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Review: *Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country*

*Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country* by Dr. Frederick Hoxie

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no doubt enjoy a visit to this museum, and should look forward as well to its future developments.

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*Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country*, curated by DR. FREDERICK HOXIE, sponsored by the Newberry Library. Visited April 19, 2012, at Marquette University, during the NPCH Annual Conference.

Within walking distance of the Frontier Airlines Center in downtown Milwaukee lies the campus of Marquette University, set among some of the city's most historic buildings. Heading west to the campus along West Wisconsin Avenue, a bronze statue of George Washington stands as a quiet sentry over the Court of Honor, overlooking another statue in memorial of Civil War soldiers and one of a volunteer soldier in the Spanish American War. Passing these grand invocations of American history, the mood was already set to take in the small but informative traveling exhibit on display in the lobby of the campus's John P. Raynor, S.J., Library. *Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country*, curated by Dr. Frederick Hoxie, and sponsored by the Newberry Library in Chicago, provided the institution with the opportunity to display some very rare artifacts of the 1804–1806 Corps of Discovery Expedition—as the Lewis and Clark Expedition was officially known—even if they were represented only by photographic reproduction.

On display at its final stop on a tour of twenty-three libraries across the country, the exhibit first appeared four years ago as the Newberry Library's contribution to the national celebration of the Corps of Discovery Expedition's bicentennial anniversary. As former vice president for research and education at the library, Hoxie was asked to curate the exhibit. Hoxie wanted to put together an exhibit that, unlike other Lewis and Clark exhibits and literature that were produced at the time, would focus on the centrality of American Indian tribes to the expedition. Though he was initially assisted by academic works such as James P. Ronda's *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, the greatest strength of the exhibit came from members of the native communities along the trail who contributed their histories, knowledge, and perspective.

When I first approached the three large folding panels of the exhibit I was struck by the intensity of Richard Mack's beautiful photography that was used as a backdrop for text and images. Despite the title, the introductory panel made it clear that the exhibit was not focused on Lewis and Clark but instead used the Corps of Discovery Expedition itself as a nexus to explore the initial contact between the United States and American Indian tribes, and the consequences of those interactions, tracing them into the present. The exhibit began with an introduction to the cultures of the tribes that had the greatest interaction with the Corps: the Mandans and Hidatsas, the Blackfeet, the Nez Perce, the Umatillas, and the Chinook people. During the two years of plan-



Richard Mack's striking background images support the foreground text and graphics and add depth to the exhibit. (Photo courtesy of the author)

ning, Hoxie met with members of the tribes on an almost monthly basis. The heavy involvement of the tribes in what Hoxie called a “shared moment” afforded the exhibit a complicated and rich narrative that wouldn't have been possible in a commemorative or academic work.

It was not until the second panel, “Crossing Indian Country 1804–1806,” that the expedition was discussed in great depth. Without the assistance of Native Americans, the exhibit stated, the expedition would have failed, a fact that went unacknowledged and often unappreciated by the captains. Cultural misunderstandings and the difference between what the Corps hoped to achieve and Indian expectations were illustrated here through encounters between the Corps and indigenous people, both good and bad, and moments when diplomacy failed completely, such as with the slaying of two Blackfeet youths.

The Lewis and Clark expedition encouraged Anglo-Americans to flock westward, first through fur trading in the Pacific Northwest, and later through the federal encouragement of homesteading on the Great Plains and gold rushes in the Black Hills. Despite the steady increase of Anglo-Americans west of the Missouri River and the mass depopulation of American Indians during the nineteenth century, one of the goals of the participating tribes was to reaffirm their continued and growing presence in the United States. Therefore, the exhibit ends with examples of tribes that have adapted to American citizenry in the twenty-first century while also maintaining the traditions of their heritage.

Unlike other literature and commemorations produced during the bicentennial, *Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country* did not portray the Corps of Discovery Expedition in a celebratory light but instead inserted it into a pre-



The exhibit seems largely ignored by its target audience, who walk by without giving it a glance. (Photo courtesy of the author)

existing world of nuanced intertribal relationships, culture politics, and trade networks. That Lewis and Clark were delegates sent into the North American interior to establish trade, extend diplomacy, and assert American sovereignty among native peoples is a familiar storyline. However, the subtheme that the success of the expedition was hindered by failed communication among groups, cultural misunderstandings, and prevailing notions of racism is relatively new in public historical interpretations of the Corps of Discovery expedition, and one that was also initially controversial during the early planning stages of the exhibit. However, the exhibit's connection between the Corps and Native Americans in the twenty-first century has preserved the relevance of the exhibit since it was first displayed seven years ago, while also serving as a testament to the acceptance of new Western history in the public realm.

“Many of the tribes I consulted wanted people to understand that the expedition serves as a point of origin for them. They trace the beginning of their relationship with the United States directly to their ancestors’ first meeting with Lewis and Clark,” said Hoxie.

Unfortunately the success of the traveling exhibit at Raynor Library was hard to gauge, as it seemed largely ignored by its target audience, the student body of Marquette. During my time viewing the exhibit, the students who paused in the foyer on their way in and out of the library did so only to meet friends or to make a hurried phone call before class. Though the exhibit did feature many pictures of rarely seen artifacts in the Newberry’s collection such as Joseph Whitehouse’s journal and William Clark’s account book, as a traveling exhibit that used photographs, the appeal of the original artifacts was lost. Despite the excellent quality of historiography within the exhibit, with-

out artifacts the exhibit was unable to invoke curiosity in those who had come to the library for another purpose. If the exhibit had been placed in a location where people dwelt longer, I believe it would have drawn in more people. Or, as other libraries had done, the library could have invited local historical societies and other local historical groups to contribute to the exhibit by adding artifacts from their own collections, thus connecting the expedition to local history. Unfortunately at Marquette, there was little besides the beautiful photograph and stunning images to encourage the attention of the casual passerby.

For those who took the time to view *Lewis and Clark and the Indian Country*, it was unlikely that the alternative perspective on the expedition presented would fail to affect them. Lewis and Clark are names in the American historical canon that most people are familiar with, and the exhibit takes advantage of visitors' preexisting knowledge to offer them a new perspective on the captains, their American Indian counterparts, and the legacy of the expedition. The final panel, "Preparing for the Tricentennial" reaffirms that the Lewis and Clark expedition is a complex chapter of American history, worth more than just a cursory celebration by Americans. Rather, American Indians and the environment are still living with the repercussions of the Lewis and Clark expedition, a fact that the exhibit rightly asks Americans to consider and think of looking forward.

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*Schuetzenfest Von Milwaukee* and *Streets of Milwaukee*, Milwaukee Public Museum, AL MUCHKA, American history curator, [www.mpm.edu](http://www.mpm.edu).

The joint was jumping on a mid-April morning visit to the Milwaukee Public Museum (MPM). A diverse crowd of families pushing strollers, roving bands of school-aged kids, and small groups of older visitors roamed the building and snacked at the lobby café. Front-line staff in the light-filled entry area were notably friendly and well-informed as they welcomed and guided visitors to museum exhibits. It was the last day of the public school spring vacation. The vibrant scene demonstrated Milwaukee area residents' affection for and use of the MPM.

My assignment was to review historical exhibits at one of the oldest public museums in the country, chartered in 1882, with educational origins dating to the 1850s. This included visiting the iconic *Streets of Milwaukee*, the widely known (and imitated) three-quarter scale streetscape installed as the inaugural exhibit when MPM moved to its present location in the mid-1960s, the adjacent European village displays, and *Schuetzenfest Von Milwaukee*, a temporary exhibit.

Historical displays occupy a relatively small part of the museum. Natural history and anthropology installations dominate the exhibit areas, 150,000