

LEWIS AND CLARK: THE PAPER ASSIGNMENT



In honor of the ongoing bicentennial celebrations for the Lewis and Clark expedition, your assignment is to write a 5-8 page essay (typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. font, 1-inch margins) on the expedition following one of the topics below. Use Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Lewis and Clark Journals: An American Epic of Discovery* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003) as your major source. Unless specified by the topic or explicitly approved by Prof. Pasley, you should use no other sources at all except your textbooks. Indicate where you got a particular quote or bit of information in the book with page numbers in parentheses after the sentence or paragraph in question. When using the Moulton book, pay particular attention to whose journal a passage comes from and when and where it was written. There is no specific reading assignment in the Moulton book. You will want to start with the introduction and then begin working your way through the journey as soon as you can, before selecting a topic. Using the index, it may be possible to investigate a particular topic by reading around in the book, but it is your responsibility to ground and document your points as thoroughly as possible, even if that means reading the entire book.

The papers will be graded according to the following criteria: Your paper must have a definite overall thesis or argument that is logically developed and well documented from the materials available to you. You should use these materials and answer the question (or carry out the assignment) as thoroughly as possible. The extent to which you appear to have read and considered both the Moulton book and the other relevant course materials, including the textbook and online readings, will be a factor in the grading. Your writing must be clear, specific, and free of grammatical and typographical errors. Engaging the reader's interest will be a help, too. One style point that is of great importance for your instructor is the use of a title. Give your paper a title that captures your major argument or theme in some way. If you can't come up with a title any more descriptive than "A Paper on Lewis and Clark," then the odds are good that you don't have a clear argument or theme.

The papers will be due on Thursday, April 29, at the beginning of class.



TOPICS

1. Responding to the Lewis and Clark commemorations, journalist David Plotz of *Slate* (Microsoft's online magazine), wrote a blistering assessment of Lewis and Clark carrying the headline, "Stop celebrating. They don't matter." Read Plotz's article at <http://slate.msn.com/id/2069382> and write your own response. Are Lewis and Clark really worthy of the public adulation they are currently receiving? What makes them truly significant historical figures, or not?
2. Read President Thomas Jefferson's instructions to Capt. Meriwether Lewis (available at <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/jefflett.html> or <http://www.monticello.org/education/lcresource/instructions.html>). How effectively did Lewis and Clark carry out their instructions, as well as Jefferson's larger purposes for the expedition? For this assignment, you are welcome to draw on Jefferson's other writings, available online from the Library of Congress and the University of Virginia.
3. *St. Louis Special!* The Missouri History Museum in Forest Park is currently hosting the opening of a huge national Lewis and Clark exhibition. (See <http://www.lewisandclarkexhibit.org/index.html> for more information.) Visit the exhibition and write a review-essay in which you compare and contrast the view of Lewis and Clark presented at the exhibition with what you learned about them reading their journals. This essay could take the form of a review of the actual exhibition or an essay on the themes brought out by the exhibition.
4. Probably most important among the many aspects of the expedition was its role as a diplomatic mission to the Indians of the Louisiana Purchase and the Pacific Northwest. The U.S. had just taken possession or hoped to soon take possession of the area and it was vitally important that the cooperation or (at least) the acquiescence of the native population be gained. How well did this aspect of the mission go? How did they approach

the various Indians they met (you can focus on 2 or 3 examples), and what sort of relationships did they establish?

5. One of the claims often made for the Lewis and Clark expedition, especially in arguments for celebrating them today, revolves around the alleged egalitarianism of the expedition. As the story goes, the rigors of life on the trail brought a diverse group of people together across the usual lines of race, class, and gender, turning the expedition into a microcosm of an idealized "melting pot" America. How accurate is this interpretation, based on your reading of the journals? What facts and passages seem to support or refute it? Give your own interpretation of the relations that existed among the various social and ethnic groups and individuals who participated in the expedition.
6. Lewis and Clark's Indian ally Sacagawea has even bigger historical reputation than the two captains. She is the only member of the expedition to get her own coin after all. Is this reputation justified? Reconstruct Sacagawea's story as you see it in the journals. Who was she and what did she actually do? What was her role in the expedition, and her relationships with the other members?

More topics may be added later as they occur to me. Be sure to indicate in the paper which topic you are writing on. You may devise your own topic, but in order for the paper to be accepted, you must first write a topic statement/question like those above, and then have it approved in advance by Prof. Pasley.