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Review of *Finding the West: Explorations with Lewis and Clark* By James P. Ronda

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Finding the West: Explorations with Lewis and Clark. By James P. Ronda. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001. Maps, index. xxii + 138 pp. \$22.95.

Amid the hype over the bicentennial of the Lewis and Clark expedition, University of Tulsa history professor James Ronda has written a work of eminent common sense that provides an antidote to the myth-making surrounding the journey of the Corps of Discovery. A prolific scholar of the West and the Lewis and Clark expedition, Ronda here presents seven "stories" and a map essay examining the wider context, the cultural and political assumptions, and the impact of the trek. "Such a reconsideration," Ronda insists, "might reveal not one voyage but many, not one band of explorers but whole congregations of the intrepid and the curious." The book is not a comprehensive re-telling of the entire Lewis and Clark narrative but rather a series of snapshots depicting various interpretive angles.

In Ronda's hands the Lewis and Clark expedition becomes a truly American story that includes Indians, the courage and naivete of the explorers, and the imperial ambitions of a young nation. Included among the voyages Ronda explores are Thomas Jefferson's perceptions of nature and rivers, Lewis and Clark's place within the pantheon of North American explorers since Columbus, the false impressions of the West as an "empty" land, the way that an Enlightenment and East Coast background colored Lewis and Clark's perceptions of what they saw in the West, the uncertainty of American control over the West in September 1806 as news of Aaron Burr's "conspiracy" with Spain in the deep South and British intrusion into the West reached Jefferson at Monticello, the Clatsop Indian Coboway's investigation of the Corps of Discovery as they camped at Fort Clatsop in the winter of 1805-06, and the failure of the expedition to fulfill its primary goal of finding an all-water route through the continent.

"Beyond any initial thoughts of failure," Ronda reminds us, however, "was the emer-

gence of a global power with imperial aspirations." *Finding the West* forces us to recognize that the expedition was not a single event isolated in time but rather the start of a continent-wide American nation focused on further expansion. Moreover, "[c]oming to terms with Lewis, Clark, and all those touched by their journey compels us to face our own troubled past and our uncertain present." This book will find a wide readership among academic and general students of American history.

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