

One Generation More

By Julie Cajune

A Tribal Perspective on the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial

Council Grove State Park

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I would like to begin this evening by honoring my ancestors who stood on this ground 143 years ago resisting and surviving. It is our tradition always to start with prayer. I will honor this tradition in my way by sharing the prologue to the Hellgate Treaty play written by Jennifer Finely.

We Are This land

By Jennifer Finley

*We know there is a powerful, spiritual world as real as the palm of my hand.
When my great grandmothers were born,
when my chiefs were born all of their clothes were beautiful
and were handmade by people who loved them.
My ancestors ate Salish food.
My ancestors sang Salish songs.
I still sing these songs.
All my prayers are Salish...because I am Salish.*

*I am here today because of the strength of all who came before me.
Not long ago, my tribe had powerful medicine people and powerful chiefs.
Terrible things happened to my people.
Terrible things happened to my family.
Terrible things happened to me,
but nothing can take away the love this land has for me.
Nothing can take away the good medicine in my heart.*

Some of the most beautiful spiritual people in my tribe had to face some of the greatest evils our people ever faced.

*The fact that I am here is a great testament to their power,
because intelligent, holy medicine people prayed ancient prayers for me.
We have withstood the unimaginable.*

*Prayer alone could not turn the invasion back,
nor could prayer alone make spiritually sick people well.
However, without prayers things would surely be much worse and perhaps unendurable.
We were not spiritually unarmed. Without prayers, I might not be here today.*

*My chiefs were strong chiefs.
These men were good and intelligent men.
When Governor Isaac Stevens negotiated a treaty with my chiefs in 1855,
they could read his heart.*

*They could tell by the way he looked at them
and they knew by the tone of his voice what he really thought of them.
Isaac Stevens promised my chiefs the United States would keep its word
and survey their beloved Bitterroot Valley
so they could remain where they had always lived.*

*That survey never happened.
Many promises were not kept.
Chief Charlo waited for thirty years for good to prevail.
Finally, in 1891, the last of the Salish were forced to leave the Bitterroot
and move to the last of their reserved homeland on the Flathead Reservation.*

This is the story of a terrible time.

To start our journey together here, I'd like to share these words that the late Clarence Woodcock left us. They tell us of the beginning of the Salish people.

“Our story begins when the Creator put the animal people on this earth. He sent Coyote ahead as the world was full of evils and not yet fit for mankind. Coyote came with his brother Fox, to this big island, as the elders call this land, to free it of these evils. They were responsible for creating many geographic formations and providing good and special skills and knowledge for man to use. Coyote, however, left many faults such as greed, jealousy, hunger, envy, and many other imperfections that we know of today.”

For most of us this is a very different beginning than the one we commonly find ascribed to Indian people in history books. The “genesis” in US History’s master narrative is really not a genesis at all but rather a journey – a migration journey across the Bering Strait. Though this journey is all speculative theory, it remains the foundation statement about the indigenous people of this country and how we came to be here. So begins the myth making of American History. This posit of theory is a convenient practice that allowed the colonizing nations to justify invasion and theft, because, “Hey all you Indians are really newcomers too.”

American History engages not only in the tradition of mythmaking, but also in the tradition of selection. The long-standing habit of selecting only white males as important figures in American History makes an important political statement about who and what American values. The celebratory story of Lewis and Clark has combined both traditions of mythmaking and selection.

I would like to address a common perspective about the Lewis and Clark Expedition that is shared by many Americans; that the expedition was a great scientific and geographic exploration. Though America takes great pleasure in lauding it as such, it was in reality a business trip – a trip to catalogue resources for commerce. This fact and intention was made very clear in letters written by Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson’s instructions and

intentions can be found in “Messages From the President on the State of the Fur Trade” at the Library of Congress.

Here is his confidential letter to Congress in January of 1803:

The Indians residing within the limits of the United States have, for a considerable time, been growing more and more uneasy at the constant diminution of the territory they occupy, although effected by their own voluntary sale, on any conditions ... A few Tribes only are not yet obstinately in thee dispositioned. In order, peaceable, to counteract this policy of theirs, and to provide an extension of territory which the rapid increase of our numbers will call for, two measures are deemed expedient. First, to encourage them to abandon hunting, to apply to raising stock ... and thereby prove to themselves that less land and labor will maintain them in this better than their former mode of living. The extensive forests will then become useless. Second to multiply trading houses among them ... Experience and reflection will develop them the wisdom of exchanging what they can spare and what we want ... The interest of commerce place the principle object within the constitutional powers and care of Congress, and that it should incidentally advance the geographic knowledge of our own continent cannot but be an additional gratification.

Jefferson’s instructions to Meriwether Lewis are clear and direct.

The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri River, and such principal stream of it, as by its course and communication with the water of the Pacific Ocean, may offer the most direct and practical water communication across this continent, and for the purposes of commerce ... Your observations are to be taken with great pains and accuracy ... the commerce which may be carried on with the people inhabiting the line you will pursue renders a knowledge of these people important. You will therefore endeavor to make yourself acquainted with the names of the nations and their numbers; the extent and limits of their possessions, relations with other tribes .. and articles of commerce they may need or furnish and to what extent ... In all your intercourse with the natives, treat them with the most friendly and conciliatory manner ... allay all jealousies as the objects of your journey, satisfy them of its innocence And of our dispositions to a commercial intercourse with them.

Beyond the purpose of commerce, Jefferson entertains the possibility of an even greater gain in establishing trade with Indian people. In a letter to Indian Governor Henry Harrison, Jefferson wrote:

To promote this disposition to exchange lands, which they have to spare and we want, for necessities, which we have to spare and they want, we shall push our trading houses, and be glad to see the good and influential among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop them off by a cession of land.

To underscore the gains for the United States by establishing trade among Tribes, let me offer you a glimpse of the size and lucrative natures of the Fur Trade. In 1626, at the onset of trade, 45,000 livres of beaver were imported into France from Canada. By 1667, France imported 550,000 livres of fur. A livre is a former French monetary unit, originally worth one pound of silver.

By 1800, when the fur trade was in full swing, England imported 138,000 marten, 45,000 otter, 25,000 wolf, 42,000 fox, 23,000 mink, 248,000 raccoon, 50,000 bear, 245,000 beaver pelts and numerous elf, moose, and deer hides with an aggregate value of around \$5,000,000.¹ Keep in mind that the value of the dollar was significantly higher than today. Remember also that other countries were importing fur.

The first monopoly in United States History was that of John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. At the time of his death in 1848, Astor had become the richest man in North America and one of the world's first men to accumulate over a million dollars. His estate was valued between sixteen and twenty million dollars. The fur trade comprised the early capital of North America with fur fortunes financing much of the subsequent development of the United States and Canada.

With these facts in mind, it is a logical assumption that the Lewis and Clark Expedition hastened the fur trade. Information on a transcontinental route to the Pacific, detailed geography of the Columbia River basin, as well as reports on the vast amount of commercial resources were all significant to the expansion of the fur trade.

The July 17, 1805 New Orleans' Gazette reported on the progress of the expedition from a previous article in the Kentucky Gazette.

On their trip up the river (Mississippi), they had the delightful view of a beautiful country for the distance of some 200 leagues to the Platte of Chato River which empties on the South of the Missouri ... the buffalo are found in numerous herds, and they are of great corpulence (fat). They describe two species of deer ... the elk and mountain goat are very numerous ... the geese are in abundance.

Though some trappers and traders had good relationships with Tribes, Indian people lost far more than they gained from the Fur Trade era. With the traders and trappers came disease. Epidemic disease accounts for about 90% of the loss of life among Indian people up to the year 1900. The smallpox epidemic of 1782 swept across the northern Plains and crossed the Rockies. Trader David Thompson, a witness to the tragedy estimated that it killed three-fifths of the Indians it touched. A measles epidemic in 1847 struck Fort Colville, causing disproportionate death among the children.² Series of repeated epidemics could have been the cause for Trapper John Work's observation in 1829, that according to his local informants, the Indian population was decreasing at a rapid rate.

Loss of life came not only through disease, which perhaps may have been the kinder death. The Russians moved into the fur trade, crossing Siberia to the Pacific Ocean, depleting Asian animals along the way and descending upon the Aleuts. The Russians made no attempt to hunt for themselves, instead they seized the Aleut villages,

demanding the men bring furs or the traders would kill the Aleut women and children. The Russian government exercised little control or interest, as long as the czar received their royal 105 tax on furs. As the animal populations decreased, the Aleuts began to resist and fight. The Russian traders then waged a war of extinction, leaving only enough to serve their sexual and financial needs. On San Nicolas Island off the coast of Southern California, the Russians exterminated all the men and captured the women, while they put Kodiaks to work hunting sea otters. The following year, the native women rebelled and killed their Russian captors.

Native communities were not the only ones to suffer as a consequence of the great capitalistic venture of the Fur Trade. In 1830 John Work observed a valley in eastern Oregon commenting, “they think a valley of beaver to be enough forever...” The beaver were exterminated by Work’s trappers in a matter of weeks.

In 1824, the Hudson Bay Company adopted a “scorched stream” policy, designed to exterminate the beaver in the areas the company trapped. By 1830, most Rocky Mountain streams were trapped out. But, by this time, the beaver was out of fashion as silk hats replaced the beaver hat. And soon buffalo robes came into demand and so the story goes.

Beyond the impact of the Fur Trade, and perhaps a more poignant and ironic point to address is that the expedition would never have succeeded without the knowledge and assistance given by Indian people. Stephen Ambrose states in his book, “The Mandans were patient with them. And protective too, although the captains hated to admit it. The expedition ate an enormous amount every day, and more every day as winter came on and it got colder ... To get through the winter the Americans were going to need large quantities of Indian corn, beans, and squash, and they were going to have to find a regular source of meat.”³

Upon leaving the Mandan, the expedition had elicited the assistance of Charbonneau and Sacajawea – who incidentally fed them their second day out by gathering Jerusalem artichokes – the expeditions’ hunters were unable to kill anything to eat.

The Shoshone were the next tribe to assist the expedition and they were in earnest searching for them to procure horses and information. Lewis wrote, “We begin to feel considerable anxiety with respect to the Snake Indians ... if we do not find them, I fear the successful issue of our voyage will be very doubtful or all events much more difficult in its accomplishment.”⁴

Lewis does meet the Shoshone and fortunately, he came upon an elder woman who facilitated the safety of his subsequent meeting with Cameahwait and her people. Horses and information were not all that Lewis requested of the Shoshone, he wanted their assistance crossing the Continental Divide at Lemhi Pass. According to Ambrose, he gave promises of guns and ammunition – upon his return from the Pacific. Charboneau reported that Sacajewea had overheard the Shoshone making plans to meet the Flatheads (Salish) to travel together to the Missouri to buffalo county to hunt. Many of Cameahwait’s people were without food. Ambrose states that Lewis scolded and rebuked

the Shoshone leaders, reminding them of their promise to assist them. After this rebuke, the leaders relented and provided assistance.

Now, finally, we come to the meeting of the expedition with my ancestors. The expedition was traveling south of present day Darby, at a site now called Ross' Hole, then called a Place of a Great Clearing by the Salish. The expedition had been observed by the Salish and watched to determine their purpose and intention. This account is said to have originally been told by the widow of Chief Victor.

One time when the Flatheads were camping at Ross' Hole, Chief Three Eagles left the camp to do some scouting. He feared that some enemy Indians might be sneaking near the camp, intending to steal horses. At a distance he saw a party of about twenty men travelling toward his camp. Except for the two chiefs riding ahead, each man was leading two pack horses. Chief Three Eagles was puzzled by the appearance of the strangers, for never before had he seen men not wearing blankets. Perhaps they have been robbed, he thought.

Returning to his people, he told them about the strange beings. He gave orders that all the horses should be driven in the camp and watched. Then he went back toward the party, hid himself in the forest, and watched them approach.

He saw that they were traveling slowly, without any suspicious behavior. The two leaders would ride ahead, seeming to survey the country, and then would go back and consult with the men.

"They must be two chiefs" Three Eagles thought. "But what are they after? And why does one of their men have a black face? Who can he be?"

The chief puzzled about the black man. Among his own people it was the custom to have a war dance if, on a buffalo hunt they should see sign of their enemies hiding around. For this dance the warriors painted themselves – some with red, others with yellow, others with black. While dancing they would encourage each other to fight bravely. "This black man," thought Chief Three Eagles, "must have painted his face black as a sign of war. The party must have fought with their enemies and have escaped, losing only their blankets."

Once more the chief returned to his camp and reported to his people. "They are traveling in our direction," he said. "Let us keep quiet and wait for them. They seem to have no intentions of fighting us or harming us."

So he and his people watched and waited. The strangers approached slowly, still showing no hostile intentions. When they came near the camp, the two leaders got off their horses and walked toward the people making signs of friendship. They shook hands with Chief Three Eagles. Then all the Indian men shook hands with all the white men.

“Bring the best buffalo skins,” said the chief. “One for each man to sit on.” Bring the best buffalo robes and put them over the men’s shoulders.”

The two leaders saw that the Indians were smoking a strange plant. They asked for some to fill their pipes. But they did not like it. “It is no good,” they said.

Cutting some of their own tobacco, they asked the Indians to fill their pipes with it. But the Indians did not like it. It made all of them cough and everybody laughed. Then the two leaders making signs, asked for some of the kinnikinnick. They mixed the leaves with their own tobacco and gave the mixture to the Indians. The Indians liked it. So the people smoked together.

Seeing that everybody was friendly, the white men decided to camp there near the Indians. As they unpacked their horses, they explained with signs that they had blankets in their packs used only for sleeping. So they gave back the robes.

The white men were very strong. Some of them carried on their shoulders very large logs to use for their campfires.

Our people and the white men continued to be friendly. On the third day they started off. We showed them how to get to the Lolo Fork trail, which is the best way to get to the Nez Perce country on the west side of the mountains.

Pierre Pichette told a similar version of this account. Pichette’s account varies in whom first spotted the expedition, and he tells us that after looking through the white men’s packs, Chief Three Eagles said:

“I think they have had a narrow escape from their enemies. All their belongings were taken away by the enemy. That’s why there is so little in their packs. Maybe the rest of the Tribe were killed. These men must be very hungry, perhaps starving. And see how poor and torn their clothes are...” The chief ordered food to be brought to them ... they did not take with them the robes and clothing that Chief Three Eagles had given them. Perhaps the white men did not understand that they were gifts.

To the Salish, the expedition was poorly dressed, lacking proper supplies and food, and unsure of where they were going. From the Lewis and Clark’s own description, their Shoshone horses were also in poor condition. The Salish treated the expedition with great hospitality, supplying them with horses and sharing their food – which was in meager supply, and directing them to the Lolo Trail.

The expedition’s next encounter was with the Nez Perce and again, they receive generous and life saving gifts. The US government did not reciprocate the kindness and hospitality extended to the expedition when the Nez Perce were driven from their homeland in 1877.

Today we can only speculate what would have happened if Indian people had not provided invaluable assistance to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. What might have

happened if any of the tribal nations had killed the expedition for invading their homelands? Would the westward movement have been slowed or impeded for ten years, twenty years, thirty years? I can only imagine what it might be like for me today if my language and culture had been intact for even one generation more. I would be a fluent speaker of my language.

The attention and celebration of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial is reminiscent of the Columbus Quincentenary. For some it gives rise to feelings of deep sentiment and patriotism. To others it is an opportunity for American to revision her history, to remember more fully her beginnings. I invite you to join me in that effort. This is America's coming of age, a time of truth telling. This is her rite of passage to a more just and humane society.

Our closing words will be *from Sand Creek*, by Simon J. Ortiz. (University of Arizona Press, 2000)

Buffalo were like dark rich clouds moving upon the rolling hills, plains, and rivers of America. And then the flashing steel came upon bone and flesh.

*The blood poured unto the plains, steaming like breath on winter morning;
the breath rose into clouds and became rain and replenishment.*

*The future will not be mad with loss and waste though the memory will be there
Eyes will become kind and deep, and the bones of this nation will mend ...*

Sources for this public presentation sponsored by the Lolo National Forest Service

Messages From the President on the State of the Fur Trade – Library of Congress

1. Northwest Anthropological Research Notes
2. *Harvesting Shadows* by H. D. Smiley
3. *Undaunted Courage* by Stephen Ambrose
4. DeVoto's edition of the Lewis and Clark Journals

The Salish oral histories of the meeting with the Lewis and Clark Expedition have been published in *The Salish People and the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, University of Nebraska Press, 2005, pp. 91-109.