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Review of *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* By James P. Ronda

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Lewis and Clark Among the Indians. By James P. Ronda. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. Illustrations, maps, afterword, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. 310 pp. \$24.95.

In his instructions of June 1803 to Meriwether Lewis concerning the conduct of what was to become known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Thomas Jefferson made it quite clear that one of the Expedition's purposes was to pave the way for the development of American commerce with the Indians of the northern Plains, Rocky Mountains, and Pacific Northwest. That was soon to occur but the President could not have anticipated the longer-term economic spin off for the nation's publishing industry. Since the appearance in 1807 of the first printed account of the Expedition more than one hundred books have been published about it. Until the mid-twentieth century these consisted mainly

of editions of the journals and popularized accounts, but in recent decades there has been a steady increase in the publication of carefully edited primary materials and well researched thematic studies. James Ronda's book is quite clearly in the latter category and complements thematic books and papers on Captains Lewis and Clark as linguists, naturalists, cartographers, and creators of regional images. Although it draws on essentially the same primary sources, it does not duplicate any of these and therefore merits serious attention.

The "among" of the book's title is too weak a conjunction. The work is concerned almost exclusively with three sets of two-way relationships: between the two captains and each of nineteen or so groups of Indians; between Indians and the members of the Corps of Discovery; and between the different Indian groups as perceived by Lewis and Clark. Ronda's approach is that of a historian, with a sound knowledge of the region's ethnohistory, an ability to reconstruct personalities, and a well developed awareness of spatial relationships. Consciously, or otherwise, he adopts two strategies: reconstructions of events illuminated by retrospective understanding; and spatial analyses of strategic relationships between the different groups of Indian, English, and Canadian traders and the Corps of Discovery as the representative of American interests. The reviewer found the spatial analyses particularly revealing. The remarkable ability of Jefferson to anticipate the essential nature of these macro relationships and the extent to which his two representatives were able to clarify them are well brought out, though the deliberate emphasis on people rather than region inevitably obscures the fact that the two captains were unravelling relationships in a veritable terra incognita approximately twice as extensive as the then seventeen states of the union. In his reconstructions of events, Ronda covers a wide range of topics including conference procedures, ethnographic methods, problems of language translation, and sexual relations. In his portrayals of individual Indians he is a

perceptive interpreter of the evidence and avoids the gross culture bias of many earlier authors (a four page appendix on Sacagawea corrects many widely held but false impressions). Ronda is also good at evaluating the captains' failures and successes. Whereas the material cultures and day-to-day domestic and economic activities of the Indians were for the most part well recorded, social structures, myths, and "religious" practices were either unrecorded or misunderstood.

The book is typographically well designed, physically well produced, and has a useful index. However, most of the eighteen halftone reproductions of watercolors, drawings, and photographs are unsatisfactory and add little to the text. The main route map, though potentially valuable, is just too small to reveal all that it attempts to represent or to show all that it should. The dust jacket suggested a children's book to the reviewer's teenage daughter and the reproduction of the Charles M. Russell painting thereon had already reminded her father of a 1930s Sunday school prize. But these are relatively minor criticisms of a book which will take its place alongside the thematic works of John Allen and Paul Cutright as an original contribution to our understanding of the roles and achievements of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. With them it will remain a landmark; at least until the University of Nebraska Press has completed its ambitious project to publish an eleven-volume edition of the expedition's journals, after which a new generation of scholars will have new and more accessible materials with which to work.

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