

THE WHITE HOUSE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Classroom: Grades 9-12

President as Visionary: "Others Ask Why Not?"

Activity - We Come in Peace: Native Americans and the Legacy of Lewis and Clark

Stephen Ambrose, in *Undaunted Courage*, describes Jefferson's vision of America from a 1790s perspective:

In Jefferson's view the trans-Mississippi western empire could serve as a vast reservation for Indians displaced from east of the river. There they could learn to farm and become civilized, so that they could be incorporated into the body politic. Eventually, Louisiana would be available for farmers emigrating from the east or immigrating from Europe. There was land enough for all in a United States stretching from sea to sea, land enough to sustain the American dream for centuries to come.⁴

By the early 1800s, it seemed clear that if Louisiana became available to farmers coming from the East or from Europe, eventually the Indians would stand in the way. It had once seemed like enough land for all inhabitants, but already Jefferson was anticipating a time when that would not be true. It was important to court the Indians and, through peaceable means if possible, prevent their impeding the progress of white settlers. Jefferson told Congress that good relations with the tribes on the Missouri were "indispensable to the policy of governing those Indians by commerce rather than arms." According to Jefferson, "The Indians can be kept in order only by commerce or war. The former is cheapest." In a directive to William Henry Harrison, the governor of the Indiana Territory, Jefferson's view of the Indians, in all of its ambiguity, was expressed: "In the whole course of this, it is essential to cultivate their love. As to their fear, we presume that our strength and their weakness is now so visible that they must see we have only shut our hand to crush them."⁵ When the Corps of Discovery went west, they took that view with them.

Indeed, when Lewis and Clark encountered Indian tribes throughout their trip, they had instructions from President Jefferson as to how they were to represent the government of the United States. They repeated this pattern of introduction many times on their trip west. First, to impress the chiefs with American military power and technology, they displayed magnets, compasses, and spyglasses. Then they distributed gifts: beads, scissors, razors, mirrors, tobacco, and knives. They then presented medals struck with the image of President Thomas Jefferson on one side, and two hands clasped in friendship on the other. Lesser chiefs got paper certificates with blanks filled in for the name and tribe. Following the gift giving, the captains made a prewritten speech intended to explain the

new United States claim of sovereignty over the territory. In Lewis and Clark, Dayton Duncan and Ken Burns record portions of that speech:

Children. Your old fathers the French and the Spaniards have gone beyond the great lake toward the rising sun, from whence they never intend returning to visit their former red children.

Children. The great chief of the Seventeen Great nations of America, impelled by his parental regard for his newly adopted children on the troubled waters, has sent us out to clear the road . . . and make it a road of peace.

Children. Know that the great chief who has . . . offered you the hand of unalterable friendship is the great Chief of the Seventeen Great nations of America, whose cities are as numerous as the stars of the heavens, and whose people like the grass of your plains cover . . . the wide extended country . . . to where the land ends and the sun rises from the face of the great waters. . . . [H]e will serve you and not deceive you.

Children. Do these things which your great father advises and be happy . . . lest by one false step you should bring down upon your nation the displeasure of your great father . . . who could consume you as the fire consumes the grass of the plains.

Children . . . Follow [his] counsels and you will have nothing to fear, because the Great Spirit will smile upon your nation in future ages and will make you outnumber the trees of the forest.⁶

Activity:

We have the advantage of two hundred years of history to judge what happened to the tribes to whom these promises were made. Your goal will be to look at just one tribe the Lewis and Clark Expedition encountered along the way and find out what happened to it "in future ages."

1. Using the journals of Lewis and Clark, or a secondary source describing their journey, identify a specific Indian tribe encountered by the Corps of Discovery during the expedition. Use a marking pin to locate the place of that encounter on your classroom's political map of the United States.
2. To whatever degree your class time permits, read and collect notes about the first encounter between the tribe and Lewis and Clark and the subsequent history of that one tribe for the first hundred years (major events only) since the Corps arrived.

3. In 1904, the Great American Exposition was held in St. Louis, Missouri. Much attention was focused on the one-hundredth anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Imagine that you are the spiritual leader of your tribe and have been asked to speak at this exposition.
4. Keeping in mind the powerful oral tradition of many Native American tribes, develop a story featuring the significant events of that hundred-year tribal history. Use information from your study of the tribe's culture to set the right tone or approach to your narrative. Make your "voice" as authentic as possible.
5. Though you most likely won't have a costume, dress in a way that creates a mood for your presentation.
6. Imagine that your tribe has designed a "peace medal" for you to present to government officials who will introduce the Native America leaders at the Expo. Though the peace medals Lewis and Clark gave to the Indian chiefs were medallion size, you can make yours a bit larger, perhaps 6 x 6 inches to create a more detailed design. Think of this medal as representing two aspects of your tribal culture. On one side depict the most positive and enduring aspect of your tribal life since the coming of Lewis and Clark; on the other side, depict the biggest challenge your tribe has faced since then.
7. Use each side of the medal to help you present the story you prepared. After you have completed your narrative, display your medal in a tribal memory circle. After all storytellers have presented, turn each tribal medallion first to the positive side, then to the negative. Use this cluster of medals to generalize about the problems faced by tribes living in the Louisiana Territory in the hundred years after the expedition. Keep the tribal memory circle in place for a while, so your classmates will have a chance to look at the medals up close.

An accompanying activity

Using two outline maps, color in the area where your tribe lived at the time of the Lewis and Clark Expedition on the first map, then indicate the area of the United States where your people live today. Ask your other classmates, who studied other tribes, to do this as well, using the same two maps. Where are the Native Americans today? What patterns emerge from this exercise? Discuss these points with your classmates.