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# EXPLORING THE EXPLORERS

## GREAT PLAINS PEOPLES

### AND THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

JAMES P. RONDA

There are few stories that seem more commonplace than the narrative of the exploration of the American West. It is the stock-in-trade of countless textbooks, classroom lectures, and popular novels. In the traditional telling, European and American adventurers are the actors at center stage while Native Americans stand silently in the wings or have bit parts.

Much of exploration history labors under two burdens. First, we still see exploration events through the eyes of the European explorers themselves. Their stories become the only stories, their visions the only vision. For the most part exploration scholarship has not taken into account the ways Native and non-Native

peoples worked together to probe a shared world. And scholars have not paid sufficient attention to Native voices as they give balance and meaning to the exploration encounter. Second, many recent accounts continue to envision exploration as simply a physical journey across a material landscape. Generations of artists and writers have sought to reveal exploration as a venture aimed at understanding self, place, and the other. Exploration was, and remains in the Space Age, an interior pilgrimage, a passage that Joseph Conrad dared call a journey into the heart of darkness.<sup>1</sup>

These observations carry special force when applied to the Lewis and Clark expedition. The Lewis and Clark story is an emblematic tale, one that transcends the particular events to represent larger cultural truths. Lewis and Clark's odyssey has become a touchstone event in the history of the American West, a part of something that might be called the tale of the tribe. But the telling of that tale has often been narrow in range and focus. Like the rest of exploration history, the Lewis and Clark narrative has been repeated as the exclusive adventures of white American males. We need to reimagine the Lewis and Clark voyage, not as a

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trip through empty space but as a mutual encounter between diverse peoples and cultures.<sup>2</sup>

The expedition was as much the object of exploration as it was the agent for exploring. Lewis and Clark were both explorers and the explored. Native people looked at the American expedition and saw a new world. Travelers on both sides of the cultural divide struggled to fit new faces, new words, new objects, and new ways of being into familiar patterns of meaning. What happened along the Missouri River was mutual discovery. When we say the word "explorer" we should see a native face as quickly as we see the face of a bearded stranger. So I propose that we turn the familiar Lewis and Clark story upside down, that we see it through native eyes. What we need to do is make Lewis and Clark the uncharted territory and native people the explorers. Then perhaps we can grasp the complexity of this American discovery.

Long before Lewis and Clark left St. Louis, they had a set of images and preconceptions about the land and peoples they would meet along the way. Those images, drawn from many sources, informed and directed the expedition throughout its journey. We might begin by asking what images, what previous experiences Great Plains native people had about Europeans before 1804.

For native people who called the northern Plains home, white travelers were no novelty. By the time Lewis and Clark made their way up river, there was already half a century of contact between plains peoples and the outsiders. Beginning in the 1730s, first a trickle and then a steady stream of European visitors came to call. It was commerce, the traffic in furs, that brought men like David Thompson, James Slater, and Rene Jusseume to the Mandan and Hidatsa villages. Those merchants simply became part of a vast and complex native trade system in place long before any French *coureurs de bois* or Hudson's Bay Company men came to the northern Plains.

From these contacts plains people fashioned a set of expectations about white outsiders. These men, always men, came in small num-

bers. The typical trading party counted perhaps five or seven men. In the fifty years before Lewis and Clark, the largest recorded European trading expedition had ten men.<sup>3</sup> By the 1780s those visits fell into an almost predictable seasonal cycle. The traders, especially those from Canada, arrived in late fall or early winter and stayed several weeks. Native people expected those weeks to be filled with business, the exchange of pelts and skins for ironware, textiles, guns, and luxury goods.

The business they neither expected nor welcomed was politics and diplomacy. European empire builders rightly understood that fur traders were agents of imperial expansion. Along with the usual goods to sell, the traders brought flags, medals, and other symbols of national sovereignty. While Indians often accepted such objects out of curiosity, respect, or hospitality, they did not think that those things in any way diminished native sovereignty or bound them to a distant great father. While most of the traders left once the exchanges were concluded, the villagers came to expect that a few might take wives and enter the native social world. These men, known as resident or tenant traders, became important intermediaries bridging the cultural divide. Two of them—Rene Jusseume and Toussaint Charbonneau—played significant roles in the Lewis and Clark experience.

To these expectations about outsiders, we need to add one additional element. Early in the history of contact between native people and European traders, the goods that passed into native hands took on a special meaning. Meriwether Lewis grasped something of this when he wrote that Indians believed the first white traders "were the most powerful persons in the nation."<sup>4</sup> The apparent power of the whites—their technologies, seeming resistance to certain diseases, and exotic customs—could be shared with others by wearing or using things connected to the outsiders. A button, an awl, a gun, or an old tobacco box might have both utility in this world and a special force in the invisible but ever-present other world.

When the Lewis and Clark expedition came up the Missouri in 1804 the Corps of Discovery

presented native people with a spectacle at once familiar and yet strangely unexpected and unsettling. First there was the matter of size. What came up the river was by any standard a very large party, perhaps the largest yet seen on the Missouri. While the precise number remains elusive, there were at least forty men in the expedition company. And even a cursory look revealed a second unmistakable fact. These men were exceptionally well-armed. Trading parties always carried guns but no Indian could have confused this traveling infantry company for a traders' brigade. Weapons of all shapes and sizes—small cannons, pistols, rifles, muskets, and knives—were displayed for all to see. How this large, well-armed party sailed up river was also a source of wonder. St. Louis traders had used rafts, canoes, and perogues for river traffic. In the 1790s Spanish officials briefly experimented with small galleys but nothing could quite compare with the impressive keelboat captained by Lewis and Clark. Here was a river craft unique in design and impressive in size.

Once the American expedition settled in to winter quarters at Fort Mandan, near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota, the sense of the new and the strange continued. The fort itself was an architectural curiosity. Mandan and Hidatsa villagers knew all about constructing very large earth lodges and they had seen an occasional trading party put up a crude post but the American fort was something altogether different. Walls, barracks, guards, and a locked gate—here was a new way to define space under Dakota skies. What happened in and around the fort was equally new and bewildering. Native people reasonably assumed that trade was the principal reason any party came to the Missouri. At first glance Lewis and Clark certainly looked like traders. Their bales of goods held a virtual country store—everything from knives and fish hooks to mirrors and calico shirts. And Lewis and Clark talked about trade, trade with St. Louis merchants who were part of an expanding American commercial empire. But commerce did not follow the words. While the soldiers at Fort Mandan were always ready to

buy meat and corn, they showed no interest in pelts. These men were traders who did not trade.

The mystery of their intentions deepened as winter closed in. Earth lodge people always assumed that some of the resident traders would take village wives and become part of the family world. But the fort men were somehow different. They certainly sought the comforts of sex but made no moves to fulfill family obligations. For native women sex was bound up in family duties and, in the case of the buffalo-calling ritual, the quest for spirit power. Expedition men plainly saw intimate relations in a wholly different light. The bodies and some of the desires were the same; it was the meaning that did not translate across the divide.

What the captains said and did in their daily routine also did not square with previous plains experience. Squinting at the stars, recording temperatures, and collecting plant and animal specimens were strange things that demanded some explanation. Just as disturbing was all the American talk about the Great Father in Washington and the obedience owed to his wishes. During the Mandan winter, Lewis and Clark pursued an ambitious and ultimately unsuccessful diplomatic agenda. They sought to establish American sovereignty, to discredit Canadian rivals, and to forge an alliance with village peoples against the Sioux. A new political order had evidently come to the northern Plains, one that chiefs and elders now struggled to understand.

And there was one final part of the Lewis and Clark territory that demanded exploration. Most of the objects carried by the American explorers were now quite familiar to native people. European clothing, guns, all sorts of trade items—none of this was new. But there were some things, "curriossities" the captains called them, that were striking in form and function. When the Mandan Chief Black Cat visited the fort in late November 1804 he asked to see those objects. Out from their boxes came the latest wonders of western scientific technology. Surveying compasses, a precision chronometer, a sextant, and several telescopes—these things

represented a reality as remote and mysterious as anything from NASA.<sup>5</sup>

To native eyes the space in and around the expedition was a new world. Here were people, objects, and ways of behaving that challenged previous assumptions. All exploration involves measuring images and preconceptions up against what is immediately seen. Along the Missouri, plains people began to explore the shadowy Lewis and Clark country just as other natives had done elsewhere since the 1490s. Even before the Mandan winter and its longer time for mutual discovery, river folk had tried to chart the expedition world. In early September 1804 Black Buffalo's band of Brule Sioux had an angry face-off with the Americans at the confluence of the Bad and Missouri rivers. That confrontation revealed Lewis and Clark as unwelcome intruders, commercial rivals bent on both political and economic dominion.<sup>6</sup>

Further up river the American party spent five days at the Grand River Arikara villages. Like other river people, the Arikaras had seen white traders and their goods. But the intentions and behavior of the captains, their fascinating technology, and the presence of the black slave York sparked intense interest. What came out of that encounter was a vivid set of stories, a kind of exploration folklore. Arikaras asked: who were these strangers, where did they come from, and what was the meaning of their journey? Pierre-Antoine Tabeau, a French trader well acquainted with the Arikaras, recorded many of those stories. Kakawita, Tabeau's leading informant, reported that Arikaras thought the Americans were on a special vision quest and had encountered terrible monsters along the way. A sextant, a magnet, and phosphorous were pointed to as evidence of spirit powers. And there was York. He was the clearest sign of the supernatural, "a large fine man, black as a bear who spoke and acted as one."<sup>7</sup>

Those plains and river folk—Sioux and Arikaras—had only a brief moment to explore the mysterious strangers. Genuine exploration takes time; it is the work of larger views and longer talks. The winter of 1804-05 at Fort

Mandan was such a time. Here the American expedition was at rest, no longer defined by the traveling routines of up and out and on the way. For the Americans, exploration meant moving, measuring, observing, and recording. This was an abstract, almost detached process well-suited to the scientific spirit of the age. Landscape meant exploitable resources; people were objects to be studied and classified.

Native explorers pursued a different strategy. As hitherto unknown people, goods, and experiences entered the traditional circles of life, native people sought to maintain a harmonious balance between the old and the new. Exploration meant finding a suitable place for each new thing or person within the familiar framework. Indian explorers sought to domesticate the unknown, to name what seemed nameless. The native question was not so much "who are you" as "where do you fit?" To find the "fit" was to fix the meaning and keep all in balance. Indian explorers, and that means all native peoples of whatever age or gender, used simple but effective methods to probe the strangers. They looked at them, visited them, traded with them, shared all sorts of information, and on occasion made love with them. Lewis and Clark sought the new and gloried in it. Native explorers confronted the new, tried to soften its edges and make it like the old and the familiar.

Looking out from Fort Mandan, Lewis and Clark imagined a wilderness, a crowded wilderness but a wilderness nonetheless. From their earth lodges, Mandan and Hidatsa folk held a very different view of the landscape. When they surveyed the northern Plains they saw a great community of life. Fort Mandan, that odd one-house town, and its strange inhabitants were a challenge to the settled order of things. Here was something that needed to be folded into the everyday routines of life, made commonplace, and therefore comprehensible. Like European adventurers on their various travels, native discoverers undertook a journey to Fort Mandan, a journey of exploration and explanation. That voyage began by simply watching the strangers. For many plains people the American expedition was an almost irresistible tourist attrac-

tion. As the Lewis and Clark navy nosed its way up river into what is now North Dakota the banks were lined with curious onlookers. Sergeant John Ordway noticed that on many days the riverside galleries were packed with children.<sup>8</sup>

Once construction began on the fort there was even more to see. Native sidewalk superintendents observed everything from building the various quarters and rooms to setting the palisades and digging the latrines. As William Clark put it in one journal entry, Indian neighbors were “verry Curious in examining our works.”<sup>9</sup> Little wonder, since the fort looked like no other piece of plains architecture. Its angular lines, vertical walls, heavy gate, and windows must have fascinated Indians more accustomed to the rounded lines of domed earth lodges.

For all the pleasures of seeing, looking was not enough for native explorers. Exploration demanded participation. It was not a spectator sport. Visiting was an essential part of any frontier culture, whether in tidewater Virginia or on the northern Plains. Fort Mandan was no isolated outpost, caught in the grip of a Dakota winter and cut off from the simple joys of human companionship. Long before Lewis and Clark came into the country, Mandan and Hidatsa villagers had brightened their winters with a steady round of visits to the lodges of friends and neighbors. Life in the winter camps could be harsh and hungry, but there also were times for storytelling and gossip. Once Fort Mandan was built, the Americans became part of the social web that bound the villagers together. Indians were drawn not only to the fort itself but to the many “curriossities” they found inside.

It had long been expedition policy to display all sorts of weapons and scientific instruments in an effort to impress Indians with American power. When Hidatsa chief Le Borgne came to visit in early March 1805, he was shown everything from Lewis’s airgun to a spyglass. The Hidatsa promptly proclaimed these devices to be “Great Medicines.” Whether impressed or not, many visitors found the objects both mys-

terious and compelling. Thermometers, quadrants, writing paper, and metal goods of all sorts were worth a special visit to the fort. It was as if Fort Mandan had become a living museum of white American life, familiar in some ways but novel in so many others.<sup>10</sup>

During most of the winter, Indians found an unfailing welcome at Fort Mandan. And on most days, despite snow and falling temperatures, Indians came to explore the fort. Only once during the entire season were native people asked not to come calling. On Christmas day 1804 the expedition evidently wanted to do its own celebrating. Native neighbors were told that the festivities were part of a special “medicine day” for whites only.<sup>11</sup> On every other day the gates were open. Indian visitors brought a sense of friendship and good company. Visits usually meant sharing food and enjoying a dance or some fiddle music by Pierre Cruzatte. There must have been time to appreciate a fine bow, a good gun, or a skillfully decorated pair of moccasins. Visiting put names to faces and words to things. It humanized the unknown, softened its rough edges, and civilized the pale savages.

Plains people expected that strangers coming from afar made the journey to trade. Villagers used trade not only to enhance individual status but as a means to make and cement personal friendships. Indians who traded at the Mandan and Hidatsa villages were for the most part potential enemies or relatives of those killed in combat. Some means had to be found to stop possible violence and allow peaceful relations. Reflecting the fundamental native social reality that defined relatives as friends and outsiders as enemies, villagers and their trading partners created a ceremony in which strangers were made temporary, fictional relatives. Men who might later fight each other could for a brief time exchange goods, swap stories, and even share ritual practices as friends. Perhaps the bearded strangers could be made trading “relatives.”

Lewis and Clark surely fit the image of traders. They came with all sorts of goods. And the Americans talked a trading game. A large part

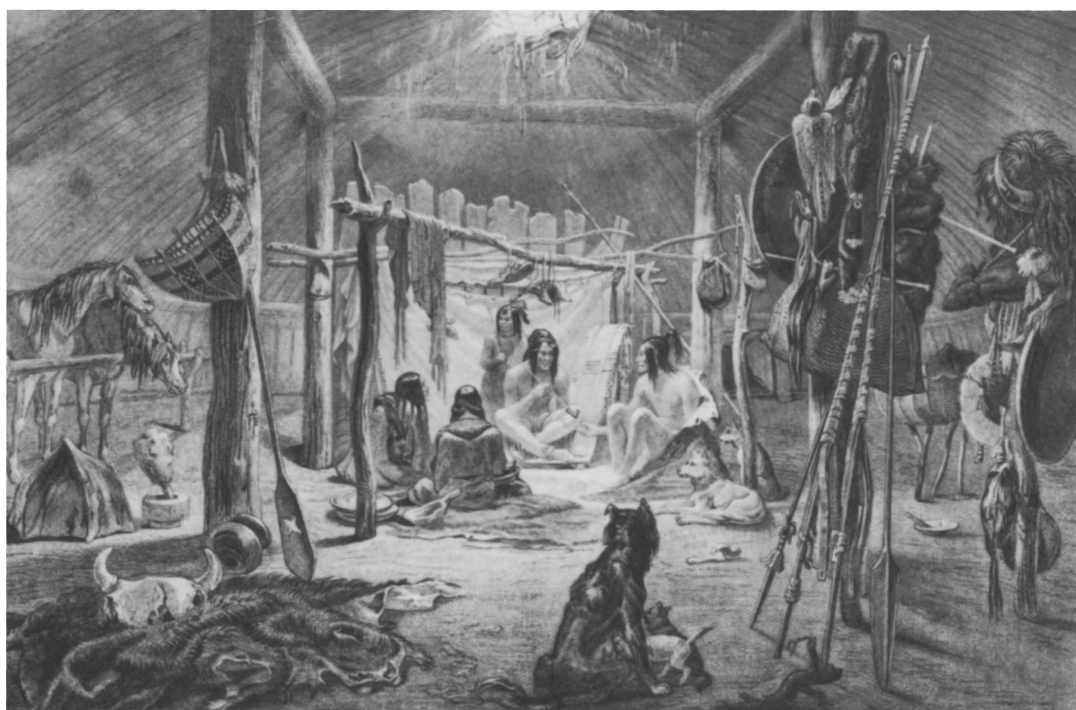


FIG. 1. After Karl Bodmer: "The Interior of the Hut of a Mandan Chief," engraving with aquatint. Courtesy of Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska; gift of the Enron Art Foundation.

of the expedition's diplomacy was aimed at redirecting the Indian trade away from Canadian markets and toward a St. Louis-based commercial system. Not only did the Americans look like traders and talk like traders, they sometimes acted like traders. Fort Mandan became a busy marketplace where skilled native merchants brought corn and meat in exchange for metal and textile items. At one point during the winter the American expedition was so desperate for corn that Indians were offered war axes in exchange for food. Lewis and Clark diplomacy preached intertribal peace but the power of necessity put weapons in the hands of those same warriors.

It seemed to make sense that the American explorers were in fact a large group of traders. But somehow for Indians exploring Lewis and Clark, that answer didn't quite make sense. For

all the goods and all the talk, the Americans did not behave like visitors from Canada. Fort Mandan had no fur warehouse. And these outsiders showed no inclination to become even temporary "relatives." By January 1805 some Mandan villagers were beginning to doubt that the label "trader" fit their fort neighbors. Earth lodge gossip had it that the Americans were stingy bargainers, unable or unwilling to compete with their Canadian rivals. When William Clark bitterly complained about all this loose talk, two Mandan elders quickly reassured him that the words were only in "jest and lafture."<sup>12</sup>

But this explanation barely covered what an increasing number of Indians had come to believe. Lewis and Clark were not traders. And if they were not traders, who were they? Exploring the American explorers, village people had come up against an almost unanswerable ques-

tion. The concept, the linguistic category employed to describe a large-scale expedition not for war, not for trade, not for hunting, simply did not exist. Warriors plotted war trails; merchants sought trade routes; hunters scouted game lands. Exploration apart from these activities was a pursuit utterly foreign to native peoples. Eventually Lewis and Clark hit upon an identity explanation that more completely fit the native universe of experience. Indians were told that the party was in search of distant, long-lost relatives.

Thomas Jefferson expected that his explorers would not so much march across the continent as question their way west. Deeply influenced by Enlightenment strategies, the president understood exploration as inquiry, not grand romantic adventure. Lewis and Clark went up the Missouri armed with a comprehensive set of questions on everything from botany and climatology to diplomacy and ethnography. Native explorers did not have such detailed question lists but they were inquirers nonetheless. One example here can stand for many. Few Indians were more regular visitors at Fort Mandan than Black Cat, chief of the Mandan village called Ruptáre. Lewis respected the quality of Black Cat's mind, calling him a man of "integrety, firmness, intelligence, and perspicuity."<sup>13</sup>

On a cold windy morning in November, Black Cat worked his way along the river bank to Fort Mandan. As Clark later recalled it, Black Cat "made Great inquiries respecting our fashions." We need to be sensitive to the many meanings of the word "fashion" as used by Clark. Black Cat was not especially interested in frontier *haute couture*, the latest stylings from a nineteenth-century Bill Blass or Christian Dior. Fashion meant customs, habits, and ways of being. Black Cat had already seen the "curriossities." Now he wanted to understand something about the fabric of ordinary American life. What kind of a world produced and used such objects? Clark's journal is silent on the particulars. We don't know if Black Cat's questions headed toward the shape of American houses or the domestic relations between

husbands and wives. But whatever the questions, Black Cat must have found the process satisfying. Within a few days he was eagerly sharing what Clark called "little Indian aneckdts."<sup>14</sup> The questions of exploration had sparked the dialogue of encounter.

Looking, visiting, questioning—this was exploring the new and the other on a personal level. But the American expedition posed a challenge on a much larger scale. That challenge was all about diplomacy—the complex web of relations between the native nations and their new neighbors. Lewis and Clark came to the Missouri with a diplomatic scheme that if implemented would have revolutionized the politics of the northern Plains. Were Lewis and Clark to have had their way, it would have indeed been a new world order. As agents of a young and ambitious imperial republic, the captains sought to proclaim American sovereignty and fashion an alliance of village peoples against the Sioux. Diplomacy was no new game for village chiefs and elders, but the American demands were so stiff that they called for another kind of exploring.

In hurried meetings and formal councils throughout the winter of 1804-05, native diplomats probed the territory that would come to be if Lewis and Clark prevailed. Typical of such gatherings were the exchanges at the end of October 1804. In a speech that was now a stock part of his repertory, Lewis sketched the outlines of a new political landscape on the Plains. There were the familiar themes—federal sovereignty, American trade, and intertribal peace. Such proposals did not seem extraordinary to the captains, but they did amount to substantial changes to the traditional ways the five Mandan and Hidatsa villages did business with both native and non-native outsiders.

At the end of the speech, Lewis introduced the most controversial feature in his plan. The assembled Indians must have known that the Arikara chief sitting in the council was more than a chance visitor. Now was the time to open the touchy issue of peace between the Arikaras and their Mandan and Hidatsa neighbors. That peace, so Lewis and Clark believed,



was a necessary preliminary to a general village coalition against the Sioux. The captains did not record the words they used to propose the peace treaty but what does survive is evidence of a culturally significant gesture. Clark, by now familiar with the protocol of plains diplomacy, took a pipe, smoked it, and passed it to the Arikara chief. That pipe was in turn handed around to the Mandan and Hidatsa representative. Clark noted later, "They all smoked with eagerness."<sup>15</sup>

That eagerness did not mean assent. At most it meant that men like Black Cat were ready to begin a diplomatic exploration of what must have seemed suspect terrain. Black Cat, adept at probing other parts of that terrain, was equally skilled at feeling his way in the murk of diplomacy. Because the American explorers thought Black Cat was the most powerful Mandan chief, they were anxious to know his thoughts. At mid-day on 31 October Clark and interpreter Rene Jusseume walked down to Black Cat's village. At Rupt re Clark was welcomed "and with great ceremony was Seated on a robe by the Side of the Chief." Black Cat placed a fine buffalo robe over Clark's shoulders "and after smoking the pipe with several old men around" began to speak.<sup>16</sup>

Black Cat's speech was a carefully worded reply to the American proposals. It was a response designed to reassure Lewis and Clark without tying the villages too closely to an uncertain policy and a chancy future. He went directly to the heart of the matter. Intertribal peace made sense, at least to elders and chiefs. Black Cat graphically illustrated what he saw as the benefits of such a peace, saying it would mean "they now could hunt without fear, and their women could work in the fields without looking every moment for the enemy." But this bright vision of a promising future did not mean that Black Cat was ready to become an American client. In his mind there were many unanswered questions. Earlier trader-diplomats, men like John Evans, had made extravagant promises about goods, markets, and protection against hostile outsiders. Those proved empty offers. Would the American ones be any better?

The Great Father in Washington was only the most recent in a long line of distant sovereigns who handed out medals and flags. Each father asked much but in the end proved powerless and faithless. Would the chief of the American fires be any better? Later in November, Black Cat accepted a peace medal and an American flag. And there was his promise—made under considerable duress—to keep Union Jacks and King George medals out of his village.<sup>17</sup> Lewis and Clark imagined a plains diplomatic landscape filled with treaties, alliances, and the fixed bureaucracies of nation-states. Black Cat and his successors now had to explore that country. Such a journey would prove a perilous voyage, far more dangerous than any trek across the windswept plains.

T. S. Eliot once wrote that all exploring begins with an outward journey and ends with an interior passage back to one's inner self. Exploration is a kind of self knowledge. When native people explored Lewis and Clark they may have come to know themselves with more clarity. Whether that happened or not, Indian explorers pursued the obvious strategies as they faced the new country. Looking, visiting, questioning, and counseling—all these were visible voyages made before the public gaze. But there was a final kind of discovery and exploration, one that was intensely personal and profoundly private. It was the exploration of the body, the intimate territory of another self.

Lewis and Clark knew that there would be liaisons between members of the expedition and Native American women. The captains accepted such relations as inevitable and thought about them in largely medical terms. For the practical captains, sex meant venereal disease. It was a clinical issue, something to be dealt with by doses of mercury from penis syringes. The American exploration strategy never considered sex as anything other than a physical problem or a momentary dalliance.

For Native American women on the northern Plains sexual relations with men other than their husbands took place within rigidly prescribed limits. In the buffalo-calling ceremony, wives of younger men courted and had inter-

course with older men. Those intimate relations were like a conduit that transferred spiritual power and hunting skill from an older man to a younger one. When non-natives, both black and white, appeared on the scene, Indian women, and sometimes their spouses, sought them out. As Clark noted, "the Indians say all white flesh is medisan." In one especially revealing incident, an Arikara husband stood guard at the door of his lodge lest anyone interrupt the tryst between his wife and York.<sup>18</sup> Sex could appropriate power and place it in native hands. Here Indian women explored the intimate unknown, expecting to find great strength and a different kind of knowledge.

No nineteenth-century American exploring party made a fuller and more intimate record of its daily doings than the Lewis and Clark expedition. When expedition journal keepers encountered native women, the accounts they wrote revealed some things while concealing others. Journal entries made it plain that women were defined in terms of sexual identity, reproductive history, and domestic labor. Euro-American explorers were bound by those definitions, and blinded to the other ways that native women explorers might behave. What is either missing in or concealed by the journals are the ways native women explored the worlds beyond the sexual. Like native men, women must have studied the ways and means, the sights and sounds of the bearded strangers. That the strangers took no notice of that exploring activity diminishes both the written record and our appreciation of the larger exploration encounter.

It is not easy to judge how well native explorers came to know their strange neighbors. What did all the looking, visiting, questioning, talking, and lovemaking finally produce? Did native explorers succeed in "civilizing" the strangers? Did they give them new names or influence their behavior? There are no certain answers to these questions. There is no scholarly edition of documents and maps called *The Journals of Black Cat*. What survives are evocative fragments hinting at a major effort of mind and spirit, the struggle to know

the other. Two unrelated events at the end of the winter of 1804-05 can tell us something about the Indian enterprise to understand what had quite suddenly become a new world.

In early March 1805 the Hidatsa chief Le Borgne came to Fort Mandan for a meeting with Lewis. As the two men talked through an interpreter, there was a buzz of commotion in the Hidatsa delegation. Finally the chief explained what was going on. "Some foolish young men had informed him that there was a black man in the party." Le Borgne doubted that any man was wholly black. Perhaps the man in question was simply wearing black paint in mourning for a lost relative. With that, Lewis produced Clark's slave York. In that moment Le Borgne the explorer had to confront what seemed the unthinkable, the unimaginable. Was York a man, was he really black? Clark heard later that Le Borgne was "astonished" by the sight of York. The chief examined York closely and then "spit on his hand and rubbed in order to rub off the paint." York quickly grasped what was going on, pulled off the bandana from his head, and showed Le Borgne his hair. Amazed by black skin and curly hair, the Indian was convinced that York was "of a different species from the whites."<sup>19</sup>

If Le Borgne was bewildered by his foray into the unknown, Black Cat's more extensive exploration of the Lewis and Clark world produced a larger measure of understanding. On a warm day in early April 1805, just before the American explorers left for the Pacific, Black Cat had a final visit with the captains. They smoked together and then the Indian gave Clark "a par of excellent Mockersons."<sup>20</sup> Smoking and a gift—perhaps gestures that acknowledged an exploration enterprise at least partially fulfilled. Clark now had a place in Black Cat's world. The pipe and the moccasins said as much. What happened along the Missouri was a continuation of a process that began in 1492. Two very different worlds collided and out of that collision came something new and unsettling. Black Cat, Le Borgne, Lewis, and Clark—all were new world explorers bound together in the common cause of discovery.

## NOTES

1. Exploration historiography is discussed at length in James P. Ronda, *The Exploration of North America* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1992).

2. The full range of Lewis and Clark scholarship is discussed in James P. Ronda, "The Writingest Explorers: The Lewis and Clark Expedition in American Historical Literature," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 112 (October 1988): 607-30.

3. W. Raymond Wood and Thomas D. Thiessen, eds., *Early Fur Trade on the Northern Plains: Canadian Traders Among the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians, 1738-1818* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), table 1.

4. Lewis, "Observations and Reflections, August, 1807," in Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 2: 698.

5. Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 8 vols. to date (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983—), 3:242. Hereafter cited as JLCE.

6. James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp. 27-41.

7. Annie H. Abel, ed., *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), pp. 200-201.

8. Milo M. Quaife, ed., *The Journals of Captain Meriwether Lewis and Sergeant John Ordway* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1916), p. 159.

9. JLCE, 3: 238.

10. JLCE, 3: 310-11; Quaife, ed., *Journals of Lewis and Ordway* (note 8 above), p. 186.

11. Quaife, ed., *Journals of Lewis and Ordway* (note 8 above), p. 174.

12. JLCE, 3: 267.

13. JLCE, 3: 289.

14. JLCE, 3: 237, 238, 240, 311, quotations 237 and 311.

15. JLCE, 3: 208-11, quotation 209.

16. JLCE, 3: 218.

17. JLCE, 3: 218-19, 242.

18. "Biddle Notes," in Jackson, ed., *Letters* (note 4 above), 2: 503, 538; JLCE, 3: 209, 268.

19. "Biddle Notes," in Jackson, ed., *Letters* (note 4 above), 2: 539.

20. JLCE, 4: 13-14.