the area's plants, animals, and geography, and to learn about and reach out to Native Americans along the way.<sup>1</sup> Jefferson's objectives were mainly commercial, wanting to stake the claim on lands that were disputed west of the Rocky Mountains, and to establish trade with the Native Americans they came in contact with. However, he also directed Lewis and Clark to gather observations of what they saw, contributing to scientific knowledge educating the east on what they had found.

The Expedition left St. Louis in May of 1804 and spent over two years traveling to the Pacific and back, facing many hardships and starting diplomatic relations with many different

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<sup>1</sup> Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis, June 20, 1803, in *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 61-66.

Native American tribes. Upon their return east to St. Louis in 1806, not much attention was given to the Corps of Discovery. There are many reasons for this, one being that not many newspapers provided coverage of the Expedition, either during the journey or after they had arrived back. Many newspapers and magazines announced the return of Lewis and Clark, but few actually reported details of the Expedition beyond the fact that they had returned safely. Additionally, Lewis and Clark returned in September, but many papers did not run the announcement of their return until over a month later. No publications really examined the Expedition and what they had done during their long journey west and back. This is in part due to the lack of communication between the Corps of Discovery and the “civilized” world. While they were gone, many people had forgotten them entirely, or thought that the Expedition had perished on their journey, thereby not leaving much of an impression in the public sphere.<sup>2</sup>

The lack of press coverage of Lewis and Clark can also be contributed to the other type of news occurring in the country at the time. Most newspapers ran accounts of more domestic concerns. One popular story that pushed Lewis and Clark to the back pages was of former Vice President Aaron Burr amidst controversy of treason. Politics also influenced what stories were published. For example, Republican editors were more likely to publish stories about the Expedition than Federalist ones. Federalists chose not to touch on the subject because of partisan reasons.<sup>3</sup> This lack of media coverage was the first of many reasons that the Corps of Discovery was denied legendary status during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>2</sup> Carol Sue Humphrey, “The Overlooked Legend: The Failure of the Media to Report on the Lewis and Clark Expedition,” *American Journalism* 21, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 33-54.

<sup>3</sup> Humphrey, “The Overlooked Legend,” 33-54.

Another contributing factor to the lack of interest in Lewis and Clark's journey is the debate of whether or not they actually achieved Jefferson's objectives. One of the main goals of the journey was to "establish the geographic means by which the commercial and political nation might be extended to the Pacific shore," essentially a Northwest Passage.<sup>4</sup> Lewis and Clark seemed to know that they had failed in this regard, skirting the truth by stating that they had found the best route, but not the most feasible. The route they had found along the Missouri and Columbia Rivers was long and arduous, crossing through mountains and often requiring them to get out and pull the boat through shallow waters. In addition, there was a long stretch of the journey where they were forced to walk through the Rocky Mountains, carrying their supplies on horses. There was also the difficulty of traveling through territory that was disputed. The Louisiana Purchase did not extend all the way to the Pacific, so Lewis and Clark were traveling through land that was claimed by more than one nation and was in contention. Achieving Jefferson's goal of commerce through the west to the Pacific along the Missouri River was not possible, therefore Lewis and Clark had failed in this regard, even though they had in fact made it to the Pacific.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the failure of finding the Northwest Passage across the continent, Lewis and Clark did map new terrain as well as made important scientific observations and discoveries, one of Jefferson's original objectives. They also managed to trace the Missouri River to its source, and descended the Columbia River from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, a feat no one had thought possible.<sup>6</sup> While doing that, Lewis and Clark gathered information about

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<sup>4</sup> Jefferson to Lewis, 61-66.

<sup>5</sup> Robert S. Cox, ed., *The Shortest and Most Convenient Route: Lewis and Clark in Context* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2004), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Humphrey, "The Overlooked Legend," 38.

climate, soils, plants, and animals that they came across. They were the first men to describe in more scholarly terms animals such as the grizzly bear, prairie dog, pronghorn, jack rabbit, black-tailed deer, and mountain goat, and the first to “discover” the magpie and the prairie dog. There were, however, skeptics at the time that viewed Lewis and Clark’s descriptions as brief and superficial, especially when compared to descriptions of other explorers in the early 1800s. Together with the fact that there were no trained naturalists on the Expedition, naturalists back east claimed that Lewis and Clark were not qualified and that their accounts were informal and unscientific. For the rest of the country, Lewis and Clark’s achievements were hard to understand because their contributions were similar to many others. It also didn’t help their case that the Expedition failed to find any plants that could be used for cultivation or animals that could be used for livestock. The information Lewis and Clark brought back didn’t apply to those living in their own sheltered worlds who would never leave their homes for the west. Those citizens who were more scholarly questioned the qualifications of the captains and were unimpressed by their descriptions.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most influential of these contributing factors that led to the rather rapid fade of Lewis and Clark in the spotlight of the early nineteenth century is that it took nearly one hundred years for their journals to be published verbatim. After their return in 1806, one of the members of the Expedition, Sergeant Patrick Gass, published his journal against the wishes of Lewis. The unofficial, best-selling account of Gass in 1807 angered Lewis, who said that the story of the Expedition should have been told by the commanders. Gass’s version would,

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<sup>7</sup> Donald Jackson, “The Public Image of Lewis and Clark,” *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (January 1966): 6; Cox, ed., *The Shortest and Most Convenient Route*, 239-247; Patrick Gass, *The Journals of Patrick Gass: Member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. Carol Lynn MacGregor (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Pub. Co., 1997).

however, be the only account in print until 1814. His version of events was decidedly less scientific, and told more like an adventure story. This appealed to the general public, but did little to implicate their scientific findings and accomplishments. Lewis died of apparent suicide in 1809 without ever publishing his account of the journey. Because he was primarily in charge of publishing the journals, his death left Gass's account uncontested for years, and placed a negative emphasis on the legacy of the Expedition.<sup>8</sup>

Clark, now feeling the pressure of President Jefferson to publish his findings, began to work with Nicholas Biddle, a lawyer and author, to form the journals into a narrative. Biddle and Clark studied the journals together in 1810 and published in 1814, eight years after the return of the Expedition, long after the country had lost whatever little interest they initially had. Instead of keeping the writings of Lewis and Clark's viewpoints separate, Biddle merged them into one, writing the story from the perspective of a third, unidentifiable person. Biddle greatly romanticized the Expedition, and in doing so left out most of the scientific observations and descriptions. Likewise, competing accounts had begun to circulate, diluting the importance of the Expedition. Other better funded and better equipped Expeditions had been sent west under the leadership of men like Pike, Freeman, Dunbar, and Colter. In addition, Lewis and Clark did not capture the attention or imagination of the American public the way that Kit Carson or Davy Crockett did. Ultimately, Biddle's edition of the journals did poorly. Only 1,417 copies were printed, accomplishing little in the way of bringing Lewis and Clark into the spotlight.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kris Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark: Legacies, Memories, and New Perspectives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 2-3, 26-29; Cox, ed., *The Shortest and Most Convenient Route*, 161.

All of these factors, from public opinion and lack of information available, to competing explorations served to help the Expedition disappear from public view during the early nineteenth century. However, later in the century, they would soon emerge again, just in time for the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase and the one hundred year anniversary of the Expedition itself.

### **Centennial**

Lewis and Clark had faded almost entirely from the eye of the public after their return and into the mid-nineteenth century, but they would not stay hidden from the history books for long. The changing historical trends and geopolitical roles late in the century served to shine a new light on how people perceived the Corps of Discovery. The beginning of this shift in perspectives of Lewis and Clark started with the reprinting of Biddle's work in the 1840s and 50s, presumably because it served to justify the nation's territorial claims of "manifest destiny" in the Far West. However, the Expedition seemed to fade again soon after until Elliot Coues, a naturalist scientist, published a revision of Biddle's work in 1893, the first new edition of the journals since Biddle's work was published almost eighty years earlier in 1814. Coues "urged an appreciation of Lewis and Clark, those who 'first saw' the land and began the American 'course of empire.'" He also emphasized the Expedition's scientific achievements. Coues' work went a long way in getting the public to see that the Corps was not just sent on an adventure, but contributed greatly to the scientific knowledge base of the country.<sup>10</sup>

The next event that brought even more attention to the accomplishments of Lewis and Clark was the first publishing of the journals word-for-word, edited by the director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Reuben Gold Thwaites in 1905, one hundred years after the

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<sup>10</sup> Cox, ed., *The Shortest and Most Convenient Route*, 236-237; Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 161.

return of the Expedition. Lewis and Clark's journals were published in eight volumes that are still being sold today. Finally people were able to read exactly what Lewis and Clark wrote in their journals. The emergence of their real journals served to bring Lewis and Clark into the limelight once more, this time with more emphasis on the scientific achievements of the Expedition, making their story more than just one of adventure. The journals were published just in time for the celebration of the centennial of the Expedition taking place in Portland, Oregon.<sup>11</sup>

When the twentieth century emerged, so did Lewis and Clark as national heroes. This is in part due to two late-nineteenth century developments. One of these was the tendency to mark important national anniversaries with great events. In the summer of 1876, the centennial of the birth of the United States was celebrated in Philadelphia. Additionally, the Columbian World Exposition celebrated in Chicago in 1893 marked the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World, the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 marked the anniversary of the Louisiana Purchase, the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915 celebrating the Panama Canal, and a second in Chicago in 1933 celebrating the city's centennial titled A Century of Progress International Exposition. The country had become increasingly interested in celebrating important events in the nation's history through world's fairs and expositions, and the centennial of Lewis and Clark was not going to be an exception.<sup>12</sup>

The second development of the contemporary United States was the "professionalism of social science." The American Historical Association was founded in 1884, which placed more of an emphasis on the study of history. Slowly, the AHA began to collect, edit, and publish

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<sup>11</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

important American historical documents. This eventually led to the publication of Thwaite's edition of Lewis and Clark's journals, which previously had been housed at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia where they were often forgotten. This increased awareness of Lewis and Clark and their accomplishments, along with the declaration of the closing of the frontier they had discovered, led to an increased interest in what the Corps of Discovery had accomplished and in what the future had in store for the United States.<sup>13</sup>

The Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair, also known as the Portland World's Fair, was held from June 1 to October 15, 1905 in Portland, Oregon. It occupied 182 acres of land and 220 acres of water in the floodplains of the Willamette River. The Fair in Portland followed the celebration in 1904 of the centennial of the Louisiana Purchase. According to its official catalogue, the Exposition was held to mark the most remarkable periods of growth and development of the United States, including the advances in commerce, industry, science, education, and civic and racial development, and to celebrate one hundred years of Lewis and Clark exploring Oregon country. It was physically set up similarly to the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. The Exposition had an entertainment section called The Trail, and A Bridge of Nations connected the mainland to the US Government buildings. It was the first World's Fair on the coast of the Pacific. At the Exposition, fairgoers could attend conferences and conventions, educational speeches and presentations, and attend exhibits of different states and nations.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> William L. Lang and Carl Abbott, *Two Centuries of Lewis and Clark: Selections on the Voyage of Discovery* (Portland: Oregon Historical Press, 2004), 63-70; *Official Catalogue of the Lewis & Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair, 1905*, Internet Archive, Library of Congress.

When attempting to gain recognition and support from the U.S. government, the planners of the centennial celebration stated that Lewis and Clark were instrumental to history because the Louisiana Purchase was the most significant expansion in U.S. history. Lewis and Clark's accomplishments led to the development of international commerce on the Pacific, which in turn led to commercial and industrial progress and intellectual and moral development. Additionally, the Expedition paved the way for settlement west, which strengthened the nation's claims on the territory held in contention with Spain, Britain, and Russia, and also leading to the eventual acquisition of California and Alaska. Lewis and Clark had made it possible for the US to grow, both physically and economically because of the abundance of resources in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>15</sup>

The organizers of the Exposition hoped to sway the government into supporting their cause by stating that the World's Fair would educate the public in history and foster patriotism while looking back at the accomplishment of others in the past. They also wanted to look to the future at what was to come. The hearing before Congress in 1904 succeeded in Congress giving \$200,000 in recognition of the importance of the exposition. In addition, sixteen states participated in the Exposition, as well as twenty one foreign countries, including France, Germany, China, Australia, Russia and Switzerland. Those who were in charge of the Exposition couldn't have hoped for greater participation and world involvement. The World's Fair in Portland would soon bring the Pacific Northwest into the spotlight as a major supplier of wealth to the country and the world, all because Lewis and Clark explored it a hundred years earlier.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Official Catalogue of the Lewis & Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair*. 1905. Internet Archive, Library of Congress; US Congress, House, 1904, *Hearing before the United States House Committee on Industrial Arts and Expositions*, HR 2850, 58<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., January 1904.

<sup>16</sup> US House 1904; Lang and Abbott, *Two Centuries of Lewis and Clark*, 70; *Official Catalogue*, 1905.

The Exposition effectively merged Lewis and Clark with the goals for the future. It told the story of the Expedition and how it “paved the way through the West,” bringing wealth and growth to the country. America once again started to look to the west. The country aimed to establish itself into the world market in order to gain new markets to trade with, thus the “Oriental” emphasis in the presentation of the Exposition. The nation looked to expand into the Pacific and Asia after 1898, where there was a large market and demand for US goods could grow immensely. This idea of Pacific imperialism started with Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, who “annexed Hawaii, divided Samoa with Germany, and took control of Guam and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War of 1898,” as well as eventually established a protectorate over Panama in order to acquire land for the Panama Canal. Now the country turned to new areas. In order to bolster popular opinion towards empire building the Exposition featured a 50,000 square foot Oriental Exhibits Building where fairgoers could view products from Asia, however most of the exhibits were established by trading companies and importers who wanted to display their goods and make more money. Once again, resembling reasons why Thomas Jefferson bought the Louisiana Territory, America was looking to the west to expand.<sup>17</sup>

This ideology of empire building was displayed for everyone to see as they walked into the Exposition. When entering, fairgoers would walk under the official motto “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way.” It was also shown in the official seal of the Exposition. Lady Columbia, symbol of freedom and progress, was shown leading Lewis and Clark west towards the Pacific and the setting sun. It is not hard to see how this image would instill a feeling of

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<sup>17</sup> Lisa Blee, “Completing Lewis and Clark’s Westward March: Exhibiting a History of Empire at the 1905 Portland World’s Fair,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 106, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 232-253; Lang and Abbott, *Two Centuries of Lewis and Clark*, 63-86.

patriotism in all who saw it. When put together, the motto and the seal demonstrated the tradition of empire building in the US, and the intent to continue that tradition into the coming years. In this way, Lewis and Clark became precursors of industrial expansion.<sup>18</sup>



Seal of the Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair, *Official Catalogue of the Lewis and Clark Centennial and American Pacific Exposition and Oriental Fair*, 1905.

The fair told the story of the Expedition, specifically how they “paved the way through the west.” But it also proved that Lewis and Clark were not just sent west to explore the land. Through Lewis and Clark, Thomas Jefferson had worked to expand the nation from the Mississippi to the Pacific. Although the accomplishments of the Expedition were on full display, there was decidedly more focus on how Lewis and Clark had opened the way to the development of industry and commerce. The Exposition pointed out the way of progress and spent a great deal of time and money displaying how the Expedition had changed the U.S. “for the better.”

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<sup>18</sup> Blee, “Completing Lewis and Clark’s Westward March,” 246.

Naturally, the fair placed most of the emphasis on Oregon country. The Forestry Building, a large log cabin, displayed how the timber industry was booming in the Pacific Northwest, and how logging companies had moved from the Midwest for a more plentiful supply. In addition, the new Federal Reclamation Service exhibited how they were working to change the land to better suit the needs of US citizens, including the drying up of lakes in Oregon to bring water to farmers. The land that Lewis and Clark had explored would be virtually unrecognizable to them, but to Americans at the time, it was of great significance and a source of great pride that the natural resources of the Oregon country was providing vast wealth for the rest of the country. This notion of progress had started with the Expedition and would continue on for many years.<sup>19</sup>

The Exposition called for the public to imagine the West as conquered and tamed, not only the Native Americans who had lived there, but also the wilderness and its resources. Likewise, Lewis and Clark were turned into “world conquerors,” leading the way for America. This conquering of peoples and land was tied closely with the future of the US. Lewis and Clark served as symbols of “imperialism might and ingenuity,” which was especially important going into the nineteenth century as America had lost its western frontier, but hoped to gain a new one across the Pacific. Just as Americans had “tamed and conquered” Native Americans, they hoped to do the same to many others, in the hopes of making them more “civilized” and more like themselves, white Anglo-Saxons.<sup>20</sup>

According to Carl Abbott, a historian who focused specifically on the centennial celebration, “The most prominent presence of Native Americans [at the Exposition] was

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<sup>19</sup> F.G. Young, “The Lewis and Clark Centennial: The Occasion and Its Observance,” *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, 4, no. 1 (March 1903): 5-7; Blee, “Completing Lewis and Clark’s Westward March,” 232-234; Lang and Abbott, *Two Centuries of Lewis and Clark*, 74-79.

<sup>20</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 170-171.

inanimate.” The Government building housed an exhibit on Native Americans, made by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, which was primarily about the education of Native Americans in government run schools. At the exhibit, fairgoers could examine the schoolwork of Native Americans and see how they had “improved,” through their education. It was with great pride that white Americans had prevailed over tribes who were uncooperative, and they wanted to show it. In addition to the exhibit, Native Americans would perform traditional dances and songs and demonstrate crafts. Essentially, Natives were put on show for Americans to scrutinize. Lewis and Clark had been at the forefront of American relations with Native Americans. While on their journey westward they had cooperated and traded with the different tribes they encountered. They were in general very peaceful. What Lewis and Clark would have seen at their own centennial celebration would have not been how they dealt with them on their journey. On the Expedition, Lewis and Clark met with Native Americans on their own land, often times on their own terms. By the late nineteenth century natives were being forced off of their lands and onto reservations. The representation of natives in 1905 show how society at the time saw Native Americans. According to Americans, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the assimilation of Native Americans into a “superior” culture was of benefit to Native Americans themselves because it was making them more civilized and less savage. As the US expanded even further, this policy of “noble conquest” started to apply to the peoples of Asia as well.<sup>21</sup>

At the time of the World’s Fair the nation had already taken control of the Philippines and its people. Filipinos were put on display, much like how Native Americans were. The Exposition used the chance to show everyday citizens how the conquering of Filipinos was

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<sup>21</sup> Lang and Abbott, *Two Centuries of Lewis and Clark*, 89-93; David Sarasohn, *Waiting for Lewis and Clark: The Bicentennial and the Changing West* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 2005), 29; Blee, “Completing Lewis and Clark’s Westward March,” 237-240.

justified by showing how they were “savage” and “primitive.” Displays at the fair showed how these “dog-eating” people had been tamed and civilized through US expansion, expansion that they said Lewis and Clark had initiated. How the Exposition incorporated Native Americans and Filipinos, or people who were “exotic,” gives a great amount of information about how “White Americans and Europeans at the turn of the century were preoccupied with ordering different national and ethnic groups into a hierarchy of superior and inferior peoples.” In 1905, Lewis and Clark were being heralded as leaders into the progressive age. They were being used as symbols of conquest, and it suited the nation well.<sup>22</sup>

By the last day of the Exposition in October, around one and a half million visitors had attended, with nearly four hundred thousand of them being from somewhere other than the Pacific Northwest.<sup>23</sup> The intent of the fair was to celebrate Lewis and Clark, but in reality it was more about the future than the past. Instead, the Corps of Discovery was used as justification for imperial and commercial policies, in order to garner the support of American citizens. It compared Lewis and Clark to issues that were relevant at the time, instead of celebrating how much they had contributed to the country in the early 1800s. It did however serve to bring the Expedition back into popular history, if only for reasons of self-interest. The old news of the 1800s had become new for a different reason.

### **Sesquicentennial**

After the celebrations of the centennial, Lewis and Clark seemed to gain interest in a different way. Although the centennial used the Expedition as a way to justify actions during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, attention was brought back to the achievements of

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<sup>22</sup> Lang and Abbott, *Two Centuries of Lewis and Clark*, 93-95.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

the Expedition and more and more people started to care about Lewis and Clark. With the end of the frontier that Jefferson predicted would last for much longer, Americans became more concerned with conservation of what was left. Lewis and Clark came to symbolize the efforts of preservation and nostalgia for simpler times. Historians and artists portrayed these feelings in their work, which helped draw attention to Lewis and Clark. Charles Russell, a premier artist of the Old West, painted many works in the early 1900s that romanticized and heroicized the members of the Expedition, with particular emphasis on the Native Americans that they encountered. In addition, historian Ralph Henry Gabriel published *The Lure of the Frontier*. His work also heavily romanticized the Expedition and portrayed the explorers as valiant and Native Americans as “noble savages.”<sup>24</sup> Works like Gabriel and Russell’s fascinated the American public with stories of adventure and ideas of the preserved frontier of long ago.

In 1929 other events occurred to help bring Lewis and Clark into new light. Concerned that the nation had inadequately commemorated the Expedition in the hundred plus years since their return, the Lewis and Clark Memorial Association (LCMA) was formed in Idaho. The LCMA was concerned that Lewis and Clark had been largely ignored. They came to the conclusion that the Expedition hadn’t garnered much interest from the public because of the ways they had been memorialized in the past. They believed that by instilling a “better understanding” among Americans, they would better understand the significance of the Expedition and ways to commemorate their accomplishments. A primary goal of the LCMA was to memorialize the route of the Expedition through building road and highways named after

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Archibald, “The Significance of the National Lewis and Clark Commemoration,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 99, no. 3 (September 2003): 256.

Lewis and Clark, in short establishing a way of automobile tourism rapidly becoming more popular with the development of cars and highway systems.<sup>25</sup>

As the sesquicentennial (one hundred and fiftieth) anniversary of the Corps of Discovery rolled around in the mid twentieth century, interest continued to grow, mainly due to an increase in works that centered on the Expedition. In 1955 Paramount Studios released *The Far Horizon*, starring Fred MacMurray and Charles Heston as Lewis and Clark, about “a thrilling journey into the unknown, a race against the intrigues of foreign powers, that succeeded in securing this continent to the American nation.” The movie was released at the height of the celebrations and featured real photography of the trail. The film used direct quotes from the journals of Lewis and Clark, and followed the maps that Clark drew during the journey. However, the adventures of the Expedition was greatly dramatized and some events were made up.<sup>26</sup> The film, along with other books published in the time period, would only serve to boost the excitement of Lewis and Clark’s journey west to the American people who watched and read about them.

The Cold War itself shaped how Lewis and Clark were seen at the time. Bernard Devoto’s publishing of *The Course of Empire* as well as his own edition of the Lewis and Clark Journals in 1952 and 1953 “called attention to the dual significance of the Lewis and Clark expedition as a marker of the emergence of the United States onto the global stages of major scientific discovery and empire-building.” Just like the present threats from the Soviet Union, in the early 1800s the U.S. felt threatened by Spain, France, and Britain. There was a new emphasis on Lewis and Clark’s role as captains and the importance of duty and discipline, mirroring what

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<sup>25</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 198-199.

<sup>26</sup> James J. Kopp, “Billy and Merne’s Excellent Expedition: The ‘Lost’ Screenplay of ‘Lewis and Clark,’” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 107, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 65-68.

the leaders of the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s deemed as important. Lewis and Clark became servants to a greater cause of U.S. interests at home and abroad as the nation attempted to out-do the Soviet Union in technology and expansion.<sup>27</sup>

The sesquicentennial inspired interest in local and regional communities in commemorating Lewis and Clark, focusing on celebrations that “would foster local pride and attract tourists to sites along the Expedition route.” In 1955, the governors of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana declared the year as “Lewis and Clark Year.” A committee of representatives planned events that would take place between May and October, and Fort Clatsop was replicated at the spot where the Expedition spent the winter of 1805-1806. Events for the week-long celebration and dedication of the Fort included the selection of Miss Sacagawea, a pancake breakfast, Indian dances, a barbeque of elk meat, a dog show, costume contest, the blowing up of a replicated ship, street dances, a Pirates Den, a barrel race, picnic, and the appearance by the Cascade chorus from Eugene, Oregon.<sup>28</sup>

Interest in following the Expedition’s route grew exponentially. One thousand boy scouts met in Great Falls, Montana and followed the trail to Fort Clatsop in Oregon just in time for the dedication of the newly completed fort. An automobile caravan sponsored by the Greater Clarkston (Washington) Association traveled the route for nine days, stopping at Lewis and Clark roadside markers and camping at night. One hundred pilots followed the trail in the air. The national highways built in the 1920’s now had significant use as people found it easier to travel the route of Lewis and Clark. For those who did not want to or could not travel the trail, the Northern Pacific Railway Company produced a sesquicentennial book “with maps to

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<sup>27</sup> Cox, ed., *The Shortest and Most Convenient Route*, 52; Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> “Clatsop County, Oregon Plans Big Celebration,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, July 26, 1955.

familiarize readers with events in the journals and the nature of the country the explorers traversed.”<sup>29</sup> Now people could follow the journey of the Expedition and see what Lewis and Clark saw in the comfort of their own homes.

The sesquicentennial celebrations ended with a three-day gala in Lewiston, Idaho, with an emphasis on preserving and interpreting the trail as a national memorial. “History was reenacted for a crowd of thousands Saturday as the Lewis-Clark sesquicentennial celebration hit its stride.” A pageant and parade were conducted in Lewiston to commemorate the Corps of Discovery. The governor of Idaho also urged for the early completion of the last twenty four miles of the Lewis and Clark Highway between Kooskia, Idaho and Missoula, Montana.<sup>30</sup> The interest in Lewis and Clark caused by the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary would continue to grow momentum, culminating in the bicentennial in the early twenty-first century.

### **Bicentennial**

At the turn of the century, the anxiety over the loss of the western frontier had helped to boost interest in Lewis and Clark. By the 1960s, this had changed to anxiety “over the loss of parts of the historical landscape.” This fear of destruction contributed in the efforts to create a nationally recognized Lewis and Clark trail. However, efforts to preserve didn’t just revolve around the trail. While the celebrations of the centennial in Portland focused on how the west had been changed for good, increased awareness in the mid to late twentieth century started to focus on how it had been changed for the worse. The bicentennial commemoration would offer a

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<sup>29</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 205-207.

<sup>30</sup> “Thousands See Lewis-Clark Fete,” *Idaho Falls Post Register*, October 9, 1955; “Smylie Urges Highway Work,” *Idaho Falls Post Register*, October 10, 1955.

chance to educate the public on how the country had changed, as well as how to preserve it for future generations of Americans.<sup>31</sup>

In 1969 the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation (LCTHF) was formed in order to share the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition and to preserve the route of the Corps of Discovery from Jefferson’s residence in Virginia to Ft. Clatsop in Oregon. Even now, the Foundation works to “stimulate public appreciation of the Lewis and Clark Expedition’s contributions to America’s heritage and to support education, research, development, and preservation of the Lewis and Clark experience.” Since the sesquicentennial, more and more published historical accounts have been published, including books and films, and museums have started to accumulate more artifacts related to the journey. The popularity of Lewis and Clark continued to grow, even in the years after the sesquicentennial celebration.<sup>32</sup>



Official symbol of the National Park Service’s Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/lewisandclark/trailtoday.htm>.

Historians have noted that a golden age of Lewis and Clark scholarship has been in effect since 1962. This is because they believe that the gap between the popular images of Lewis and

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<sup>31</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 208-220.

<sup>32</sup> “Our Mission and Our Vision,” Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, 2014, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://www.lewisandclark.org/about/index.html>; Archibald, “The Significance of the National Lewis and Clark Commemoration,” 256.

Clark and their scientific and social achievements has lessened since then. No longer was the story of Lewis and Clark so distorted and Native American culture so ignored. Indeed, by 1975 social and economic problems such as foreign policy and race relations impacted a change in symbolic meaning of Lewis and Clark. They were still considered heroic and courageous, but instead of symbolizing industrial development and economic progress, they came to symbolize conservation and cultural awareness. Lewis and Clark were now being used to critique progress instead of celebrate it. This led to an even more increased interest in the route they traveled, because it was now impossible to travel due to dams and civilization in general. When Ted Yates, a news producer, headed west to recreate the Expedition, he wrote “It seems that we in our short history have at times confused vandalism with progress, wanton waste with riches. We have not used our resources, we have looted them.” And although this was among the first negative views of progress in the west, it was certainly not the last. Progressively more and more people would travel the route of the Expedition and compare it to what Lewis and Clark saw in 1806, critiquing the progress that the country had made since the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup>

In 1993, the LCTHF created the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council in the hopes that the bicentennial anniversary of Lewis and Clark would be an opportunity to educate the public about the issues surrounding the Expedition. Henry Hubbard, the president of the Council, stated that some of the benefits would be “geographic knowledge, ecological awareness, and the appreciation of cultural diversity,” acknowledging how the different Native American tribes that the Corps of Discovery encountered on the way aided and supported the Expedition. The bicentennial was also an opportunity for national redemption. Instead of

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<sup>33</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 160, 172-174; Ted Yates, “Since Lewis and Clark,” *The American West* 2, no. 4 (1965): 23-30.

celebrating how Lewis and Clark paved the way for industrial development, emphasis would be placed on the mistakes made in the past two centuries and how to rectify those mistakes. Instead of focusing on how Lewis and Clark dominated the Native Americans they encountered, the diplomacy and cooperation that Lewis and Clark demonstrated with them would be highlighted.<sup>34</sup> Accomplishing these aims correctly and effectively was the main goal of the Bicentennial Council, but they would need help in doing so.

In 1998, the US government and the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council came together in order “to collaborate in commemorating the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.” Eleven federal agencies signed the memorandum, including sectors from the Department of Agriculture, Department of the Army, Department of Education, and Department of Transportation. In the memorandum of understanding (MOU) drawn up between the parties, the importance of the Expedition was noted, saying that without Lewis and Clark the boundaries and history of the nation would be unrecognizable today, that they initiated relationships between the US and Native Americans in the West, and perhaps most importantly that the Expedition “challenged the human spirit of adventure, embodied the importance of service to one’s country, and documented the natural resources and American Indian cultures in the American West.” The purpose of the MOU was to establish cooperation among the different government agencies involved and the Bicentennial Council, to achieve common goals of public awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the Expedition, to aid in efforts of protecting cultural and natural resources, and to work with Native American tribes in order to foster understanding and appreciation for the indigenous cultures. This would be done through the encouragement of

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<sup>34</sup> Fresonke, ed., *Lewis and Clark*, 177.

responsible recreation, travel, and tourism along the trail.<sup>35</sup> Again, the trail plays a central role in the way the Expedition was being commemorated. Without the assistance of the government, the commemoration might not have made such an impact on the American public in the way that it did.

Excitement for the events of the commemoration continued to grow. By 2001, two years before the start of the commemoration, it was estimated that twenty five million travelers would camp, drive, bike, paddle, ride, or walk a part of the Expeditions trail spanning approximately 3,700 miles across Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. The National Park Service created a traveling exhibit called the Corps of Discovery II: 200 Years to the Future. It would include live reenactments, interpretive programs, and natural and cultural history lessons and would travel west and back during 2003 to 2006. In following the goals set forth by the MOU, the Corps of Discovery II would emphasize conservation, history, education, and reconciliation with Native Americans.<sup>36</sup> In order to appeal to citizens of all ages, the Corps II played on the sense of adventure and courageousness of Lewis and Clark, while also including educational aspects that all could learn and appreciate. While younger children were learning about what Lewis and Clark accomplished on their journey westward, they were also learning about different cultures through events that highlighted different Native American tribes. Likewise, adults would learn that there was more

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<sup>35</sup> Department Agriculture, Department of the Army, Department of Education, Department of the Interior, Department of Transportation, and the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council, Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate in commemorating the Bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1998.

<sup>36</sup> "Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Celebration," *Parks & Recreation* 36, no. 3 (March 2001): 22, SPORTDiscus with Full Text, EBSCOhost (accessed March 18, 2015).

to the story than what they were told in school years earlier, including the need to protect and preserve the earth.

Native Americans played a large part in the bicentennial commemorations. For many Native American tribes, Lewis and Clark was a passing event of little importance. Their side of the story was hardly told in American textbooks. With the coming of the bicentennial, the Council wanted to involve Native Americans and tell all sides of the story of the Expedition. For many tribes, Lewis and Clark were the first diplomatic and cultural contact with the U.S. This marked the beginning of a change in their lives that would become irreversible. According to one member of the Blackfoot Indian Tribe, “Lewis and Clark mark a long misunderstanding of Native Americans.” It was hoped that the bicentennial would make them more prominent in not only the history of Lewis and Clark, but the history of the U.S. as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

Not only were Native Americans taught about during the commemoration, but tribal involvement was the highest priority of the Bicentennial Council. Even the National Park Service recognized the importance of Native Americans. They appointed a Native American as superintendent to oversee the commemoration and events planned. In an interview with a podcast called Native America Calling, the superintendent, Gerard Baker, stated that the goals of the National Park Service were to tell the story from various different views. In turn, this would help to rewrite history books and mend racial stereotypes and political differences that existed long before Lewis and Clark encountered Native Americans on their way west. The aims of having different tribes involved were to help Americans understand more about indigenous cultures and how they have existed since the 1800s. Efforts to make people more aware of the different

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<sup>37</sup> Angie Wagner, “Indians Want Their Side Told during Lewis and Clark Bicentennial,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 149.

cultures and communities around them could in turn help in protecting areas important to tribes. This would be done directly through having tribes talk about what life was like before and after Lewis and Clark. The bicentennial became the first major national occasion that had the active involvement of over sixty tribal groups, making them more involved in the history that they have been a part of. In addition, each “signature event” needed to have the co-sponsorship of a Native American tribe. This went a long way in ensuring that they finally had a chance to be in the spotlight and say how Lewis and Clark had affected them.<sup>38</sup>

Directly tied in with Native Americans was a shift in importance of conservation. The plants and animals that Lewis and Clark discovered were not of much importance when they returned, but by the time of the bicentennial many were now threatened or endangered. The public was just now, two hundred years after their return, starting to realize the importance of what Lewis and Clark documented. Even though much of the territory has changed, there is still land that must be appreciated and preserved.<sup>39</sup> People wanted to be able to travel the route that Lewis and Clark traveled and see what they saw. But since that time the land had changed.

Even today Lewis and Clark are still an important part of history. In 2012 19,500 visitors stopped at the headquarters of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail in Omaha, Nebraska. Students continue to learn about them in school. In Wisconsin, Lewis and Clark fall under early explorers, traders, and settlers to 1812 to be learned about in fourth through twelfth grade.<sup>40</sup> Over two hundred years after their journey, Lewis and Clark are still being discussed in and out of the

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<sup>38</sup> Harlan McKosato, host, “The Corps of Discovery II,” Native America Calling (podcast), December 5, 2000, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nativeamc/allingarchives/168>; Sarasohn, *Waiting for Lewis and Clark*, 49, 170.

<sup>39</sup> Sarasohn, *Waiting for Lewis and Clark*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> Tracy Loew, “Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail: Epic route to the West,” *USA Today*, June 21, 2013; “Content Standard Social Studies Standard B – History: Time, Continuity, and Change,” *Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction*, accessed April 29, 2015, [http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/stn\\_ssstanb](http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/stn_ssstanb).

classroom. They continue to be and will in the future be studied and analyzed, and will be interpreted differently according to the times.

## **Conclusion**

Lewis and Clark's journey and accomplishments are much more celebrated now than ever before. From when they returned and saw little press coverage, to the centennial when they were used to justify social and political claims, to the bicentennial when they were used as activists for conservation and protection of what they once explored, Lewis and Clark have shifted in meaning and symbolism over the centuries. This is important because it tells us about society. What they choose to celebrate and commemorate from the Expedition shows what they think is important. It was always seen that Lewis and Clark had accomplished something great. They traveled across the U.S. and back, into uncharted territory, with no idea what would happen or who they would encounter. That has always been at the forefront of how they are remembered. But because of the circumstances at the time of their return, they were dismissed as yet another exploration party and given little thought. By the time of the centennial, more books had been published and the Expedition was widely relatable to continuing ideas of expansion and commerce. Therefore, Lewis and Clark became symbols of advancement. In the years after that they continued to evolve. With the nation's boundaries firmly in place, no longer did the U.S. need to worry about expansion. Instead, they started to worry about the land itself. With the realization that the landscape that Lewis and Clark saw in the 1800's was virtually unrecognizable, emphasis shifted on how to preserve what was left for the future generations.

The story itself has not changed in the two hundred plus years since they traveled west, but how we view it constantly evolves. With the emphasis on conservation nine years ago, the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary looks to be much the same as the bicentennial, but when

three hundred comes around, the world might be a drastically different place, and Lewis and Clark might come to symbolize something completely new.

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