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Review Essay

WILLIAM R. SWAGERTY AND THE INDIANIZATION OF THE CORPS OF DISCOVERY

Jay H. Buckley

In 1984 historian James P. Ronda published his pathbreaking *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, which set the standard for ethnographic analysis of Native relations and the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Three decades later, historian William R. Swagerty has added an important sequel, appropriately accompanied with Ronda's foreword, highlighting how individuals are changed by the people they encounter. In volumes 1 and 2 of *The Indianization of Lewis and Clark* (2012), Swagerty expands upon Ronda's earlier study by advocating that to accurately understand the economic, political, diplomatic, and cultural relations between the Corps of Discovery and the Indian nations, one must recognize that perhaps the most significant factor contributing to the expedition's success was the degree to which they borrowed objects and material culture from Natives to become "Indianized."

Swagerty employs the term "Indianization" to describe the gradual process whereby the Corps of Discovery acculturated Indian ways, a concept Swagerty derived from anthropologist A. Irving Hollowell, who explained how Euro Americans physically and mentally changed when they came into contact with American Indians. Swagerty establishes a baseline of Jeffersonian America's concepts of race, culture, medicine, food, and clothes to

The Indianization of Lewis and Clark. By William R. Swagerty, foreword by James P. Ronda. 2 vols. (Norman: The Arthur H. Clark Company, an imprint of the University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. Vol. 1: xviii + 343 pp. Vol. 2: pp. 345–778. 11 color plates, 49 halftones, line drawings, maps, 12 tables, selected bibliography, index. \$90.00 cloth, ISBN 9780-87062-413-1). Jay H. Buckley is an associate professor of history at Brigham Young University.

demonstrate the degree to which the expedition was “completely metamorphosed” by extensive material adaptation and cultural borrowing from Native nations. While following the Corps to the Pacific and back, Swagerty has “demonstrated that the men were profoundly transformed and the potential for a different understanding of the Indian impact on America was revealed” (p. 46).

Swagerty’s exhaustive research chronicles the extensive material adaptation and cultural borrowing between the expedition and their hosts. His study provides a dual analysis because it illuminates both white and Indian views regarding apparel, cartography, cuisine, diplomacy, housing, languages, material culture, medicine, science, sexual mores, technology, transportation, and world views. At the outset of their journey, the Americans’ views formed one circle and the Indians’ views formed another circle that barely intersected. After demonstrating how the expedition thought, ate, dressed, and lived at the outset of their journey, he expertly illustrates the changes that occurred when they came into close contact with Indian customs, values, and ideals. To a significant degree, the expedition gradually underwent a process of acculturation, blending American and Indian ways of eating, lodging, traveling, and dressing. By journey’s end, those two disparate circles of American and Indian views overlapped to a considerable degree.

The presence of cultural brokers—liaisons between Indian and white worlds—also aided the expedition. French Canadians, Creoles, Métis, the Shoshone woman Sacagawea, and other personnel contributed greatly to the Indianization process within the Corps as American cultural baggage ran out or was replaced with Native baggage. As the Corps proceeded, a number of transformations occurred: clothing comprised of wool, linen, cotton, and flannel gave way to leather moccasins, leggings and breechcloths, and woven Indian hats; American health practices and medicines were supplemented by Native cures; keelboats and pirogues were abandoned and replaced by Native canoes and Indian ponies; culinary options changed from a diet of pickled pork, flour, and butter to an Indian diet of corn, venison, salmon, and assorted root vegetables and berries; military tents and forts temporarily gave way to Indian lodges; and single bachelors engaged in intimate relations with Native women.

Swagerty asserts that “America is still learning lessons from [Meriwether] Lewis and [William] Clark [including] the cardinal significance of the Indianization within American culture.” The journals kept by the expedition members “testify to the Indian influences that enabled them to understand situations, to comprehend material realities, to analyze possibilities, and to simply proceed on, day by day” (p. 678). Swagerty concludes that “this

national epic was made possible by Indians, and by Lewis, Clark, and their Corps of Discovery's willingness to learn and adapt Indian ways" (p. 681). Significantly, the speed and degree to which the expedition adopted Indian ways played a crucial role in their very survival and ultimately contributed to their successful return.

Although Swagerty is entirely convincing in demonstrating how the Corps of Discovery was changed physically with their encounter with American Indians, he is less convincing of how the mutual encounter altered the expedition mentally. One example that Swagerty did not use, but would have supported his thesis of a mental transformation, was how Clark, after being separated from Lewis, actually changed some of his diplomatic speeches in order to incorporate voices from nature and from horses, as represented by Clark's written (but never delivered) speech to the Crow Nation.

Swagerty has authored numerous articles on the fur trade, is a contributor to the Smithsonian's *Handbook of North American Indians*, and serves as the director of the John Muir Center at the University of the Pacific. This massive two-volume set, encyclopedic in scope, is his magnum opus. Seven maps, several tables, and sixty-five illustrations accompany the seven hundred pages of text and nearly two thousand footnotes. Swagerty aptly demonstrates both his prodigious knowledge and command of a vast array of interdisciplinary source material as well as his penchant to include nearly every relevant fact imaginable. The casual reader unacquainted with the Lewis and Clark Expedition may find the narrative too tedious or detailed to fully appreciate. Some may wonder why the author provides so much evidence and minutia, offering numerous examples to illustrate or prove a point when a few may have sufficed. However, a preference toward accessibility most certainly would have sacrificed the breadth and depth this study achieves.

Scholars and readers who are already familiar with Lewis and Clark's epic journey will enjoy and laud this appraisal of Indian America's influence upon the Corps of Discovery. This beautiful set of books from Arthur H. Clark and the University of Oklahoma Press represents a major contribution to Lewis and Clark scholarship, specifically, and exploration scholarship, generally. All who take the effort to retrace and contemplate the transformation of this military expedition into an Indianized one will benefit from the exercise. Swagerty's *Indianization of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* rightly joins Ronda's *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* as two of the best sources on the ethnography of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

