• James Holmberg on Clark’s Enslaved “Family”
• Kevin O’Brien on the Language of Place and the Place of Language
• Book Review: The Hudson’s Bay Company
Cameras By Any Other Name Would Smell as Sweet

Confucius said, “The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their proper name.”

What was the name of York’s wife?

York had one and of course she had a name. His love and loyalty to her cost him his relationship with William Clark, who was outraged that his body servant (his slave, his property) was unwilling to “give over that wife of his” and settle down in St. Louis beginning in 1808. In his article in this issue of WPO, Jim Holmberg writes that we know more about York than about most enslaved people in the era of Thomas Jefferson thanks to William Clark’s voluminous correspondence. And yet we do not know the name of York’s wife.

We’ve been getting it wrong from the very beginning. When Christopher Columbus bumped accidentally into the Bahamas in 1492, thinking he had arrived in Asia, he called the Indigenous people *Los Indios*, the people of India, the sub-continent Indians. That misnomer has stuck with such tenacity that even now, 529 years later, the word “Indians” is still widely, if no longer universally, used to identify the Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

The Euro-American conquest and settlement of North America were accomplished by many means: war and purchase and broken treaties; assimilation and alcohol and the lure of White men’s industrial goods; inadvertent epidemic; demonization and dehumanization; the cultivation of what the settlers called “friendlies” and the fierce chastisement of the “recalcitrants;” and by cultural genocide. There was a linguistic conquest, too. Although the occupiers retained some Native American names – Monongehela, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio – they usually erased the Indigenous nomenclature and replaced it with their own terms. The continent became America thanks to the writings of the Italian traveler and empresario Amerigo Vespucci. New York, New Jersey, and New Hampshire hearkened back to the English world. Meriwether Lewis renamed a number of rivers in Montana for members of the Jefferson administration. Whatever the three branching tributaries of the Missouri were called by their Indigenous sovereigns before July 28, 1805, on that day they became the Madison (Secretary of State), the Gallatin (Secretary of Treasury), and Jefferson (President of the United States).

Erasure and replacement

But recently, things have begun to change – so quickly that they have alarmed many people with good hearts and open minds.

Harney Peak in the Black Hills, named for an agent of conquest in 1855, was renamed Black Elk Peak on August 11, 2016, for the Lakota spiritual leader who was carried there in his great vision in 1855, was renamed Black Elk Peak on August 11, 2016, for the Lakota spiritual leader who was carried there in his great vision in 1855, was renamed Black Elk Peak on August 11, 2016, for the Lakota spiritual leader who was carried there in his great vision in 1855, was renamed Black Elk Peak on August 11, 2016, for the Lakota spiritual leader who was carried there in his great vision in 1855, was renamed Black Elk Peak on August 11, 2016, for the Lakota spiritual leader who was carried there in his great vision in 1855, was renamed Black Elk Peak on August 11, 2016, for the Dakotah people by their mortal enemies. Theodore Roosevelt’s statue has been retired at the portal of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and Thomas Jefferson’s name and statues have been removed from parks and schools across America in the last half-dozen years. The statue of Lewis and Clark and a kneeling Sacagawea is being retired in Charlottesville, Virginia.

You have to be very powerful or essentially powerless to be known by a single name: Cher, Prince, Liberace, and Madonna at one end of the spectrum, and at the other end – the powerless end – Clark’s York, Jefferson’s Jupiter, and countless other men and women in America and throughout the history of slavery. To add insult to injury, these names were imposed on enslaved individuals by their White owners, who erased the individual’s birth name, if he or she ever had one, and renamed that person arbitrarily, often ironically, as when the Jefferson family named his personal slave Jupiter, after the most powerful of the Roman gods. Think of the heartless irony of giving the name Zeus or Apollo or Mars or Athena to a person you could buy or sell, whip or brand, rape or breed, work to death or beat to death, separate from his or her family, or sell to the highest bidder.

Did York ever know another name?

As probably you have noticed, historians and cultural institutions now increasingly use the term enslaved person instead of slave. This takes a little getting used to, but you can see the point. “Slave” suggests some sort of objective status, like a job description, along the lines of carpenter, welder, poet, priest, housewife, or farmer. The word “enslaved” signifies that Africans and then African Americans were thrust into that cruelly subordinate status by people who had the power and the desire to “wring their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces,” as Abraham Lincoln expressed it in his magnificent Second Inaugural Address, delivered just forty-two days before his assassination by an actor who would rather put a bullet in the brain of his president than grant rights to African Americans.

We have been so accustomed to conventional names for Native American groups for so long that it is hard for us to make the adjustment to names that better represent their cultural traditions or their sense of themselves. Here in my beloved North Dakota, we have rightly called the Mandan Mandan and the Hidatsa Hidatsa, but for most of our history we have spoken of the Sioux when we speak of the people who call themselves Dakotah or Lakota or more precisely Hunkpapa, Ogala, Minneconjou, or Teton. Sioux is a term projected onto the Dakotah people by their enemies the Ojibwe. They called them *Nadouessioux*, which translates as “little rattle” or “little snake people,” or more generally, “the enemy.” The term was truncated into “sioux.” It’s easy to see why the Dakotah might not want to be called by a name foisted upon them by their mortal enemies.

continued on the inside back cover...
We Proceeded On welcomes submissions of articles, proposals, inquiries, and letters. Writer’s guidelines are available by request and can be found on our website, lewisandclark.org. Submissions should be sent to Clay S. Jenkinson, 1324 Golden Eagle Lane, Bismarck, North Dakota 58503, or by email to Clayjenkinson2010@gmail.com. 701-202-6751.

Editor’s Note: This is a very important issue of We Proceeded On. You all know that America’s understanding of our history is undergoing an unprecedented reckoning. This issue features two long articles focussing on the non-dominant peoples of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. James Holmberg of the Filson Historical Society has written about William Clark’s enslaved valet York and Clark’s “family” of enslaved individuals; and the Montana archaeologist Kevin O’Briant has written about the cultural traditions, including the names of places, nations, and individuals, of the Native Americans whose sovereign lands were crisscrossed and forever impacted by the coming of Lewis and Clark. Holmberg is a venerable figure in our community. It was Holmberg who had the glory of helping to unearth and annotate the fifty-five previously unknown letters between William Clark and his brother Jonathan that have had a revolutionary impact on our understanding of Clark and also of the last days of Meriwether Lewis. Kevin O’Briant is younger, less committed to the re-enactment and hagiographical culture that is so rich and important a feature of the Trail Heritage Foundation’s history, but his fresh mind and deep fascination with Native Americans not as bit players in the Lewis and Clark story, but as aboriginal peoples of inherent dignity and sovereign purpose, have added enormously to our understanding of a story we thought we knew to the core. You will remember that it was Kevin O’Briant who brought to the attention of WPO the map of the Arikara world by Too Né, who accompanied Lewis and Clark from the Grand River earthlodge villages to the Mandan and Hidatsa metropolex in the autumn of 1804.

I have granted each of these extraordinary scholars more than the usual number of pages in WPO because I believe that we who love Lewis and Clark (with all our hearts) must not only open our minds to new and sometimes challenging perspectives on the world we thought we knew, but must be proactive in embracing the emerging challenges and insights, lest we be left behind as America and the world strain to understand the whole complexity of our rich, fabulous, troubled, and sometimes unenlightened narrative.
August 2021
Volume 47, Number 3

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E. G. Chuinard, M.D., Founder, *We Proceeded On*
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We Proceeded On

A Message from the President

LCTHF President Louis Ritten

The Covid-19 pandemic is easing as I write this message and we are beginning to settle back into a more normal routine. Although we have sadly lost a few of our members recently, to our knowledge none of them succumbed to the virus itself. Thank you for using common sense and adhering to protocols that increased your odds of staying healthy. A dollop of the old Lewis and Clark luck surely helped as well.

Our chapters, working together with others in their respective regions, are again starting to plan in-person activities. Won’t it be nice to have the opportunity to see old friends and make new ones in the real world? Please make the effort to attend gatherings that are being held for your benefit by fellow members just like yourself. Better yet, pitch in to assist them in putting the gatherings together. Rest assured your energy and ideas will be put to good use. If you have not yet been fully vaccinated, please be respectful and mindful of your fellow members by wearing a mask and using appropriate social distancing measures when you attend LCTHF or any other activities. Thank you for your thoughtfulness and consideration. Stay healthy and safe!

After a one-year hiatus, we once again ran the Missouri Breaks canoe trip this summer. This year’s slots were completely sold out and we are already developing a list for next year. If paddling down an unspoiled section of the Missouri River in style is something that you can envision in your future, be sure to make your interest known early by contacting the LCTHF office.

We have furthered our educational mission by offering our recently developed mobile exhibit, Reimagining America: The Maps of Lewis and Clark. It is already booked through the end of next year and we are creating a list of venues for future reservations. If you know of any institutions that may be interested in hosting the exhibit, make them aware of it and/or let our staff know of potential interest. See lewisandclark.org/maps for the current exhibit schedule.

Primarily through the efforts of Board member Gary Kimsey, LCTHF is now disseminating a nationwide calendar of events including items sponsored by the LCTHF and our regions and chapters, as well as related governmental and other private groups who share an interest in matters related to Lewis and Clark. The slate of activities is quite extensive. If you know of upcoming events that should be included, contact the office. LCTHF is truly becoming the nationwide connective tissue and go-to place for all matters Lewis and Clark. This is likewise in keeping with our efforts to reach out and educate the public about the importance of Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery in American history and their relevance to today.

You as an individual now also have the opportunity to fulfill our educational mission by serving as a Lewis and Clark Ambassador. Volunteers who participate in this program may offer their knowledge and expertise in answering questions that come into the office, interact with travelers to the extent you mutually desire, and serve the public and students by disseminating your knowledge of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Please contact the LCTHF office to volunteer or to find out more. This program would not be possible without the help of people like you, our dedicated members. Thank you for your participation.

We have taken on new personnel recently. Through a grant from Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) and with an assist from our friends at the National Park Service, we are delighted to have the services of our intern Tori Clemmons who is learning about the operations of a non-profit like ours and helping in various tasks around the office. One of her duties has been to oversee our social media presence, and due to her abilities, we have seen larger than usual increases in views and followers. Please welcome Tori and give her a big thank you when you see her.

Our extremely dedicated office assistant, Chris Maillet, has decided to retire after several years of service to LCTHF. We will miss Chris’ sunny disposition and calming manner as she capably fielded member inquiries,
A Message from the President

comments, and the occasional complaint. We wish Chris happiness and tranquility as she enters this new phase of her life. She assures us she will remain a presence at events in Great Falls. Please join the Board of Directors and me in giving Chris a big thank you for all she has given LCTHF. Godspeed, Chris!

Although we were sad to see Chris go, we’re not leaving our executive director Sarah Cawley understaffed. Sarah was exceedingly proactive in finding a replacement for Chris, and we are very happy to announce that Svenja Turman has filled the position of Membership and Administrative Assistant. The title of this part-time position was expanded in recognition of the duties that Chris Maillet assumed in her time with us. You have big shoes to fill, Svenja, and we know you will come through with flying colors. Please welcome Svenja into the LCTHF family.

Our 2021 Annual Meeting will again be held virtually. It will be a one-day meeting taking place for a nominal fee via Zoom on Sunday September 12. We look forward to being enlightened by our Moulton Lecture scholar John Logan Allen, tantalized by LCTHF Board Member Luann Waters as she demonstrates period cooking methods, and informed by your officers about LCTHF as we recap the year ending and lay out plans for the future. See lewisandclark.org for further details.

The new membership system discussed in the May 2021 WPO President’s Message and in the ballot envelope is being implemented as you read this. The Board of Directors and I feel this will help us attract new members and face the future more confidently and effectively. When your own membership term is nearing its end, look for the new form and take a few moments to digest your options. If you wish to continue receiving We Proceeded On in either paper or electronic form, you must check that option from now on. Consider using the online form to renew your membership. Go to lewisandclark.org and click on the “Join or Donate” tab. Once again, contact the office (406-454-1234) with any questions. Our staff will be happy to assist you.

Thank you for your steadfast support of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation.

Proceeding on together,
Lou Ritten, President
Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation

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**We Proceeded On**

The Journal of the Lewis & Clark Trail Heritage Foundation

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<td>January 1</td>
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I am a veteran guide on the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail. Each summer, for many years, I have been paddling the 149 river-miles of the Upper Missouri Breaks National Monument downstream from Fort Benton, Montana, and hiking the ancient, high-altitude Lolo Trail in northern Idaho. People pay me to walk in the footsteps of a small band of thirty-three people who passed this way over two centuries ago—over, and over, and over again.

I am also an archaeologist. As such, I’m sensitive to the antiquity of the paths I am following.

What we think of as the Lolo Trail today is only a short segment of a much longer route, called the Qoq’aals ‘Iskit, “Buffalo Road,” or k’uysey’ ne’iskit, “bison hunt trail,” in the language of the Nimiiipuu (Nez Perce) people. When tourists come to follow the Lewis and Clark Expedition’s westward journey, they are interested in traveling through a sub-segment of that trail, between Tmsm’Hi (Salish: “No Salmon” or Travelers’ Rest State Park) in far western Montana and Sherman Peak (a.k.a. “Spirit Revival Ridge”) in Idaho (Figure 1). My favorite westward hike along that route leads me past a place called the “Sinque Hole,” one of the rare spots with standing water on a 7,000 foot ridge, and an expedition campsite on September 17, 1805. About sixteen miles north and around 4,000 feet down from there, on the banks of the North Fork of the Clearwater River (or what the expedition journals call the “Choppunnish”), sits a much older campsite called Kelly Forks which has drawn the recent attention of archaeologists. Deposits at the site...
have been dated to be between 13,000 and 11,000 years old. The stone tools recovered are associated with two distinct and geographically separated archaeological cultures from that time period: the Western Stemmed Tradition, arising out of the Columbia Plateau region of Washington and Oregon,5 and the Goshen Tradition of the Northern Plains.6 Using a technique called X-ray fluorescence, archaeologists have been able to determine the sources of obsidian (naturally occurring volcanic glass) artifacts from the site. Coming from as far away as southern Idaho, eastern Oregon, and northwestern Montana, these stone tools provide evidence of frequent movement of both people and goods for thousands of years7 through the harshest terrain encountered by the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Following the Buffalo Road to the east (or Lewis’ journey of July 1806) takes you to the Upper Missouri Breaks of central Montana. Oral tradition and archaeological evidence put the ancestors of people like the Niitsítapi (Blackfoot Confederacy), Apsaalooke (Crow), White Clay People (Atsina/Gros-Ventre), Nakoda (Assiniboine), and Cree in these vast grasslands and valleys for at least the last 12,900 years.8

If I may misquote Rick Blaine of the 1942 film Casablanca: It doesn’t take much to see that the problems of thirty-three little people don’t amount to a hill of beans in this cultural landscape.9 They were hardly alone: consider the near-contemporary explorations of Alexander Mackenzie10 and David Thompson11 described recently in these pages. The apparent inevitability of hindsight, which allows us to look back on the past (or the parts of it we choose to remember) and declare which characters were “significant” and which were not, may not have been so clear at the end of the “long 18th century,” when Euro-Canadian, Iroquoian, and Métis fur traders from the Hudson’s Bay, North West, and “XY” Companies were competing for pre-eminence in a lucrative and extractive trade that often caught them in the middle of violent territorial disputes among their Indigenous customers, suppliers, and middlemen. At that moment in time, strange foreign names like Mackenzie or Meriwether really didn’t matter much on the Northwestern Plains. Fortunes could rise or fall on the friendship or enmity of influential band leaders like Ac Ko Mok Ki (“Old Swan” or “Many Swans” in the language of the Niitsítapi) and O Mok A Pee (“Big Man”).12 Approaching the Lewis and Clark Trail as a cultural landscape pulls the camera back and invites a wider-angle view, one that includes the broader political, economic, ecological, and cultural context of not just the members of the Corps of Discovery but of all the other people populating that landscape, both seen and unseen by the explorers.
Part 1: Maps

Every summer for the last eight years, I have launched at least one guided canoe trip from Coal Banks Landing on the Missouri River, about a mile downriver from the site where the Lewis and Clark Expedition camped on June 1, 1805. The Missouri River once flowed to the northeast from here, draining into Hudson Bay, but the advance of the Laurentide Ice Sheet during the Last Glacial Maximum eventually forced the river to bend sharply to the south.

In late September of 1800, a little more than 200 miles straight north across the prairie from this bend in the river, an employee of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) named Peter Fidler (1769-1822) and eighteen of his colleagues established a trading post at the confluence of the South Saskatchewan and Red Deer rivers called Chesterfield House. That this post – deep in the heart of Siksika territory (the Siksika, Pikaani, and Kainah composed the three main divisions of the Niitsitapi or Blackfoot) – even existed was thanks to the support and diplomacy of a man named Ac Ko Mok Ki, called “Feathers” among the HBC traders. In 1801 Ac Ko Mok Ki drew a map for Fidler of the upper Missouri drainage (Figure 2), a copy of which eventually made it to Aaron Arrowsmith, the London mapmaker who published the map consulted by the expedition when they camped at the confluence of the Marias and Missouri rivers on June 3, 1805.13

This confluence is known as “Decision Point” because it was here, according to Lewis, that “[a]n interesting question was now to be determined; which of these rivers was the Missouri....”16 Being in full spring flood and carrying a reassuringly familiar sediment load made the swollen Marias difficult to distinguish from the Missouri they had been following for more than a year. But some of their confusion

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Figure 2. Ac Ko Mok Ki’s 1801 map, copied by Peter Fidler. The yellow highlighted line shows the route of a contemporary warpath. Note: Indigenous maps do not conform to Anglo-European conventions. Here, north is generally to the right.
may have been due to the nature of the map they were consulting: Arrowsmith had copied Ac Ko Mok Ki’s map without understanding its scale or schematic style, so he shoehorned it into a larger map with a more familiar European coordinate system, consistent linear scale, and north-orientation (Figure 3).17

For millennia, Ac Ko Mok Ki’s people, the Niitsítapi, have occupied a country bounded roughly by the Great Sand Hills of southeastern Saskatchewan to the east, the Rocky Mountain Front to the west, the upper drainages of the Saskatchewan River to the north, and the Yellowstone River to the south.18 These boundaries were permeable and very much in flux in 1801. Such dynamism was due in part to the trade in two key commodities: guns and horses.19

While living among the Niitsítapi and learning their language in 1787-1788, David Thompson lodged with an elder.
We Proceeded On 9 named Saukamappee, who bore witness to the introduction of the horse around 1730.20 The trade in horses originated from the Spanish colonies to the south. Animals and related goods such as bridles followed old, well-established trade networks that linked the Puebloan peoples of the Southwest with the seasonal Shoshone rendezvous in Wyoming and the agricultural villages of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara along the Missouri River in present-day North and South Dakota.21

Meanwhile, French Canadian traders were establishing trading posts at traditional Cree rendezvous places on the lower Saskatchewan. At these locations, European manufactured goods such as textiles, metal implements, and guns were introduced into these pre-existing, canoe-based trade networks in exchange for furs and provisions.22 As these valuable manufactured goods were exchanged down-the-line farther from their source on Hudson Bay, their value increased exponentially, making them largely unaffordable to groups like the Niitsítapi living deep in the interior of the continent.

The introduction of the horse into the northern plains had a profound and uneven effect on the pre-horse balance of power for the Niitsítapi. Horses became the driving force of a new culture of raiding and violence on the Northern Plains. Still compelled to travel and fight on foot, the Niitsítapi had been harassed by their mounted Shoshone enemies to move out of the country around the Missouri and into the northern reaches of their territory before they were finally able to acquire horses of their own. Thompson recorded Saukamappee’s account of this period: “we had more guns and iron headed arrows than before; but our enemies the Snake Indians [Shoshone] and their allies had Misstutim (Big Dogs, that is Horses) on which they rode, swift as the Deer, on which they dashed at the Peeagans [Pikaani].”23

Mounted and lightly armed with European trade guns obtained from the Cree and Nakoda, the Niitsítapi were now equipped and ready to reassert control over the land around the Upper Missouri Breaks when a wave of smallpox spread north from Mexico City in 1779 and decimated their Shoshone enemies, who retreated into the mountains.24

The establishment of Chesterfield House on the South Saskatchewan by Peter Fidler and the HBC meant direct access to guns, which would likewise give the Niitsítapi a military advantage over their neighbors. Ac Ko Mok Ki saw this as a boon to his band of Siksika. His friends and allies maintained peaceful relations with the HBC as well as their Cree and Nakoda trading partners, ensuring a steady supply of European goods. O Mok A Pee and his band took a different

Glossary

Languages

Blackfoot :: Síxika, Siksiká’powahsn
Bitterroot Salish :: Séliš
Gros Ventre :: Ahsí, A, A’ananin
Nez Perce :: Nimiipuu (“the people”)

People

Assiniboine :: Nakoda (“friend” or “ally”)
Blackfoot Confederacy :: Niitsítapi (“the people”)

Subgroups:

Blood Tribe :: Kainah (“many chiefs”)
Piegan Blackfeet (Montana) :: Piikáni, Piikáni
Peigan Nation (Alberta) :: Aapátohsipikáni
Siksika :: Siksiká (“black feet”)
Crow :: Apsalooké (“children of the large-beaked bird”)
Gros Ventre :: Atsina, A’aninín, “White Clay People”
Nez Perce :: Nimiipuu (“the people”)

Places

Badger Two Medicine Area :: motaátusi
(Blackfoot: “place where the bundle keepers live”)
Bison jump :: pisín (Blackfoot)
Cypress Hills :: aìikim’ìkui (Blackfoot: “striped earth”)
Evaro, Montana :: snìhpìp̓ám
(Bitterroot Salish: “small clearing on the hilltop”)
Lolo Trail :: gq’al Iksit (Nez Perce: “Buffalo Road”)
Marias River :: kíáyosisahtaayi (Blackfoot: “bears river”)
Milk River :: kínákishtaai (Blackfoot: “old river”),
ployitahtai (“opaque river”), öníkisíishtaayi (milk river”)
Missouri River :: ömahkahti (Blackfoot: “big/old river”)
Missoula, Montana :: nmesuletk’
(Bitterroot Salish: “extremely cold water”)
Rocky Mountain Front :: mistakis (Blackfoot: “backbone”)
Sweet Grass Hills :: kátoyiss (Blackfoot: “sweet pines”)
Travelers Rest :: tmsmìtì (Bitterroot Salish: “no salmon”)
Two Medicine River :: nááto’kiookáishtaayi
(Blackfoot: “two sun dance river”).
approach. Aligning themselves with the neighboring White Clay People, O Mok A Pee’s band raided and attacked the fur trade posts and the Cree and Nakoda people trading and working there. Not wishing to ally themselves with any one group, the fur traders continued to do business with O Mok A Pee’s band regardless of these attacks. These two contradictory approaches to trade and foreign policy, one aggressive and the other cooperative, defined these two bands of Siksika. Factionalism of this sort was an important feature of social organization on the Northern Plains. Individuals who were sympathetic to Ac Ko Mok Ki’s cooperative policies could ally themselves with and live among his band, while maintaining a polite distance from their friends and relatives in O Mok A Pee’s band who might have a more antagonistic point of view, thus avoiding intra-tribal conflict.25

Ac Ko Mok Ki and members of his community provided maps and other intelligence, as well as food and protection to the traders at Chesterfield House. As Indigenous historical documents, these maps provide us with a window into the political and cultural world that would be disrupted by two murders that occurred on July 27, 1806. Accused of the

crime were two foreign men who had nothing left to trade. The effects were widespread, as noted by David Thompson on May 10, 1807: “the murder of two Peagan Indians by Captain Lewis of the United States, drew the Peagans to the Mississouri to revenge their deaths; and thus gave me an opportunity to cross the Mountains by the defiles of the Saskatchewan River, which led to the head waters of the Columbia River...”26

I learned from them27 that they were a part of a large band which lay encamped at present near the foot of the rocky mountains on the main branch of Maria’s river one ½ days march from our present encampment; that there was a whiteman with their band; that there was another large band of their nation hunting buffaloe near the broken mountains and were on there way to the mouth of Maria’s river where they would probably be in the course of a few days. they also informed us that from hence to the establishment where they trade on the Suskasawan river is only 6 days easy march or such as they usually travel with their women and childred which may be

Figure 4. Ac Ko Mok Ki’s 1802 map, copied by Peter Fidler.
estimated at about 150 ms. [Meriwether Lewis, July 26, 1806, Motaátusi, Pikaani Territory]

The dominant features of Ac Ko Mok Ki’s 1801 map (Figure 2) are its two major “axes:” the Missouri (labeled “O mock ab ti,” in his language, meaning “Big River” – ómabhk “big/old” + sisahtaayi “river”29) runs in a straight line until it intersects a double-line barrier at ninety degrees, apparently representing the Rocky Mountains. Tributaries to the Missouri are drawn at regular intervals to the various named points along this barrier. A dotted line (highlighted in yellow) represents the path of a recent Siksika war party which had traveled south first to the Sweet Grass Hills, then the Gates of the Mountains (labeled with an “F” by Fidler) near present-day Helena, Montana, then back to the Sweet Grass Hills via the Smith River.30 This was the map sent to Arrowsmith in London. In 1802, Ac Ko Mok Ki drew a second map of the same region for Fidler, clarifying the first (Figure 4).31 The map shows both the Missouri and the Saskatchewan, with individual place-name glyphs symbolizing the various important locations along a straight-line barrier. On this second map that barrier was labeled by Fidler “Rocky Mountains East side.”

A member of Ac Ko Mok Ki’s band, a man name Ki Oo Cus or Little Bear, drew another map of the same territory in the same year (Figure 5).32 In this map we see a change in the orientation of the barrier labeled “Rocky Mountains.” This time it curves around the side of the map, running parallel to the Missouri River. This barrier that Fidler has conflated with the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains is what the Niitsítapi call the mistakis, or “backbone,” a barrier that includes the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains, but also...
encompasses the ranges to the south which curve to the east and southeast on the south side of the Missouri River. The mistikis marks both the eastern and southern boundaries of the homeland of the Niitsitapi.33 Ki Oo Cus helpfully gives us a view of the mistikis that conforms to our topographic expectations, but Ac Ko Mok Ki shows us that the mistikis was more of an axis mundi: it is the defining feature of his two maps, and all of the rivers on his maps, including the Missouri, bend toward it.

Named places on these maps are places of significance, not just to the Blackfeet, but to the other ethnic groups who still share this landscape. Many of the names of the features in the southern portions of the map around the Missouri are White Clay names, which might imply the Niitsitapi lacked familiarity with the lands they had recently reacquired from the Shoshone. However, most of the original Indigenous place names of the region around the Upper Missouri Breaks are supra-tribal. Linguists studying traditional place names in this area have found that out of thirty-six locations with both a known Niitsitapi and White Clay place name, twenty-three of them have the same meaning in both languages (a similar ratio applies to the place names of the White Clay People and their traditional enemies, the Apsaalooké). A significant number of the places that figure on these maps have the same name in many languages, speaking to the complexity of the interrelationships of all the peoples who have lived in, traveled through, and utilized the resources of the Northern Plains.14

Places worthy of being named are not simply geographical barriers, landmarks, or routes. They are culturally significant sites with unique histories that can either define or transcend ethnic identities. Among the Niitsitapi, named places and their stories are sacred and require regular visitation and retelling. For example, point number six on Ki Oo Cus’ map (Figure 5), marked with a glyph of a lone pine tree, labeled by Fidler as “Nee too tuck kiss – one pine,” is a named-place important to the Blackfeet. Fidler camped in this place in 1792 with a Blackfoot companion, who told him that there was a piskun, or buffalo jump, nearby. The story of this place is significant for the Blackfeet because it is the place of the Women’s Buffalo Jump or Akée Piskun. When the world was young, according to Blackfeet tradition, men and women did not live together. The women were camped in this place, near their piskun, when the culture hero Napi, or Old Man, brought the men and women together for the First Marriage.15

Apart from the mistikis and the Missouri River, all three maps share another consistent feature. On Ac Ko Mok Ki’s maps (Figures 2 and 3) there are three hills in a row labeled “3 paps” by Fidler. The map drawn by Ki Oo Cus has them identified as number 17, or “Cut to yis – good pines – 3 paps” in the legend. These are the Sweet Grass Hills, a low rise of three buttes near the Milk River in north-central Montana. The name “Cut to yis” is freighted with meaning. It could refer to the name of a foundational Blackfoot ancestral being, Katoyís or Blood Clot, who was laid to rest in this place.16 With slightly different emphasis, katóyas is also a word that can mean “sweet pine.”17 “The ‘good pines’ referred to in Fidler’s note are subalpine fir. For certain ceremonies among the Blackfeet, subalpine fir needles laid on hot coals provide a fragrant and cleansing smoke. Subalpine fir grown in the dry conditions of the Sweet Grass Hills (or, more accurately, the Sweet Pine Hills) are better suited for the purposes of incense than those that grow in the damper forests of the eastern Rocky Mountain Front.18

Part II: Landscapes

After launching our canoes at Coal Banks Landing, we generally only paddle the first five miles before stopping for a break. This allows the less experienced paddlers to catch up, switch seats with their canoeing partner, or repack an unbalanced or tippy vessel. I like to stop at a place called Little Sandy, a small Bureau of Land Management campground where a minor tributary stream enters the main flow of the Missouri. On a dry, grassy bluff overlooking this modern campground shaded by mature cottonwood trees and thick with snowberry bushes, three stone tipi rings sit in mute testimony to the age of this place.

Approximately 120 miles north of this point on the Missouri there is a long barrier of hills rising about 2,000 feet above the surrounding plains. Water draining to the south of this eroded plateau flows toward the Missouri, and, ultimately, the Gulf of Mexico. Water draining to the north makes its way to Hudson Bay. This geologic feature is known today as the Cypress Hills. On Ki Oo Cus’ map and Ac Ko Mok Ki’s 1801 map (Figures 5 and 2) these hills are symbolized by a short line segment that is connected by a shorter line to the South Saskatchewan River and identified by the Blackfoot name “i a kim me coo.” Like the Sweet Grass Hills, the Cypress Hills are also a source of subalpine fir needles for ceremonial incense. Subalpine fir is a Rocky Mountain and boreal forest species, yet nearly 140 miles of
uninterrupted prairie separate the foothills of the Rocky Mountains from the Cypress Hills. The firs of the Cypress Hills do not represent a relict population of a once-continuous forest stretching from the Rockies to the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. No such forest ever existed. The agents of dispersal for these trees are the Niitsitapi themselves and the necessities of their spiritual life. When the Niitsitapi harvest plants like subalpine fir for sacred or medicinal purposes, the unused portions must be returned to the Earth with other offerings as an act of reciprocity. The act of reverently burying these unused plant remains (sometimes including roots and seeds) results in new growth of these plants and ensures their future accessibility outside of their natural range.39

Manipulation of the landscape was not limited to transplanted subalpine fir. Routes across the vast, treeless grasslands of the Northern Plains required frequent resting places (Ki Oo Cus has symbolically indicated these places as circles along a dashed route, Figure 5) where the necessities of life could be procured: water, shade, and some limited shelter from the incessant and occasionally alarming winds. These were places where useful things could be cached, retrieved, and used by others, much like the ubiquitous picnic tables of modern North American roadside rest areas and campgrounds. The most visible remains of these places are circles of reasonably large stones, often between nine and twenty-seven feet in diameter, used to weigh down the bottom perimeter of skin lodges or tipis. Early attempts to estimate the number of these structures on the plains of southern Alberta in the late 1960s put their numbers in excess of 600,000 within the province.40

here I found some indian lodges which appeared to have been inhabited last winter in a large and fertile bottom well stocked with cottonwood timber. the rose honeysuckle and redberry bushes constitute the undergrowth there being but little willow in this quarter both these rivers above their junction appeared to be well stocked with timber or comparatively so with other parts of this country. here it is that we find the three species of cottonwood which I have remarked in my voyage assembled together that species common to the Columbia I have never before seen on the waters of the Missouri, also the narrow and broad leafed species. during our stay at this place R. Fields killed a buck a part of the flesh of which we took with us.41 [Meriwether Lewis, July 26, 1806, Motaátusi, Pikaani Territory]

The White Cliffs of the Missouri River southeast of Fort Benton, Montana. Photograph by Mark Jordan.
Seasonal burning of these stopping places helped to maintain clearings in the underbrush of the bottomlands, creating open, aesthetically pleasing, and defensible campgrounds along important trails. In addition to being attractive to humans, these places were likewise attractive to grazing animals, making them a potential source of food for both humans and their horses. The narrow coulees and canyons that incise the uplands surrounding the Upper Missouri River and its tributaries provide respite to more than just people and animals. Well-watered, out of the relentless wind, and shaded from the sun, these places can shelter chokecherry trees, currants, and other valuable edible and medicinal plants. On a grander scale, the elaborate Niitsítapi land management system of seasonal burning and piskun affected the entire Northern Plains ecosystem and required extremely careful planning.42

If we look again at all three Niitsítapi maps, there are two rivers on either side of the Sweet Grass Hills (“3 Paps”); the one on the right is consistently labeled “little river” or “Kín náx is sáta.” This is the Milk River, which flows into the Missouri River just past the Fort Peck Dam in eastern Montana. The river on the left is presumably the Marias, but confusion prevails: On Ac Ko Mok Ki’s 1801 map (Figure 2), which plays an important role in the deliberations of the Lewis and Clark Expedition at Decision Point, this river has been labeled “Na too too kase” (Nááto’kíookáísaahtaayi, Náá-to’k “two” + ookáán “Sundance” + sisaabtaayi “river”43) meaning “Bears River,” the Blackfoot name for the Marias, proper, and he also includes the tributary Teton River, which flows into the Marias just before it empties into the Missouri.44 Why would Ac Ko Mok Ki give precedence to the Two Medicine River, instead of the much larger Marias? The answer may lie in the importance of this tributary to the southernmost division of the Niitsítapi, the Pikaani. A pair of Sundance lodges once sat on opposite banks of the upper Two Medicine [Lodge] River, giving rise to its name. This river runs through a valley known as Motaátusi, or the “Place Where the Bundle Owners Live,” a special place where the Pikaani gathered in the winter and memorialized the birth of the culture hero Katoyís.45

they [Drewyer and J. Fields] informed me that it was about 10 miles to the main branch of Maria’s River, that the valley formed by the river in that quarter was wide extensive and level with a considerable quantity timber; here they found some wintering camps of the natives and a great number of others of a more recent date or that had from appearance been evacuated about 6 weeks; we consider ourselves extremely fortunate in not having met with these people.46 [Lewis, July 25, 1806, approaching the Two Medicine River]

Motaátusi was as materially significant in 1801 and 1802 as were the villages of the Mandan and Hidatsa, which figure prominently on western maps from the period.
Archaeologists investigating the Kutoyis Complex on the Two Medicine River in the southern portion of the Blackfeet Reservation of Montana have described it as a “location of monumental surface stone architecture” due to the more than 3,000 stone features recorded there. In addition to eleven drive-line systems for harvesting bison, some of which extend up to two and a half miles, there are 899 stone circles, each one potentially representing a household. Radiocarbon dating of remains from this site suggests that it was episodically inhabited between 1210 and 1886. And it is one of three such massive bison harvesting and ceremonial complexes located on the Two Medicine River. In fact, many of the lines on Ac Ko Mok Ki’s 1801 map may be pointing to similar locations, because “for the better part of the last millennium, each major valley that irrigated the Rocky Mountain Front and drained into the Missouri River was heavily inhabited and utilized by communal bison hunters during the cold months of the year.”

Millennia of careful observations of the seasonal patterns of animal behavior are recorded in the objects, songs, and ceremonies stored in Niitsitapi ceremonial bundles. Extremely large and elaborate mnemonic devices, these bundles contained the ecological knowledge necessary for the Niitsitapi to arrive at a place like the Kutoyis Complex at the appropriate time of year to harvest vast numbers of bison (on foot, mind you), and then repeat the trick, reliably and sustainably, year after year, for centuries. Such complex material objects and their associated ceremonies were akin to portable libraries, stocked with critical cultural information as diverse as knowing the appropriate seasons to harvest vegetable and animal resources, how to manage grasslands and bison herds, when and how to sow tobacco, as well as important histories. The modern Niitsitapi people who keep and maintain these bundles spend years studying and learning about their contents. They must be able to complete and remember elaborate and complex ceremonies, songs, and stories, and curate the sacred objects contained within the bundles, many of which are organic in nature and must be periodically replaced. A bundlekeeper may choose to learn a new bundle after transferring a prior bundle to a new keeper. In this sense, the bundlekeepers are the scholars of their community. Thus the “Place Where the Bundle Owners Live” and the Two Medicine Lodge River that leads to that ancient place would have been and remain a vital part of Niitsitapi geography.

All of this helps us understand why Ac Ko Mok Ki chose to label the Marias/Bears River as the Two Medicine in 1801. It speaks to what matters to him, to his own cultural predilections and biases. The Two Medicine may be a smaller tributary of the larger Marias (and thereby the less “important” of the two rivers from the perspective of a London mapmaker like Arrowsmith), but its function as the pathway between the Missouri River and Motadjus takes precedence here.

Part III: Pathways

I live in Missoula, Montana (Nmesuletik*, Salish: “extremely cold water”), a place that has been, for most of the last 13,000 years, part of the Salish and Kootenai homeland. In the busy summer tourist season when I’m guiding canoe trips, I often find myself driving east along a route called “Highway 200” to a Blackfeet place now known as Fort Benton (Figure 6). When Meriwether Lewis was following this route in July of 1806, it was popularly known as the “Buffalo Road.” Similarly, when I’m guiding hiking trips along the Lolo Trail in the Nimiipuu territory of northern Idaho, I follow this Buffalo Road west from Missoula, where it has taken on the evocative and lyrical English name of “Highway 12.”

Given that I may guide more than a dozen trips during the brief Montana summer, I see these places repetitively, as they thaw and green-up in the spring until the cottonwoods and tamaracks take on their golden autumnal hue. I visit the places Lewis and Clark visited. I camp where they camped. I read from their journals and tell their stories. Drive east. Journal events from June 3, 1805, June 1, May 31, May 29, May 28. Drive west. September 15, 1805, September 16, September 17, September 18, September 19, the challenge of the Lolo Trail. Drive east. Repeat. I know my little section of the Lewis and Clark Trail very well.

All of this repetition has provided me with an extraordinary insight: memories live in places. For a wilderness guide, I’m a bit of an over-packer, so I often travel with multiple dry bags, one of which is usually full of books. However, I have found that I rarely consult them anymore. I can arrive at the place where the Lewis and Clark Expedition camped on May 29, 1805, see the towering cliffs opposite the campsite, hear the wind whistling in the cottonwoods, and I’m immediately transported by memory. Near this place in 1805, they encountered a large number of rotting bison carcasses, inspiring Lewis to write a detailed – almost ethnographic
What’s in a Name? Understanding the Lewis and Clark Trail as a Cultural Landscape

– description of a piskun. The tributary flowing into the Missouri here was dubbed “Slaughter River.” On July 29, 1806, Meriwether Lewis, Reubin Fields, and a dozen men camped again at this place, two days after engaging in an altogether different kind of slaughter.

R Fields as he seized his gun stabbed the Indian to the heart with his knife; the fellow ran about 15 steps and fell dead. One of them jumped behind a rock and spoke to the other who turned around and stopped at the distance of 30 steps from me and I shot him through the belly...they had but 2 guns and one of them they left; the others were armed with bows and arrows and eyedaggs. The gun we took with us. I also retook the flag but left the medal about the neck of the dead man that they might be informed who we were. [Lewis, July 27th, 1806, Motaátusi, Pikaani Country]

According to the Pikaani, the murder victims were only youths, no older than fourteen, and they were simply attempting to walk away with what they had won from the foreign men while gambling the night before. Certainly, the boys tried to steal horses. But young men attempting to steal horses should be interpreted as a coming-of-age ritual in their society, and certainly no crime, not in their own country. In addition to engendering enmity toward the United States, the “gunfight at Two Medicine Creek” loosened the Niitsitapi blockade of the northern passes through the Rockies as they now turned their attention toward this new threat in their southern territory. This allowed Euro-Canadians to traffic in guns in Kootenai territory, arming Niitsitapi enemies and further disrupting the regional balance of power. Canadian fur traders like Jaco Finlay were able to move into and establish trading posts in the Salish and Kootenai country around Missoula, lending his name to the Jocko River. Today, a hill about fifteen miles from Missoula known in Salish as svíks̱p̓əm marks the divide between the Jocko River and Clark Fork of the Columbia River.

But what’s in a name? In the place where Lewis, Drouillard, and the Fields (and their cohort) camped on May 29, 1805, and July 29, 1806, there is now a wire fence. It both delimits the campground and serves to keep out the

Figure 6. Map of the Upper Missouri drainage with features corresponding to the maps drawn by Ac Ko Mok Ki and Ki Oo Cus.
now ubiquitous range-cattle that currently substitute for the bison, elk, and bighorn sheep of 1806. Just outside of this fence, a weathered wooden sign can be found on the upriver side of this campground reading “Slaughter River.” Why do we maintain this name for this place? Which slaughter exactly do we wish to commemorate?

The name of the tributary that flows into the Missouri in this place is Arrow Creek, and it precedes both slaughters. Seeing the river, I remember its name. Remembering the name, I remember a love story about a young woman named Antelope and her suitor who came to visit from the north. Falling in love with Antelope at first sight, the young man vowed to return with many horses so that he could marry her. His rival was a villain straight out of central casting named Black Bull: rich, violent, vain, a wife-beater. He already had two wives, but he swore he’d have Antelope for a third. She refused his persistent advances. When the young man returned and presented the gift of horses to Antelope’s father, Black Bull attempted to kill Antelope in a jealous rage. She was saved in the nick of time by a classic *deus ex machina*: an arrow, shot by the Sun, comes out of nowhere and kills Black Bull.

Names, like Slaughter River and Arrow Creek, like the Buffalo Road and Highway 12, sit in the landscape, layered on top of one another like a palimpsest. The old names and the new, their persistence or their erasure, help us to better understand the nuanced history of any given place. Each name contains a story. The repetitive seasonal movements of people like the Nimiipuu or the Salish who followed the Buffalo Road eastward to the plains, or the movements of the Niitsitapi between named places like the Two Medicine and the Sweet Grass Hills who followed ancestral storied pathways that could evoke memories of culturally significant events (“this is the place where the culture hero *Katoyis* was born; this is where he died”), or the more personal and quotidian recollections of everyday life (“this is where I met your mother”) all tell these stories. In the same fashion, when many Americans set out to travel along the Lewis and Clark Trail, they do so with the explicit intention of “following in the footsteps of the Corps of Discovery.” As Lewis and Clark enthusiasts move through the landscape and stop at historical markers, museums, and interpretive centers along the way, the events of 1805 and 1806 are remembered, repeated, and
revived by people whose presence on these landscapes is temporary. The memories are further reinforced by the new names given to these places by either the Lewis and Clark Expedition or modern-day enthusiasts during the 2003-2009 Bicentennial, but these names both obscure and occlude the older memories attached to them.

In archaeology, context is everything. An artifact, no matter how rare or precious, loses its scientific and historical value once its provenience is lost. In this regard, archaeological sites have much in common with crime scenes. If a piece of evidence has been displaced or removed, it is tainted. The same is true of stories that have been removed from the places where they reside. To the landscape archaeologist, the push and pull of human interactions with hydrology and soils, plants and animals, are what shape a particular landscape into an integrated whole, into One Big Artifact, a “cultural landscape.” Studying that artifact involves paying close attention not just to the names of places, but the stories attached to them, the languages they are in, the resources they contain, the non-human creatures that inhabit them, and how all of these things change over time.

A cultural landscape is a very large thing. It has room for teeming bison herds and grizzly bears. Viewed as a cultural landscape, the Lewis and Clark Trail expands. Its population can grow from thirty-three when it acknowledges the world of the Niitsítapi, the Salish and the Kootenai – an ancient and contested borderland over which a new boundary had recently been imposed by the British Empire and her upstart former colony. There is room for all of the stories of all of the people whose lives have been shaped by this landscape, as they change the landscape in turn. Had Lewis arrived six weeks earlier, the 899 tipi rings of the Kutoyis Complex might have been as many lodges, filled with people living on their home sovereign landscape. Would he have been harassed by an O Mok A Pee or welcomed by an Ac Ko Mok Ki? There is plenty of room for that story too.

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Notes
2. Salish-Pend d'Oreille Culture Committee, *The Salish People, 40.*
3. Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Journals of Lewis and Clark Expedition, 13 vols.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983-2001), 10:145. Patrick Gass on September 19, 1805, “we have discovered the appearance of a valley or level part of the country about 40 miles ahead. When this discovery was made there was as much joy and rejoicing among the corps, as happens among passengers at sea, who have experienced a dangerous and protracted voyage, when they first discover land on the long looked for coast.”
9. Cazablanca (Warner Bros., 1942). In archaeology, a cultural landscape is a way of looking at the landscape in which people live as an “artifact” of their land-use patterns, which can include tracks, routeways, structures, and other landscape modifications, as well as persistent practices like seasonal burning.
13. Peter Filder journals of exploration and survey, 1792-1806, Peter Filder fonds, E.3/2 fos. 106d-107, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PF).
27. Lewis, George Drouillard, Joseph Fields, and Reubin Fields had just encountered eight Pikaan youths who were tending a herd of thirty horses.
31. PFJ, E.3/2 fo. 104.
32. PFJ, E.3/2 fo. 104d-5.
45. Binnema, “How Does a Map Mean?” 216.
I fear you will think that I have become a Severe master"
Slavery was a fact of life in America until December of 1865. Its boundaries expanded and then shrank over time, but it didn’t officially end in the United States until the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution went into effect. It is a blot on America’s conscience and was a major reason for the bloody and tragic four-year Civil War. But for tens of thousands of White Americans it was part of their way of life and sometimes represented a significant portion of the value of their assets. Even if some owners questioned the morality of the “peculiar institution,” they accepted it and propagated it. Thomas Jefferson likened slavery to having a “wolf by the ear;” you wanted to let go but you couldn’t. His admonition that slavery and the controversy it and its expansion caused were a “fire bell in the night” ringing a warning of future trouble was prescient.1 Not everyone wanted to let go, of course, or listen to that bell. Many a slaveholder believed that slavery was validated by the Bible and that Blacks were lower on the human scale of intellectual and societal development than Whites and therefore rightfully enslaved. Racism, custom, finances, and other factors combined to perpetuate slavery in areas of the United States until civil war and the Thirteenth Amendment ended it.

William Clark was born in Caroline County, Virginia, in 1770. He moved to Kentucky with his family when he was fourteen. In 1808 he moved to St. Louis and lived there until his death in 1838. All three states in which he lived were slave states. Slavery was an acceptable institution in his world. The Clarks were a slaveholding family. William grew up among family slaves. In 1799 he inherited slaves in his father John Clark’s will. He is known to have purchased at least one slave and most likely more, planned to sell slaves from time to time, freed at least two, and owned slaves to his dying day. In his classic book, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America, Ira Berlin makes a distinction between a slave society and a society with slaves. Virginia was a slave society. Kentucky in its early years was also, before gradually transitioning to a society with slaves. This also was true for Missouri, where William lived for the last thirty years of his life. William Clark’s society and family shaped his beliefs and opinions about African Americans in general, enslaved African Americans specifically, and, inevitably, the institution of slavery. In 1770, the year of Clark’s birth, slaves comprised forty-two percent of Virginia’s population. In 1800, when he was settled on his farm outside Louisville and the legal owner of some twenty slaves, African Americans in bondage comprised just over eighteen percent of Kentucky’s population. The majority of slaves lived in the Bluegrass region of the state,
including Jefferson County where Clark's Mulberry Hill farm was located. As Americans moved farther west and into Missouri, many of them were slaveholders and brought their human property with them. In 1820, the year before Missouri became a state and the last year of Clark's tenure as territorial governor, slaves comprised fifteen percent of Missouri's population. Slavery was an institution everywhere William lived, and as a slaveowner he was a participating member. It was part of who he was.

Does that make William Clark a bad person? By today's standards, yes. But as historians and others remind us, you cannot judge people and their society and actions from the past by what is considered proper or morally defensible now. What is called presentism can be fraught with unfair and erroneous judgments of historical people and their actions. Were some of Clark's actions toward his enslaved African Americans harsh? Yes. Were they unfeeling? Yes. But by the standards of a slaveholding society of the early nineteenth century they were common and expected. William Clark was a firm believer in not only his responsibilities as a master but also in what his slaves’ responsibilities were. If they obeyed him and performed their “duty” as slaves, then he would try to do right by them as best he could. That didn’t necessarily mean they would agree with or like his decisions but, as he was their master and owner, it was their duty to obey him. White slave masters made the rules. Slavery was an abhorrent institution and the human suffering and tragedy caused by it are beyond counting. Owners, depending on their needs, could act callously toward their human property because they believed they had no choice or simply because they could. Clark acted as he believed his circumstances dictated, even when he feared people would misunderstand and be critical of his actions.

William Clark's beliefs regarding African Americans, especially enslaved ones, are documented in his own words in letters to his brother Jonathan. His opinions and beliefs were formed from childhood by the society in which he lived and interactions with the enslaved on a regular basis. By the time he was an adult William's views were well entrenched. Flashes of enlightenment regarding the peculiar institution and its victims were fleeting and, like Jefferson, he probably felt as trapped in it as the enslaved. In December 1802 while preparing to move across the Ohio River from slaveholding Kentucky to free Indiana Territory, Clark freed one slave. On December 10, 1802, stating that “in consideration of services rendered me and regarding perpetual involuntary servitude to be contrary to principles of natural justice,” Clark freed Ben Gee (or McGee). While his statement might seem to indicate that he’d had an epiphany about the wrongness and inhumanity of slavery, in reality, it
was a boilerplate statement and a legal dodge. There is no record of his freeing any of his other slaves at this time even though he brought more members of his household than only Ben across the river to Indiana. The next day the legal maneuver was revealed. On December 11, Clark and Ben returned to the Jefferson County courthouse and Ben bound himself to Clark for thirty years. The condition of slave had been exchanged for that of an indentured servant. Not only could the treatment of indentured servants be worse because the master no longer had a financial investment in them, but thirty years might have been intended to span the rest of Ben’s life. As it turned out, Ben likely was released from his indenture after almost eighteen years in 1820.

In July 1803 when Meriwether Lewis’ invitation to join him on the expedition arrived, at least some of William’s slaves were living at the Clark farm at the Point of Rocks on the eastern edge of Clarksville and in free territory. Some of them apparently continued to live there with brother George Rogers Clark while William was away on the expedition. Others might have lived with other Clark family members, with Jonathan at his Trough Spring plantation southeast of Louisville, or perhaps they were hired out in their master’s absence. When William moved to St. Louis, he took certain slaves with him and left others at the Clarksville farm. In December 1810 William remarked to Jonathan in a letter that he wanted to make sure the “Old Negrows” at the farm at the Point did not suffer and were taken care of. The assumption is that these elderly African Americans still were slaves belonging to William. While records are spotty, there is no evidence that William freed anyone other than Ben Gee whom he took to St. Louis.

Owners’ concern for their human chattel’s welfare was sincere in most cases but also self-serving. Keeping slaves healthy and able to work helped maintain the financial value of both the slaves and their ability to make money for the owner. In the case of the “Old Negrows” at the Point, William was sincere in his concern, as he was in other instances regarding his slaves. He mentions his slaves by name to Jonathan indicating that Jonathan and other Clarks knew them as individuals and it was not unusual for them to be referred to as “family.” This is especially true for the elderly slaves who had been owned for a long time. William’s letters to Jonathan routinely mention slaves by name and news about them. Whether it is a pending birth, loss of a child, work they are doing, or their misbehavior and punishment meted out, their lives and relationships with their master can be glimpsed through these incomplete and sometimes perplexing documents. The care and concern that William could display were also balanced by severity if he believed his slaves deserved it. And after his move to St. Louis in June 1808 he believed a number of his slaves merited punishment.

The move from Louisville and Clarksville was a difficult transition for many of his slaves, especially the older ones. The Falls of the Ohio had been their home since settling at Mulberry Hill in 1785 and for younger slaves perhaps the only home they’d ever known. William selectively chose the slaves who moved with him, which resulted in the separation of families. This was one of slavery’s greatest dangers and something most slaves feared. Given William’s recitation of the problems and frustrations he experienced with his slaves after the move, the impression is that few of them were happy about it. They’d been uprooted from the place and people they’d known for years, if not their entire lives. They let their displeasure and unhappiness show in various ways. At this, the master who expected obedience and docility from his slaves had to mete out punishment to maintain discipline and compliance with his wishes. This even extended to York, Clark’s companion since childhood and faithful servant and traveling companion. Trouble manifested itself almost immediately. “Venos the Cook and a very good wench Since She had about fifty,” William wrote Jonathan on July 21, 1808. “Indeed I have been obliged [to] whip almost all my people. and they are now beginning to think that it is best to do better and not Cry hard when I am compelled to use the whip.”

William’s optimism was short-lived. Confessions of his frustrations and meting out punishment to his slaves appear with some regularity in his letters to Jonathan. He resorted to the whip so often that he feared Jonathan would think he’d become something the Clarks looked down on and would blemish the family name – a severe master. An enslaved woman named Easter was a particular problem. “About four days ago She [Easter] Cut a fiew Capers which had been repeated for Several days, I gave her a verry gen-tel whipping which made her verry good for on[e] Day and a half, finding She Could not vent the violence of her Disposton. She thought it best to lay by and this morning Sends for assists. “The whipping was ‘very gentel’ because Easter was pregnant and apparently close to term. Having confessed he’d resorted to the whip with Easter in that condition, William feared what Jonathan would think of him. Had he become someone who would stain the Clark name? Had William become a severe master? William had to
“I fear you will think that I have become a Severe master” William Clark, York, and Slavery explain and excuse his actions to his esteemed brother. “I fear you will think that I have become a Severe master it is not the case,” he explained, “but I find it absolutely necessary to have business done, and to Check a Slanderrous disposition, which has for a long time Suffered to rage.” Not all his slaves deserved such punishment, he noted, “in nancy and Sillo I have had but little trouble, but Easter & venos much, and have only Chastised E- 3 times & V. twice, and they appear Something better fer it…. I Shall fatigee you with negrow acurrencs.” But continue to fatigue Jonathan he did. Several weeks later William was venting yet again. “Easter is bad and I have trounced her three times I wish to hire her [out] but cant as so as yet, indeed I have been Obliged to trounce all except Sillo Ben & Sip Since I came here, they are troublesom creatures but I think are getting much better Since they have been whiped a little.” Hope sprang eternal for William in believing that the whip would make these “troublesom creatures” docile and obedient. Improved behavior was only temporary. He found it necessary to continue to wield the whip. If Jonathan provided advice on this and other matters – as William routinely asked him to do – it isn’t known to historians. His letters most likely haven’t survived. But William’s venting his frustration about “negrow accurences” and his desire to keep his Louisville family – White and Black – informed provide priceless, if very troubling, personal and historical information.

The letter William penned on January 2, 1809, reveals what was a common perception regarding African Americans, especially enslaved ones, by most slaveholders, and many who weren’t. It was a stereotype perpetuated well into the twentieth century. “I am frequently much vexed & perplexed . . . with my fiew negrows, who wish to go on [in] the old way,” William wrote,” Steel a little take a little, lie a little, Scolw a little pout a little, deceive a little, quarrel a
little and attempt to Smile, but it will not all answer.” He also characterized them as “Such Sleepy creatures” that you often could “put no dependance in them.” His vexation had reached the point that he contemplated taking a step which a good master wouldn’t. “I have not leasure to attend to them and gave the Chastizement Some of them may diserve, and have a Sort of a disposition to Sell all but about four, all the Old Stock except Ben, I wish I was near enough to Council with you a little on this Subject, will you write a few lines about this inclination of mine, to turn negrows into goods &c.” Circumstances might require an owner to sell his slaves or they could rightly be sold if they legitimately deserved it, but to do so because they aggravated him and to treat them as “goods” was to cross a line that a good master wouldn’t – but a bad or severe master would. A few weeks earlier, while bemoaning his lack of capital to invest in business, he commented that “I almost wish my old Stock of negrows were with good masters and I had the money to put in trade.” Some concern for his enslaved people is evident in wanting them to be with “good” masters.

What are we to think of Clark’s reference to humans as stock? Referring to the enslaved as such was common among slaveholders. Today, of course, a reference to stock elicits visions of cattle, horses, and other farm animals, but not people. The common saying of coming “from good stock” is different from referring to stock in this sense. It was not unusual for slaveowners to lump their slaves, horses, cattle, and other livestock together. They all were property. They were “live” stock. Clark even does this regarding York. Frustrated by and angry with York, Clark allowed his long-time companion and servant to return to Louisville in the fall of 1808 to visit his wife and family as she was owned by someone else. Clark wanted York with him in St. Louis and refused York’s pleas to remain in Louisville when he relocated to St. Louis that June. By mid-December word had reached William that York apparently was claiming he had permission to stay four or five months rather than four or five weeks. Clark was angry and now decided he didn’t want York back yet. Instead he threatened to hire him out to a severe master to teach him a lesson. Clark’s goals were for York to repent of his attitude and ask for forgiveness and permission to return to him in St. Louis. In discussing his desire to keep some of his horses in Louisville, William includes the same desire regarding York, writing Jonathan that “I do not wish the horses nor do I care for Yorks being in this Country.” By March of the following year, William was curious about his horses and York and queried “what has becom of York? and the horse.”

And so it went with William and his enslaved African Americans – a chosen move to St. Louis with his new wife Julia for him, a forced and unhappy one for his slaves, especially those separated from their loved ones. William’s belief that they were inclined to “do better” was temporary. The failure of some to conduct themselves as a slave should persuaded William that he was within his rights as a “good” master to sell them. Not only would he acquire needed capital but he’d relieve himself of the problems of dealing with difficult slaves. “I have advertised Sep & Jubia for Sale. Jubia has becom the worst fellow in town, has Broke open a Desk and Stole money with a boy of Majr. Penrose s [sic], been whiped run away, and [become] the greatest lier in the Territory. I am Deturmined to Sell him, do you think I can get a tolerable price for him near you, Sep I cant Sell for a tolerable price.” William’s desire to rid himself of “troublesome” human property extended even to York. In late August 1809 he wrote Jonathan that he was sending him as a hand on a boat bound for Wheeling. On the return trip, York was to remain in Louisville where William wished to either hire or sell him, because “I cant Sell Negrows here for money.”

William Clark’s relationship with York is especially troubling and serves as a tragic example of how the institution of slavery whereby one person owns and rules the fate of another could affect the enslaver as well as the enslaved. It was Jefferson who said, “the [White] man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraied by such circumstances.” I stated previously that I believe William Clark was a good person. That he was an honorable man. But he was formed by his times and society. He was the product of a slave-holding society and a slave-owning family. He was a military man. He felt a great sense of duty and responsibility to family, friend, and country. And, in the context of the times and society, he felt a duty and responsibility to his enslaved African Americans. He believed he must do right by them – if they did right by him. The master-slave relationship was one of reciprocal responsibilities. For one it was their duty to obey their owner. To fulfill their duties and contribute to their owner’s success. Disobedience, recalcitrance, disrespect, violence, and other forms of misbehavior were unacceptable. Their punishment could take various forms, with whipping being a common one, and as William’s letters document, such punishment was meted out to both male and female.
slaves. Such corporeal punishment also was administered to indentured servants, soldiers and sailors, children, and others. For William to punish his “people” was considered very acceptable – as long as they deserved it – especially if you had a reputation for being a “good” master. Hiring your slaves out as a means of making money was standard. And, as circumstances dictated, selling your human property was common practice. What you didn’t do – if you were a responsible master who took care of his slaves – was separate families if it could be avoided, sell your slaves without reasonable cause, or abuse them unjustly. If those enslaved failed to uphold their responsibilities and gave their owner reason to set aside that master-slave understanding, then various forms of punishment, incarceration, hiring out to a severe master, and selling were all options. And that was the post-expedition path that William and York’s relationship took.

The mistake should never be made that the two men were friends. They were master and slave, owner and property, superior and inferior. As close as that relationship was – for the many years and countless miles they were by each other’s side, for all the dangers and hardships they shared – their relationship always was based on William as master and York as servant. All indications are that the relationship was stable and could maybe even be described as good from boyhood through the expedition. There only are two known mentions of York prior to the expedition, and one is only a possibility. While serving in the army, William corresponded with his sister Fanny O’Fallon. In his June 1, 1795, letter from Greenville, Ohio, he expressed his pleasure in receiving letters from her and friends “by my Boy who arrived here a few days ago.” Although not definite, the likeliest person to be that “boy” was York who had been assigned to William from childhood and was experienced in the ways of frontier travel. Slaves were commonly dispatched over long distances in the service of their owners if capable and trusted. Taking York on an expedition across the American West clearly illustrated that he had confidence in York’s abilities to contribute not only to camp duties but to the successful advancement of the journey. The other mention is York’s inclusion in John Clark’s will of 1799 whereby he and a number of other slaves were inherited by William. Even though York acted as William’s servant and at his direction, legal ownership until then had remained with John Clark. This was true for other Clark slaves who were serving and even living with William’s siblings.10

York almost certainly accompanied Clark in his travels before, during, and after his army service. Clark traveled extensively in the 1790s and early 1800s before joining the expedition. York is not mentioned in Clark’s non-expedition journals, which speaks to the invisibility of slaves. If they did their duty they were rarely if ever mentioned. If they misbehaved or the owner had other reason to complain about them (such as in William’s letters to Jonathan about Easter, Venos, and some of his other slaves) or they did something of particular note perhaps, they were more likely to be mentioned. William knew that York could perform all the necessary duties to make camp life easier for him and Meriwether Lewis, as well as the duties needed to advance the Corps. Having grown up on the frontier, York could hunt, track, and handle weapons, horses, and boats. He could swim, something that some of the expedition’s personnel couldn’t do. And perhaps, given their many years together, William simply was comfortable having York by his side. He was someone whom he could rely on and trust, almost something of a shadow. An added bonus, something unanticipated when William decided to have York accompany the expedition, was the sensation York caused among some of the Native American nations. York is mentioned in the expedition journals of Clark and others more frequently than most of the other members. This is partly due to comments about the Indians’ reaction to him. Those Indians who had never seen a person with black skin before believed him to have great spiritual power. The Arikara, Mandan, and Hidatsa were particularly impressed and he

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was called Big Medison. The journals and various sources relate York's special status with Native Americans and also York's reaction to it. For the first time in his life, the color of his skin made him special, and in the eyes of some of the Native people superior to those with white skin. Having been told he was inferior his whole life despite being near the top of the slave pecking order as the servant of a Kentucky gentleman and soon to be national celebrity, he was believed by some Natives to be superior to his owner. At least on one occasion, according to Clark, York got a bit carried away with his tale of once being wild and captured and tamed by Clark but still liked to eat little children. One can understand his reaction. Amazement, shock, and perhaps a growing understanding that he was not inferior to Whites because of his black skin. It is through the expedition journals, Clark's post-expedition interviews with Nicholas Biddle, and Pierre Tabeau's recollection of seeing York when the Corps visited the Arikara that we gain our best understanding of York's experiences and his physical appearance. Tall, well built and perhaps heavy (Clark refers to him as “fat” in one 1804 entry), agile, very strong, hair cropped short, a good dancer, and as “black as a bear.”

Did York believe life would return to its pre-expedition routine once he and Clark were home? Life in Louisville or Clarksville with periodic trips? Despite being separated from his wife and possible children and other family members, York knew he’d be returning home. He and his master were in the same boat, so to speak – they both were separated from family. But that soon changed. In January of 1808 William wed Julia Hancock in Fincastle, Virginia. Was York with him? Most likely. After a visit in Louisville, it was off to St. Louis, where they would live. William was taking his statue, York on the campus of Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon. The sculptor, Alison Saar, standing next to her creation, incised one of Clark's maps on the back of the enslaved man.
wife. York wasn’t. York’s wife was owned by someone else. Whether William attempted to acquire her so that she could accompany her husband to St. Louis is not known. And if there were children, what about them? It is likely that William declined to try to acquire York’s wife. He already had more slaves than he needed. He hired most of them out upon arriving in St. Louis. The situation the two men had experienced during years of travel and separation from family now was different. William had his wife with him in a new town, far from their Falls of the Ohio home. York did not. Upon return from the expedition, unlike every other member of the Corps, York didn’t receive any pay or a land grant. And he didn’t receive his freedom. He was Clark’s property and not an official member of the party. Any compensation or reward was up to his master. York did get store-bought clothes and boots but he didn’t get his freedom.

It’s a popular belief that Clark promised York his freedom if he went on the expedition and did good service on it. This is not documented by any known source. Clark was an honorable man. If he had promised York manumission, he undoubtedly would have followed through. His comments on York and their eroding relationship after the move to St. Louis attest to this. Instead, it was a case of York’s being where his master wanted him to be. Whether a three-year trip to the Pacific Ocean or a permanent move to St. Louis, it was York’s duty to obey William and do his duty as a good slave should. If that meant he must “give over that wife of his,” as Clark insensitively put it, then that’s what he must do.12

But York didn’t want to give up his wife and family in Louisville. Perhaps for the first time in their essentially lifelong relationship, York balked at his master’s orders. William records it in his own words in letters to his brother Jonathan. Upon arrival in St. Louis, William put York to work tending the garden and horses and doing other chores. In late August their relationship was still stable enough that William trusted York to go to St. Charles in search of a runaway slave.13 But trouble was brewing. York was unhappy in St. Louis and he let his master know it. He wanted to return to Louisville to be with his family. The situation was increasingly aggravated by York’s refusal to resign himself to a new life in St. Louis. It is possible that something more than a desire to have York with him to perform certain work was involved. York had been his companion since their youth. William could rely on him. His presence may well have been a comfort to William, and now York wanted to leave him. Even if it were his wife, York was choosing someone else over him. Hurt feelings combined with a slave’s breaking the expected code of conduct preyed greatly on William’s mind. He recorded his dismay in his letters to Jonathan. His attitude and actions concerning York don’t reflect well on him. Today he is perceived as callous and cruel. Two centuries ago, even William feared his family might think him too severe regarding the treatment of his slaves, but he was within his rights as a slaveowner.

On November 9, 1808, William reported trouble with York. The two men were at odds and both had stubbornly dug in their heels regarding what they wanted. “I Shall Send York…and permit him to Spend a fiew weeks with his wife. he wishes to Stay there altogether and hire himself which I have refused. he prefers being Sold to return[ing] here, he is Serviceable to me at this place, and I am determined not to Sell him to gratify him.” Gratifying York as recognition and thanks for his years of faithful service, so he could be near his wife, seems perfectly reasonable, but that wasn’t necessarily the way of slavery in 1808 America. A slave who made such demands was defying his master and order and discipline must be maintained. This had become a contest of wills. Taking the risk of being hired out was uncertain enough, but to ask to be sold so he could be in Louisville near his wife was fraught with danger and possible heartbreak. Unless York somehow got the right of refusal regarding to whom he was sold, he could find himself with an owner who wouldn’t permit him to visit his wife or he might find himself taken away from Louisville if his new master moved or resold or hired him out to someone else. William’s anger and frustration were at such a level that he then threatened to do what seems the unthinkable. “If any attempt is made by york to run off, or refuse to prove him a Slave, I wish him Sent to New Orleans and Sold, or hired out to Some Severe master until he thinks better of Such Conduct.”14

York becomes a recurring subject in William’s letters to Jonathan. For historians and readers today the information he imparts regarding York’s sad post-expedition fate and his own actions as a slaveholder is priceless, but very troubling. If the widening chasm in their relationship hadn’t bothered William, he wouldn’t have returned in his correspondence to his difficulties with York time and again. He hoped Jonathan would have sage advice on the topic of York and his other slave troubles. What that advice might have been is unknown because Jonathan’s letters most likely haven’t survived. A couple of weeks later, with York on his way to Louisville, William returned to the topic of his recalcitrant slave, writing

"I fear you think that I have become a Severe master" William Clark, York, and Slavery
Jonathan that he didn’t want York sold “if he behaves himself well . . . he does not like to Stay here on account of his wife being there. he is Serviceable to me here and perhaps he will See his Situation there more unfavourable than he expected & will after a while prefer returning to this place.”

The deteriorating relationship continued to prey on William’s mind. On December 10, 1808, he again vented his frustration. His beliefs regarding York’s loyalty, service, and value reveal how wide that chasm of understanding and sympathy between owner and slave could be, and how pernicious slavery’s effects could be for both master and slave. For Clark, worried about personal and professional responsibilities and seeking ways to become financially secure, freeing a valuable piece of property – York – wasn’t possible. In a bit of slaveowner rationalization William reasoned that York didn’t deserve his freedom, at least not yet, and blamed the situation on York’s refusal to give up his wife in Kentucky.

I wrote you in both of my last letters about York, I did wish to do well by him – but as he has got Such a notion about freedom and his emence Services, that I do not expect he will be of much Service to me again; I do not think with him, that his Services has been So great (or my Situation would promit me to liberate him[)] I must request you to do for me as Circumstances may to you, appir best, or necessary and will ratify what you may do — he Could [be freed] if he would be of Service to me and Save me money, but I do not expect much from him as long as he has a wife in Kenty. I find it is necessary to look out a little and must get in Some way of makeing a little, you

will not disapprove of my inclinatuns on this Score, I have long discovered your wish (even before I went [on] the western trip) to induc me to believer that there might be a raney day. Clouds Seem to fly thicker than they use to do and I think there will be a raney day.16

Clark's “raney day” notion regarding York continued. York took advantage of the opportunity to visit his wife and family and apparently told people he had permission to stay for four or five months rather than weeks. When word reached William of York's exaggeration of the time allotted to him, Clark was more than a “little displeased.” “I do not wish the horses nor do I cear for Yorks being in this Country. I have got a little displeased with him and intended to have punished him but Govr. Lewis has insisted on my only hireing him out in Kentucky which perhaps will be best,” he wrote Jonathan on December 17, 1808. “This I leave entire-ly to you, perhaps if he has a Severe master a while he may do Some Service, I do not wish him again in this Country untill he applies himself to Come and give over that wife of his – I wishd him to Stay with his family four or five weeks only, and not 4 or 5 months [...]” 17

It is interesting that Meriwether Lewis intervened on York's behalf and persuaded his partner in discovery to take a less drastic course of action. Still, being hired out to a se-vere master would be a wretched experience, but in this war of wills between the two men, Clark was determined to win. A chastened, remorseful, and obedient York, resigned to giving up his wife and family in Kentucky, and requesting to return to his master, was Clark's preferred resolution of the problem. Months passed with no word about York's sta-tus. William's curiosity and perhaps anticipation regarding York's bending to his will was such by March of 1809 that he asked Jonathan “what has becom of YorK? and the horse.”18 Two possessions William had on his mind.

Whether York applied to William to return to St. Louis or the latter requested he be sent back isn't known. During his stay in Louisville York might have been something of a floater among Clark family members or hired out only for short periods rather than the usual one-year term. But whatever his situation, he did not endear himself to the Clarks and other Whites. York apparently let his unhappiness and resentment be known. His behavior wasn't what it should have been for a slave and that earned him the displeasure of the Clarks and others. William had exposed York's dis-simbling about how long he had permission to stay in Louisville. York was violating the slave code of conduct. In short, he was a malcontent and possible trouble maker, setting a bad example for his fellow slaves. This is known because Edmund Clark wrote his brother in early September 1809, when he learned that William planned to send York back to Louisville after his return to St. Louis that spring, that “I don’t like him nor does any other person in this coun-try and was it not for their friendship for you I Believe he w[oul]d have been roughly used when he was up last.”19

It was indeed back to Louisville for York after a brief return to St. Louis. William documents his “insolent and Sulky” behavior in letters to Jonathan. He became so dis-gusted with him that he sent him to Louisville to be hired out or sold. York might be near his wife and family but it was not for an enjoyable visit. He had fallen from one of the highest positions a slave could have, as the body servant to a high-ranking government official and national hero, to facing possible sale down the river to the Deep South or being hired out to a severe master. Manumission was still off the table as far as William was concerned. If he had hopes that York would have adjusted his attitude upon his return to St. Louis, he was disappointed. York was back with Clark by May 1809, and his letters to Jonathan continued to document York's behavior. “He is here but of verry little Service to me, insolent and Sulky, I gave him a Severe trouncing the other Day and he as much mended Since Could he be hired for any thing at or near Louis ville, I think if he was hired there a while to a Severe master he would See the differ-ence and do better.”20

And so it went that spring and summer between Clark and York. The latter's behavior would improve after punish-ment but soon enough his resentment and disobedience would again manifest themselves and he'd be punished. In July York landed in jail. It isn't known whether it was for violation of a law or at William's direction. There is a story in St. Louis lore that York would frequent the taverns and tell tales of the expedition in exchange for drinks, get drunk, and be jailed. Or did Clark have him imprisoned as punish-ment for some wrongdoing? Whatever the reason, William reported in late July that “I have taken York out of the Cale-boos and he has for two or three weeks been the finest ne-grow I ever had.” He then reported that he'd lost his favorite horse a few days earlier.21

By late August William was again so disgusted with York that he decided to wash his hands of him. “Since I confined yorK he has been a gadd fellow to work; I have become
displeased with him and Shall hire or Sell him,” he wrote Jonathan on August 26. He was sending him to Wheeling as a boat hand in early September. When he arrived at Louisville on the return trip, “I wish much to hire him or Sell him I cant Sell negrows here for money.” York had so violated the master-slave code, William believed, that he deserved to be sold – to be turned into money. Whether there were no takers in Louisville and vicinity or a decision was made not to send him off with a slave trader to New Orleans or Natchez, William retained ownership of York. Instead, he was hired out, sometimes to neglectful or severe masters. It made William some money, but it didn’t necessarily teach York the error of his ways. Life in Louisville was hard for York. He worked for the Clark family and also was hired out to severe masters who mistreated him. He worked as a wagon driver, which would play a role in his future. William’s
nephew John O’Fallon had known York his whole life. York had been entrusted by William with accompanying O’Fallon on a trip from Louisville upriver to Maysville, Kentucky, or farther a few years after the expedition. In his instructions to his nephew, William stated that York knew how to handle both horses and a boat. In May 1811 O’Fallon wrote his uncle with the main purpose of informing him about York. It was reported that his wife’s owner was moving to Natchez and taking her with him, O’Fallon wrote. Inquiries indicated that York’s behavior had been good and with his wife’s leaving Louisville, would his uncle wish York to return to St. Louis? He confessed that he didn’t know the details of their “breach,” but York “appeared wretched under the fear that he has incurred your displeasure and which he despairs he’ll ever remove. I am confident he sorely repent[s].”

His nephew’s plea on behalf of York didn’t persuade William to allow him to return to St. Louis. York remained hired out in Louisville. How severe his treatment was isn’t known, but O’Fallon’s comment in his 1811 letter that York had been “indifferently clothed if at all” indicates he wasn’t treated particularly well. By December 1814 William was ignorant of York’s situation, querying brother Edmund in a letter, “what have you done with…my negrow man York?” In November 1815 William and his nephew John Hite Clark formed a drayage business in Louisville. The driver of the wagon, as stated in the business agreement, was “Genl. Will: Clarks Slave (York).” Nine years after the return of the Corps of Discovery from its epic journey, York still was a slave.

What became of York after this is uncertain. He disappears from known documentary sources. Clark doesn’t include him on his list of the status of expedition members he recorded in the 1820s. It isn’t until Washington Irving visited William in St. Louis in 1832 that York’s apparent fate was revealed. In the course of their conversation, William reflected on York, reporting that he had set him free (not stating when), set him up in a freight hauling business with a route between Nashville and Richmond (Kentucky most likely), that he was a poor businessman, lost the business, “damned” the day he ever got his freedom, and died in Tennessee of cholera while trying to return to Clark in St. Louis, the year unnoted.

Is this true? Should it be given more weight than the story of the happier ending of York’s returning to the West and being a respected chief and warrior among the Crow Indians? In the early 1830s mountain man Zenas Leonard met a Black man living among the Crow who said he had been with Lewis and Clark. But Leonard didn’t give his name. This has caused some to conclude that it was York. But there were other African Americans in the West who might have had dealings with Lewis and Clark. The person also might have been spinning a yarn. The great weight of evidence supports an unmarked pauper’s grave in Tennessee as being York’s fate.

Why should we believe William Clark, a displeased master who opined that York was an ungrateful slave who eventually regretted being freed? While Clark might have
engaged in the usual slaveholder rationalization that freed slaves regretted their freedom, he had no reason to lie about York’s fate. What he reported to Irving regarding York’s being a wagon driver is supported by contemporary documentation. As York neared fifty years of age, William needed to free him if he intended ever to do so. In 1815 York would have been in his forties. If he were the same age as William or a few years younger, he would have reached that cut-off age of fifty in 1820 or perhaps a few years later. William also had a wide range of contacts. Even though he’d evidently washed his hands of York, that didn’t mean he was unaware of how he fared after being freed. When he learned of Meriwether Lewis’ death in October of 1809, he immediately reached out to several contacts in Nashville for information. York was based in Nashville and perhaps those same contacts kept William informed about him. What he tells Irving is quite specific. If he told Irving further details, he unfortunately didn’t note them. If William gave a year for York’s death, would it have been 1822? There were other cholera deaths in the region that year, including William’s brother-in-law Dennis Fitzhugh. The manner in which William reflects on York suggests that some years had passed since he’d been freed and died. Is an estimate of York’s manumission about 1820 and dying about 1822 reasonable? As mentioned earlier, William apparently released Ben from his indenture in 1820. We may never know when York was freed. This author continues to search for more information on York but further details relating to his freedom and death have not been found to date.

York’s fate is one question in need of an answer, but there is another question that also must be asked – why did York go to Nashville upon being freed? Going farther south into slave territory was quite dangerous for an emancipated slave. There are numerous instances of freed slaves who were kidnapped and returned to slavery. By moving away from Louisville, York also left behind whatever support system he had. And, with Louisville’s location on the banks of the Ohio River, free territory was right across the river. So why not remain in Louisville or move to Indiana? The Clarks, including William, owned property, and perhaps York could have lived on it. William previously had expressed his desire to assist the old slaves unable to take care of themselves. Would he have done the same for York? He did set him up in a business. Why not keep that business in Louisville?

To possibly answer that we need to return to the cause of the two men’s falling out – York’s wife in Kentucky. York sacrificed much in order to try to remain near his wife and family. He sacrificed his status as the trusted servant and companion to a prominent national figure and high government official with the advantages that accompanied that position, even if he were the property of that official. In William Clark’s mind, all would be fine if his life-long companion would only give up his wife and resign himself to life in St. Louis. But York would not. Instead, he expressed his desire


Dinner plentiful – good – but rustic – fried chicken, bacon and grouse, roast beef, baked potatoes, tomatoes, excellent cakes, bread, butter, etc., etc. Gov. C. gives much excellent information concerning Indians.

His slaves – set them free – one he placed at a ferry – another on a farm, giving him land, horses, etc. – a third he gave a large wagon and team of six horses to ply between Nashville and Richmond. They all repented and wanted to come back.

The waggoner was York, the hero of the Missouri expedition and adviser of the Indians. He could not get up early enough in the morn’g – his horses were ill kept – two died – the others grew poor. He sold them and was cheated – entered into service – fared ill. “Damn this freedom,” said York, “I have never had a happy day since I got it.” He determined to go back to his old master – set off for St. Louis but was taken with the cholera in Tennessee and died. Some of the traders think they have met traces of York’s crowd, on the Missouri.
to remain in Louisville and within months of their move his attitude and behavior had alienated William. It seems inconceivable to us that Clark wouldn’t have happily granted such a long-time loyal companion his freedom for his faithful service. Instead, it became a battle of wills in which Clark had the upper hand. York’s requests to be hired out or sold to someone in Louisville so he could be near his wife were denied and his declaration that he deserved to be freed fell on deaf ears.

When Clark finally did free him, more than nine years after the return of the expedition, York went south to Tennessee. Why? For the possible answer we must return to John O’Fallon’s May 1811 letter in which he reported that York’s wife’s owner was preparing to move to Natchez. Was the information accurate? Did the owner perhaps change his destination? Was his new home, and thus York’s wife’s new home, not Natchez but Nashville? This is the only logical explanation as to why York moved farther south and away from his support system and free territory. Although rare, there are documented cases of freed slaves who traveled deeper into slave territory in search of loved ones. York’s love for and devotion to his wife are one of the great love stories of early American history. And like a Shakespearian play, also tragic. If she were in Nashville, it is questionable whether York was able to reunite with her. From what Clark reported to Irving, his life post-freedom wasn’t good and ultimately ended in an unmarked pauper’s grave. In spite of all the questions that remain unanswered and all the gaps we have in our knowledge of Clark’s principal slave, it is nevertheless true that York’s life is one of the best documented for that of a slave. Through journals, letters, receipts, business ledgers, and legal documents and Washington Irving’s visit to St. Louis, significant events in York’s post-expedition life can be traced. That, for an enslaved person in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, is extremely rare. And through some of those sources York’s voice can be heard, an understanding of
him as a person gleaned. The triumphs as well as the tragedy of his life have been recorded for posterity.

What are we to conclude about William Clark as a slaveholder? Should he be viewed through the lens of presentism? If so, his reputation would be that of the Simon Legree character from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a cruel master with whip in hand. But is that fair to Clark and fair to history? Probably not. William Clark was the product of a slaveholding society and a slaveholding family. He was shaped by that culture. Recent Clark biographers Landon Jones, William Foley, and Jay Buckley concur. Did he believe African Americans were inferior to Euro-Americans? Yes. Did he believe slavery was wrong? On some level he probably did, yet, like Thomas Jefferson and many others, he believed it was a system in which both Whites and Blacks were trapped, Jefferson’s *wolf by the ear*. William Clark owned slaves until the day he died and willed them to his sons. The value of his human property was such that he believed he couldn’t afford freeing more than the occasional one. The Clarks had a reputation as “good” masters to their slaves. To be a bad or severe master was wrong and a blot on a slave-owning family’s good name. Owners didn’t abuse their slaves and slaves weren’t punished unless they deserved it.

William’s letters to Jonathan document the anxiety and frustration he experienced in trying to do right by York and his other slaves while at the same time requiring them to obey orders and uphold their responsibilities as slaves. When they failed to do so there were consequences in the form of escalating punishments from lost privileges and whippings to hiring out to a severe master or being sold. While William might have been a stern task master and unsympathetic regarding the desires of his slaves, he wasn’t cruel to them, at least by the standards of the time. By those standards, he was not a severe master. He responded as he’d been conditioned to and as a slaveholding society expected him to – to maintain discipline and control over his slaves. This, of course, doesn’t entirely excuse his actions regarding York, Venos, Easter, Juba, Scipio, and his other slaves. But the culture and realities of William Clark’s world must be kept in proper perspective. Applying today’s societal mores and beliefs to those who inhabit history is a slippery slope and one that should be avoided. It isn’t necessarily fair or valid. This applies to William Clark as slaveholder. He could be a stern master, on occasion capable of meting out physical punishment to man and woman both. He could be demanding, callous, and perhaps unreasonable. But he was no

**Some Books You May Wish to Read**

*In Search of York: The Slave Who Went to the Pacific with Lewis and Clark*

*Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*

*Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*

*Africans in America: America’s Journey through Slavery*

*American Slavery*

*A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1760-1891*

*White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*
Carol Anderson (New York: Bloomsbury Adult, 2017).
exception to how even “good” masters treated their human property. By the standards of his day, he was a good and honorable man who loved his family and his country – and who tried to do right by the human beings he owned. While York and other slaves of William Clark serve as examples of the pernicious institution of slavery, it should be kept in mind that its effects also impacted those who owned them, making them people of whom they might not have been proud and who today often are condemned for being or becoming who they were. The peculiar institution and its relationships between owner and owned are replete with contradictions and complexities. But that is part of human nature.

William Clark was no exception. His actions as a slaveholder are contradictory. His relationships with his human property sometimes were complicated – as all relationships can be. His struggle to be a “good” master rather than a “severe” one was difficult at times. Clark had his flaws, just as all people do, and his actions as a slaveholder can be considered one of them; but he was a man of his times, culture, and upbringing and they informed his beliefs and world view for better and worse. He may not have liked the institution of slavery, but he engaged in it and perpetuated it.

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Notes
3. Jefferson County (KY) Bond and Power of Attorney Book, 2:201-2. There is a question whether Clark actually owned Ben at the time he freed him. Ben had been willed to John Clark’s grandson John and Benjamin O’Fallon but was to be managed by their Uncle William and title transferred to him when the boys reached twenty-one years of age – still some ten years away. Clark apparently had acquired Ben or acted as if he had. Ben’s wife was Venus/Verus/Venex, whom had been willed to George Rogers Clark. William had acquired her and two of her children from George in 1800 for services rendered on his behalf. William took Ben and Venus with him to St. Louis when he moved there in June 1808. The freeing and then indenturing of slaves was a legal ploy commonly practiced. An owner might free one or more slaves but still bring enslaved people across the river. In this early period the enforcement of the ban on slavery in what was the Northwest Territory was rather lax.

Clark’s Mulberry Hill neighbor Robert K. Moore moved across the river to Clark County shortly before Clark and freed a couple of his slaves using the same language. It wasn’t until anti-slavery members of the territorial legislature gained a majority in 1809 that the slavery friendly treatment began to be ended. The 1816 state constitution specifically prohibited slavery. A letter in the Clark Family Papers at the Missouri Historical Society indicates that Ben was either released from his indenture or simply sent to live in Clarksville in 1820. The letter written in Ben’s name (probably by Clark’s nephew Samuel Gwathney) from Clarksville, Indiana, on June 3, 1820, to Clark inquires about his trunk that Clark was going to send him. Ben already had received two boxes of his things (Clark Family Papers, Missouri Historical Society).

4. William Clark to Jonathan Clark, December 14, 1810, in James J. Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother: Letters of William Clark to Jonathan Clark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 251-252n. The entire quote is “if the farm is bought of which I think you mention – I hope the Old Negrows at the point, they must not suffer when they have become infirm, may I beg of You to doo the best you Can with them So that they may not Suffer I will with much pleasure pay for expences which may be encured by them under your directions.” After brother George’s leg was amputated and he went to live at Locust Grove with his sister Lucy Croghan and her husband William the family had to decide what to do with the farm at Point of Rocks (present Clark’s Point). It was sold but William retained land he owned in the immediate area along the river front. The old slaves living at the Point might have included Old York, Rose, Harry, Cupid, and others. The four named were over fifty years old in 1799. Whether all of them were living in 1799 is not known, but Rose definitely was because she is mentioned in William’s 1816 runaway slave ad for her son Juba (see Note 5). In Kentucky slaves older than fifty weren’t to be freed because it was feared that they wouldn’t be able to earn a living and thus be a charity case. If they were moved to free territory that might have been legal but they likely wouldn’t have been legal at the same time there for the same reason. The original “Dear Brother” letters are in the collection of the Filson Historical Society.

5. William Clark to Jonathan Clark, July 21, 1808, Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 144, 148n. Venos (also spelled Venus and Venex) was Ben Gee/McClee’s wife. She and two of her children were inherited by George Rogers Clark’s will and then by William in January 1800 to compensate him for his work on George’s behalf. She had at least one more child after 1799. Whether Ben was the children’s father isn’t known.

6. William Clark to Jonathan Clark, January 21, 1809, and ca. March 1, 1809, Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 191, 137n. Easter was pregnant and apparently near term. William was charged six dollars by a midwife – a “Skilful old woman” as he described her – to attend to Easter, apparently her set fee for delivering a slave’s baby. The midwife’s services for Julia, who had delivered their first child Meriwether Lewis Clark earlier that month, had cost twenty-nine dollars. John and Benjamin O’Fallon had inherited Easter by the terms of their grandfather John Clark’s 1799 will but William, as with Venus, had the use of her and when the boys reached age twenty-one he would gain ownership (which he already might have by the time he moved to St. Louis in 1808 or even as early as 1803 when he moved from Louisville to Clarksville). Nancy was the daughter of Old York and Rose and York’s half-sister I believe. In 1799 she was less than twelve years of age. All three were inherited by William. She remained with the Clark family long-term because Meriwether Lewis Clark in his “Family Record, 1853” lists four slaves as being or having been his children as being her children. Sillo is Priscilla. She was inherited by William’s nephews John and Benjamin O’Fallon but William controlled them and was to eventually gain ownership when the boys reached twenty-one years of age. It’s possible he already had acquired her. Sip is Scippio, also spelled as Seppo by Clark at times. He was the son of Rose but not of Old York I believe. He was inherited by Edmund Clark per John Clark’s will (see Note 8 for more information on him). Meriwether Lewis Clark, in the 1853 family record, listed immediate and allied family members; and, thankfully for historians and genealogists, he also listed the Clark family slaves whom he remembered, knew of, and owned – even those who had been inherited from his father by the 1803 constitution. He also listed horses. The slaves listed in the record who are mentioned in this article are Ben, Venex, Nancy, Seppo, and York. Meriwether Lewis Clark, Family Record, 1853, 90-7, Filson Historical Society.

7. William Clark to Jonathan Clark, January 2 and January 21, 1809, December 10, 1808, Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 190, 193, 183. That Clark mentioned not selling Ben raises a question about his status. He was freed and then indentured to Clark in 1800. By all accounts what they were telling to the law, an indentured servant’s contract – and therefore the servant essentially – could be sold.


9. William Clark to Jonathan Clark, ca. March 1, 1809, and August 26, 1809, Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 197, 199n, 137n, 147n. Clark only recently

We proceeded on
had purchased Scipio (Seppo or Sep as Clark refers to him) and regretted the acquisition almost immediately. He learned that his brother Edmund had sold Scipio to the person from whom William bought him and that Scipio had wronged Edmund in some way. William was upset to learn this and tried to sell Scipio but didn’t want to lose money on the sale. Although unhappy with Scipio and the situation, the latter had given William no cause to whip him as yet. Landon Jones, in his biography of Clark, cites an April 18, 1819, letter by Joseph Clark (sister Fanny’s second husband) to John B. C. Lucas reporting that an “ungrateful” Clark was going to send Scipio to New Orleans to be sold, and rather than suffer that fate he killed himself. Juba (who was York’s half-brother) was still owned by Clark in 1816 and still running away. Clark posted an ad in the Louisville Western Courier giving a physical description and stating he had run away and was thought possibly to be in the Louisville area where he had family (his mother Rose, half-brother York, and probably others) and might be headed to Ohio. Juba apparently was captured. Jones states Juba was sold on the court-house steps in Louisville. See Landon Y. Jones, William Clark and the Shaping of the West (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 251, 232 for the information on Scipio’s death and Juba’s sale. Easter and Priscilla (Sillo) were left to William’s nephews John and Benjamin O’Fallon but William controlled them and was eventually to gain ownership when the boys reached twenty-one years old. It’s possible he already had acquired them.

10. William Clark to Fanny Clark O’Fallon, June 1, 1795, Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 273; Jefferson County (KY) Will Book, 1:86-90. Referring to adult African American men as “boy” was common practice as one of the methods of demeaning them and formalizing their inferior status.


13. William Clark to Jonathan Clark, July 21, 1808, and ca. March 1, 1809, Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 144, 197, 199n; Jackson, ed., Letters, 2:462-463n. The runaway might have been York’s half-brother Juba. Clark reported his difficulties to Jonathan regarding his running off and being offered for sale.


19. Edmund Clark to William Clark, September 3, 1809, William Clark Papers – Clark Family Papers Collection, Missouri Historical Society. This letter also is cited in Betts and Holmberg, In Search of York, 164.

20. William Clark to Jonathan Clark, May 28, 1809, Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 201. Clark uses the term “mended” meaning mended his ways rather than physically mended. It also is possible that he intended “minded” rather than “mended” but if so the “i” is not dotted and slightly open.


22. William Clark to Jonathan Clark, August 26, 1809, Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 210, 212n. This is the last letter to Jonathan in which William mentions York; and their correspondence continued for two more years until Jonathan’s death in November 1811.


25. Jackson, ed., Letters, 2:638-9; John F. McDermott, ed., The Western Journals of Washington Irving (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944), 82; John C. Ewers, ed., Adventures of Zenos Leonard, Fur Trader (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 51-2, 139, 147-8; Betts and Holmberg, In Search of York, 135-43, 167-70; Holmberg, ed., Dear Brother, 98n-99n. Two events in 1820 also point to it as the possible year in which Clark freed York: the deaths of his wife Julia and her father George Hancock. Their deaths had estate implications, including the disposition of slaves that Julia had received from her father. With these events and the clock that was ticking toward York’s fiftieth birthday, perhaps Clark believed that the time had come to free him. One also wonders if the horses and wagon acquired for the 1815 drayage business with his nephew were the same ones given to York for his business upon being freed.

The Company: The Rise and Fall of the Hudson’s Bay Empire

By Stephen R. Bown
Doubleday Canada, 2020; 496 pp, $28.95.

Reviewed by Mark Jordan

Thomas Jefferson instructed Meriwether Lewis (June 20, 1803) that:

The object of your mission is to explore the Missouri river, & such principal stream of it, as, by it’s course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean...may offer the most direct & practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce.

By “commerce” Jefferson meant the fur trade, the most important enterprise in the world at the time. Jefferson wanted Lewis to seek out avenues for further exploitation of the pelts of North American mammals.

Trade in furs began when the French first moved westward along the St. Lawrence River in the sixteenth century. Out of the wilderness of seventeenth century North America, two French men emerged who had a vast understanding of the value of fur, particularly beaver, the nature of the Indigenous peoples who wanted the fruits of the fur trade, and the work required to get those furs to market and European goods into the hands of the Natives. Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart des Groseilliers met in what was then New France, the area surrounding Montreal and Quebec and the St. Lawrence River. They scoured rivers and lakes, traveling as far west as the Mandan villages in today’s North Dakota, acquiring an understanding of tribes, routes, languages. They ventured northward toward Hudson Bay, finding even plusher beaver fur. They offered this knowledge to the traders of the new English colonies, then to the French, then finally to the English. Rejected by the first two, Radisson and Groseilliers captured the attention of Prince Rupert, cousin to King Charles II of England. Succeeding in getting wealthy Englishmen to subscribe to an enterprise that would exploit the fur trade in Canada, the two French men and Prince Rupert in 1670 convinced King Charles to issue the “Charter of the Company of Adventurers of England, Trading into Hudson’s Bay.” The Charter conferred unparalleled power over a territory that was almost unmeasurable in scope – the entire watershed of Hudson Bay. With this stroke of the pen, the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) came to control much of North America for 200 years.

With a description of the somewhat fantastical adventures of Radisson and Groseilliers, which led to acquiring the Charter, Stephen R. Bown starts his examination of the HBC’s rise, its tribulations and successes, and ultimately its demise in his book, The Company: The Rise and Fall of the Hudson’s Bay Empire. Bown provides a thorough look at the fur trade and its growth, not only through the eyes of the HBC, but also through its employees, allies, and competitors. Eventually, the fur trade moved the boundaries of North America from the east to the west coast and as far north as possible.

Montreal, one of New France’s two commercial centers in the late seventeenth century, had a sphere of influence extending to the Great Lakes and beyond. Their traders would board their canoes, head westward over rivers and lakes into the countryside, and bring back the furs. The other commercial entity had several centers: outposts (called forts or “factories”) punctuated the shores of Hudson Bay at carefully selected sites. The Indigenous population transported furs to these factories. The HBC clung to this model for many years, occasionally moving inland, while the Montreal traders expanded by moving further westward. Competition between these traders and the HBC grew fierce. Theft, even murder, became a common practice, each party seeking to dominate the other.

By the early 1800s, the North West Company had become the prime competitor – and prime enemy – of the HBC. The two companies engaged in what looked like all-out economic war between 1814 and 1821 until pushed into a merger that ended the hostilities and afforded the HBC even greater power and scope. By the early
nineteenth century, the HBC territory extended far beyond the grant of the original Charter (the western extent of which would have been the Rocky Mountains). The Company had settled on the West Coast. Its empire extended south into Oregon and north to Alaska. Far from London, from where it derived its “authority,” the Company was a political realm unto itself – and acted as such, particularly under the regime of George Simpson, whom Bown considers “one of the greatest villains in Canadian history.” Not only a tyrant, he was also a despicable racist. Without cataloging all his sins, I will point out that he fathered many children with Indigenous women and abandoned them all – children and mothers alike (as did many of the factors who returned to Britain). Compare him to David Thompson, who made a “country marriage” with a Native woman Charlotte Small (she had a British father who had abandoned his family) and spent the rest of his life with her, raising a family and taking her with him on many of his extended forays. Simpson instituted policies that excluded Indigenous peoples and the offspring of HBC employees from liaisons with Indigenous women from participating in the operation of the HBC. Many decisions about the future of the territory and the HBC – indeed Canada – did not take into consideration the Indigenous peoples who put the HBC on the map and made it prosper. Bown repeatedly points out how poorly the Natives were treated and under what circumstances. Bown’s book offers a view of the darker side of Canadian history.

While the first part of the nineteenth century was kind to the Company, things began to unravel as the latter half commenced. Until the 1860s, under the command of the draconian Simpson, the HBC acted with neither approbation nor consent. The peripatetic Simpson would take little advice and brook no back talk. He traveled the length of his empire in a twenty-foot birch bark canoe – from Montreal to Hudson Bay to the West Coast, using Indigenous paddlers to propel him. They labored from early morning to late evening, at times covering a staggering 160 kilometers a day with the swaggering Simpson. (The furthest I have ever paddled on a fast-flowing Canadian river in one day was about 100 kilometers.) As the century progressed and citizens began to fill the voids in the expanse that became Canada, toleration of the Company and its monopoly declined. Former employees of the Company who settled in or around the forts or in independent boroughs like the Red River settlement (which became Winnipeg), French Canadians, Metis, and even the Indigenous population felt choked by the Company, which took every opportunity to prevent individuals from trapping and selling or engaging in other commerce – even agriculture. Ultimately, the Company lost the Charter that had given it untrammeled power and reach and “sold” its interest to Canada. Bown’s The Company ends with this denouement as modern Canada is about to emerge.

But the HBC did not disappear in the 1860s. It has continued as a viable business entity to this day, with its Bay stores and outposts in the most remote of places, some of which I have visited in my canoe excursions across Canada. Bown does not delve into these last 150 years of HBC history. This absence does not detract, however, from a thrilling look at one of the world’s greatest monopolies and how it advanced the exploration of Canada and influenced the United States. The original Charter included the Red River of the North, which flowed from what would become Minnesota and North Dakota. The HBC also moved into the Oregon Territory, Washington, and Idaho. Remnants can still be seen at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site in Vancouver, Washington.

While novels are acknowledged to be character driven, histories such as The Company must also give us the story of individuals who played key roles. On this Bown delivers. We get intimate views of the British, particularly the Scots; the French Canadians, many of whom were the product of liaisons between French trappers and Indigenous women; and the Indigenous peoples. A good novel introduces more characters than can be cited in a review; so too with this history. Some of the book’s names – David Thompson and Alexander Mackenzie – will be familiar to readers of WPO. Bown applauds the scope of Thompson’s work, not only as factor (the manager of a factory or fort) but as mapmaker and ardent pursuer of the source of the Columbia. He subjects Mackenzie to more scrutiny, not finding the adventu- rous Scot, the first man to cross the continent, a particularly appealing individual. Bown’s telling of Mackenzie’s journey from Fort Chipewyan to the mouth of the Bella Coola River is brief and does not convey the scope of what those nine explorers accomplished. For a thorough discussion of Mackenzie’s journey, a better source is First Crossing: Alexander Mackenzie, His Expedition Across North America and the Opening of the Continent by Derek
Hays. Bown’s book is intended as a single volume history; as such it of necessity must omit some detail to keep the narrative under control. Anyone wishing a more complete but highly opinionated look at the HBC should read Peter C. Newman’s three-volume history, written about thirty years ago. Newman took the title for the second volume, *Caesars of the Wilderness*, from Grace Lee Nute’s biography of Radisson and Groseilliers; she in turn took the appellation from a quote attributed to Radisson: “We were Caesars, being nobody to contradict us....”

Samuel Hearne, another of the incredible characters in this story, worked out of Prince of Wales Fort at the mouth of the Churchill River. He made several forays into the interior from 1770 to 1772, accompanied by one of the most remarkable of the book’s Indigenous characters, Matonabbee. Hearne went in search of the mythical copper mines said to exist “out there.” The mines proved elusive, but Hearne was witness to many interesting interactions between Indigenous peoples, including the massacre of Inuit at Bloody Falls on the Coppermine River by Matonabbee’s companions. Hearne then reached the Arctic Ocean. He had been searching for the Northwest Passage – a grail of exploration throughout this period. His biographer Ken McGoohan believes Hearne to be the model for Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner.

Another Indigenous contributor to the success of the HBC was Thanadelthur, a Chipewyan woman who had excellent language skills. Her story of a mysterious metal initiated the search for copper. James Knight, an HBC factor, put her in charge of a mission to Great Slave Lake to effect reconciliation between the Cree and the Chipewyan, thus allowing the HBC to gain access to prime furs from deeper within the Charter territory. Stories such as these add flesh and blood to much of the history of the HBC, including the Indigenous populations, for whom Bown has great sympathy.

Bown touches on Lewis and Clark. He makes the erroneous assertion that they crossed the Continental Divide with forty-two men. He refers to Fort Clatsop as an “uninspiring dwelling.” He notes that Thompson eluded Piegan hostility in 1807 when he traversed their territory westward because the tribe concentrated their attentions to the south, seeking revenge for Lewis’ killings at the Marias River. The imperial impact of Jefferson’s effort to exploit American commerce plays a role, but it was through others who followed, such as Astor and the missionaries.

When I read a book describing the exploration of North America, I like to see detailed maps that illustrate routes taken. Unfortunately, Bown’s book contains only three not terribly detailed maps showing HBC territory. While they may be considered serviceable, I would have preferred more. For example, my copy of Samuel Hearne’s *A Journey from Hudson’s Bay to the Northern Ocean* has a magnificent foldout map of his travels. Even Wikipedia has decent though incomplete maps of Hearne’s travels. *The Company* details excursions of pioneering explorers Peter Pond, Anthony Henday, Henry Kelsey, even Radisson and Groseilliers. Maps tracing each explorer’s route would have been a very helpful addition. Notwithstanding the absence of the maps, however, *The Company* is a good way to become acquainted with the history of Canada and an informative, well-written read.

Mark Jordan, adventurer and educator, has canoed many of the waterways of North America and speaks extensively on the epic journey of Lewis and Clark. He traveled the Lewis and Clark Trail again in 2016 from the confluence of the Missouri and the Missou to Astoria to photograph the iconic locales associated with the Corps of Discovery. This proved prescient as those images became the backdrops for his transition from in-person to online teaching during the pandemic and brought the captains’ landscapes to his students across the country. He lives in Walnut Creek, California.
We have reason to feel optimistic: we retired the word “squaw” a generation ago without much fuss or fanfare. Even Washington, D.C.’s pro football franchise has liberated itself from the cultural poison of “Redskins.” Atlanta’s baseball players will not be “Braves” much longer, and no rational White person uses the N-word in our time. We learn. We grow. We adjust. And we are all better for both the process and the result.

For me it is this simple. A people has the right to be called by the name they wish to be called by. If the people we have been accustomed to calling Flatheads prefer to be known as the Salish, we should respect and honor that name, and work to retire Flathead. This is especially true since the Flatheads did not usually flatten their heads. The Nez Perce did not routinely pierce their noses. They now prefer to call themselves the Nimiipuu, which has the advantage of being rooted in their own Sahaptian language rather than in missionary or trader French.

I know this can be confusing and I know this can be frustrating. We need to learn and we need to relax. Most Native Americans are good humored and patient. They do not expect us to get it right every time or right away. We don’t have to walk on eggshells; discourse about Lewis and Clark and Native peoples is not a mine field. But we should try to wean ourselves of colonial terminology as an act of genuine respect. As the brilliant archaeologist Kevin O’Brien indicates in his essay in this issue of WPO, the Lewis and Clark story only gets richer, more fascinating, more inclusive, and more satisfying as we open our minds to the multiple layers, the palimpsest, of the landscapes and the communities of the American West.

You can feel Jim Holmberg’s discomfort in trying to write about William Clark’s relationship with his principal enslaved man York. Mr. Holmberg seeks to explore and clarify one of the most important dynamics in Clark’s life, one that was ignored for most of American history and has only really come to the surface since the coming of the Bicentennial of the expedition. It is nearly impossible to write about these things without feeling engulfed by the magnitude of the race tragedy of American history, and yet it is now irresponsible to think about Clark (or Lewis or Jefferson or Captain James Cook for that matter) without giving ample attention to this aspect of their lives. It is essential that we explore these questions, no matter how uncomfortable they make us, both those who read such essays and — for that matter — those who write them. We are all invested in the history of America, and we who are fascinated by the Lewis and Clark story perhaps have a deeper responsibility, because that transcontinental journey was one of the single most multicultural stories in American history. We should look upon that as opportunity, not burden, and we should not expect to get it right the first time or every time.

Clay Jenkinson

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Photograph of Trapper Peak, Bitterroot Mountains, Montana, courtesy of Steve Lee.