

Native Voices: The New Lewis and Clark Expedition

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The torch has been passed. For two hundred years the story of Lewis and Clark has been told by white American males—editors from Nicholas Biddle to Gary Moulton, historians from Bernard DeVoto to Stephen Ambrose, Lewis and Clark themselves. No more. “Jefferson’s West,” the kickoff bicentennial celebration at Charlottesville and Monticello in January 2003, said it all. Jefferson’s West? He never visited. Others lived there. Now it’s their story.

The most dramatic breakthrough at Charlottesville was the appearance on stage of Native American people, descendants of the tribes Lewis and Clark visited, spokespersons for their people today. Fascinating hints of a new Native American interpretation of the Expedition emerged. Can we connect their dots, and create a new story?

In his kickoff keynote, James P. Ronda insisted that the story of Lewis and Clark cannot henceforward be told without Native American voices. I’ll take that one step further: white Americans have told us all that they can about the Expedition, and all that is new and exciting will come from Native voices.