1. The Condition of White American and Indian Tribes

Lewis was born in a place where the West invited exploration, but the East could provide education and knowledge, where the hunting was magnificent but plantation society provided refinement and enlightment, where he could learn wilderness skill while sharpening his wits about such matters as surveying, politics, natural history and geography. (p. 19)

Meriwether Lewis was born on the eve of revolution into a world of conflict between Americans and the British government to control of the trans-Appalachian West in a colony whose western ambitions were limitless, a colony that was leading the surge of Americans over the mountains, and in a country that was a nursery of explorers. (p. 20)

As a child, Meriwether absorbed a strong anti-British sentiment. This came naturally to any son of a patriot growing up during the war; it was reinforced by seeing a British raiding party led by Colonel Bonastre Tarleton sweep through Albermale in 1781. (p. 24)

A Virginia gentleman was expected to be hospitable and generous, courteous in his relations with his peers, chivalrous towards woman, and kind to his inferior. (P. 31)

The Virginians lust for land and their resulting rage for speculations can only marvelled at. (p.32)

Life at Monticello in the years after the revolution was delightful to the eye, ear, taste and intellect. Just imagine an evening as Thomas Jefferson's guest, following a day of riding magnificent horses over hedges, fields, and rivers, chasing fox or deer or bear. (p.33)

The glittering social, intellectual, economic and political life of Virginia rested on the backs of slaves. Those backs were crisscrossed with scars, because slavery relied on the lash. (p. 34)

No man did more for human liberty than Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and of Virginia's Statue for Religious Freedom, among other gifts to mankind. (p. 34)

The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. (p. 35)

Jefferson's attitude toward Indians was the exact opposite of his attitude toward Negroes. (p. 35)

In 1785, he wrote, "I believe the Indian then to be in body and mind equal to the white man." He thought the only difference between Indian and white men was religion and the savage behaviour of the Indians, which was caused by the environment in which the Indian lives. Never did he say that the perceived shortcomings of the Negro—such as laziness and thievery—were caused by their condition as slaves. (p. 55)

When Jefferson or young Virginian like Lewis and Clark looked at an Indian, they saw a noble savage ready to be transformed into civilized citizen. When they looked at a Negro, they saw something less than a human, something more than an animal. (p. 55)

These Indian tribes were virtually unknown except to a handful of British and French fur traders.((p.154)

The Indians said their band of combined Otoes and Missouris numbered 250. They were a farming as well as a hunting people, with semi-permanent towns. (p. 156)

2. Colonization Issues

2.1 Politics

Rivers dominated Jefferson's thinking about North America. For the immediate future, he was determined to get control of New Orleans for the United States, so as to prevent the West from breaking away from the United States. (p.54)

There were scores of Indian tribes living across Louisiana, but given their lack of effective political organization, their inability to combine forces into an alliance, their utter dependence on whites for rifles, and the experience of Americans east of Appalachian in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in Kentucky and Ohio in the 1790s, it could taken for granted that the conquest of the Indian tribes would be bloody, costly, time consuming but certain. (p. 55)

He believed in what he called an "Empire of Liberty". "Our confederacy must be viewed as the nest from which all American, North or South, is to be peopled." (p.56)

The first purpose, Jefferson wrote, "was to find the shortest and most convenient route of communication between U.S. and the Pacific Ocean, within the temperate latitude."(p.70)

But as a politician Lincoln knew that more justification was needed to keep the Federalists from howling at the cost. He came up with a rationale that would appeal to the new England clergy: advertise the thing as a mission to elevate the religious beliefs of the heathen Indians. "If the enterprise appears to be, an attempt to advance them, it will by many people, on that account, be justified, however calamitous the issue." Jefferson bought the idea; in his final instructions he ordered Lewis to learn what he could about Indian religion, because it would help "those who may endeavour to civilize and instruct them. (p.93)

"In all your intercourse with the natives," Jefferson went on, treat them in the most friendly and conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit." Lewis should "satisfy them of your journey's innocence," but simultaneously tell them of the size and strength of the United States. (p. 95)

In general, Jefferson wanted Lewis to inform the tribes that the new father intended to embrace them into a commercial system that would benefit all involved, and that to make this happen the new father wished them to make peace with one another. Lewis's objectives, as given to him by Jefferson, were to establish American sovereignty, peace, and a trading empire in which the warriors would put down their weapons and take up traps. (p. 154)

As a good father, the president told his children how to behave. (p. 157)

Do as we say, in other words, or no white man will come to you again, ever. That was an extreme threat, strange as it sounds to modern ears. (p. 158)

2.2 Economics

Slaves and land are necessary to grow cotton; the land was available in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi; the slaves were available from the excess on the Virginia plantations. These were the central economic facts in the life of the Virginia gentry, whose principal export soon become slaves. (p. 35)

Rivers dominated Jefferson's thinking about North America. For the immediate future, he was determined to get control of New Orleans for the United States, so as to prevent the West from breaking away from the United States. (p.54)

Spain claimed to own Louisiana, which was roughly defined as that part of the interior of the continent drained by the Missouri River and the Southwestern tributaries of the Mississippi River. (p.55-56)

The British had fur-trading interests in upper Louisiana, and a claim of sorts to the Oregon Country west of the Rockies. The Russians had interests in the area around and north of the mouth of Columbia. The Spanish had some vague claims to the entire Pacific Coast. The French, who had once owned Louisiana and whose people (French Canadians) were the only white men to have much experience in Louisiana, were considering reasserting their position. (p.56)

He believed in what he called an "Empire of Liberty". "Our confederacy must be viewed as the nest from which all American, North or South, is to be peopled." (p.56)

There is on the globe one single spot, the possessor of which is our natural and habitual enemy. It is New Orleans, through which the produce of three eights of our territory must pass to market. (p.72)

Commerce being the principal object, Jefferson naturally wanted Lewis to learn what he could about the routes used by the British traders coming down from Canada to trade with the Missouri river tribes, and about their trading methods and practice. He wanted Lewis to make suggestions as to how the fur trade, currently dominated by the British, could be taken over by Americans using the Missouri route. (p. 94)

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This brought back some realism to the commander-in-chief's orders. Relations with the Indians were important, establishing commercial ties with them was desirable but the sine qua non of the expedition was to get to the Pacific and return with as much information as possible. (p. 154)

But if the Otos did as Lewis advised them, he would see that a trading post was set up at the mouth of the Platte, where they could bring their furs to trade for "a store of goods in such quantities as will be equal to your necessities." Meanwhile, their old traders, whether French or British, could stay among them as long as they acknowledged the supremacy of the United States and gave good council. (p. 157)

Lewis hoped to make the Sioux the centrepiece of the vast American trading empire he was trying to establish, and he thought this was such a good deal for the Sioux that they couldn't say no. (p. 161)

2.3 Culture

There were no public schools in eighteenth century Virginia. Planters' sons got their education by boarding with teachers, almost always preachers or parsons, who would instruct them in Latin, mathematics, natural science and English grammar. (p. 25)

"Virginians are of genuine blood," said one traveller. "They will dance or die."(p.30)

"Any young gentleman, travelling through the Colony…is presumed to be acquainted with dancing, boxing, playing the fiddle, and small sword, and cards."(p.30)

There was a high standard of politeness; Jefferson once remarked that politeness was artificial good humor, a valuable preservative of peace and tranquillity. Wenching and other debauchery, heavy drinking, and similar personal vices were common enough, but as long as they did not interfere with relations between members of the gentry they were condoned. The unpardonable sins were lying and meanness of spirit. (p.30)

The entertainment would begin with toasts to successful hunters. The table would be groaning under weight of sweet potatoes, peas, corn, various breads, nuts, quail, ham, venison, bear, ducks, milk and beer, all produced locally. (p.34)

If it was a large party, there would be conversations in French, Italian and German as well as English. Jefferson would play the violin for the Virginia reel and other dances–when he wasn't talking. (p. 34)

Attitudes toward and relations with women are central to every man's personality and character, but seldom discussed, especially among eighteenth-century Virginia gentry. (p.36)

In America, Jefferson rejoiced, women knew their place, which was in the home and, more specifically, in the nursery. Instead of gadding frivolously about town as Frenchwomen did, chasing fashion or meddling in politics, American women were content with "the tender and tranquil amusements of domestic life" and never troubled their pretty heads about politics (p. 37)

The parents storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances . (p.72)

Encounters with the Mandans were altogether different. The neighbors got along just fine. The chiefs and captains, warriors and men called on one another, went hunting together, traded extensively, enjoyed

sexual relations with the same women on a regular basis, joked, and talked. (p. 193)

Jefferson had a passion for Indian language, believing he would be able to trace the Indian's origin by discovering the basis of their language. So the gathering of vocabularies was an important charge on the captains. They put a major effort into attempting to render words from various Indian languages into an English spelling. (p. 203)

The Indians had given the white men "a very formidable account of the strength and ferocity of this animal," but Lewis had discounted the information, because the Indians had only bows and arrows or "the indifferent guns with which the traders furnish them, with these they shoot with such uncertainty and at so short a distance that they frequently mis their arm and fall a sacrifice to the bear." It gave him a bit of pause that the Indians, before attacking a grizzly, went through all the rituals they commonly used before going on a war party; still, he, Clark, and the men had faith in their long rifles and were eager to challenge the grizzly. (p. 219)

With much ceremony, he put tippets such as the Shoshones were wearing around the necks of the white men. Lewis realized that the chief's suspicious still strong, that he wanted to make the white men look like Indians in case it was Blackfeet and not Clark waiting at the forks. Realizing this, Lewis took off his cocked had and put it on Cameahwait. The men followed his example, "and we were soon completely metamorphosed." (p. 275)