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**THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE EXECUTION OF THE UNITED
STATES INDIAN POLICY**

by

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B.A. University of Maryland University College, 2006

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

This work investigates the American-Indian policy between 1790 and 1810 through the vehicle of the American government, focusing on the “white, sincere, religious-minded men who believed intensely in both American expansion and positive relations with the Indians.” While Indian reaction comprises an important piece of the native-white cultural encounter in the West, this study questions if scholars have the ability to address this problem in more than a very general way. In truth, each tribe was unique and different in their reaction to white legislation and settlement. There was no pan-Indian movement against settlement, and for the same reason, there is no pan-Indian history. However, it is possible to write of the white Americans as more of a single entity. They were closely united both in outlook and in goals. They had a single program which they meant to apply to all the Indians. This work will attempt to assess the piece of this policy regarding the fur trade and the Northwest.

This study also links the Republican policies of Thomas Jefferson with the platforms of his federalist predecessors. Thorough investigation reveals choices in Western settlement were made by both government officials and settlers. Settlement of the Western frontier did not follow a predetermined path; private settlement and frontier violence were not predestined. Many junctures existed where it could have shifted. Lewis and Clark can be used as a case study with which to assess Jeffersonian policy. First, the men followed direct orders from Jefferson, instructed to act as the “forward voice” of his anticipated policy. Second, the men recorded almost the entirety of the voyage, and thoroughly captured the initial contact between whites and natives. Moreover, this contact occurred in region without previous contact with whites. As

such, the Lewis and Clark expedition affords a unique opportunity to eliminate some of the inherent biases which were amassed during the colonial period of contact, both with the British and the American colonies.

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INTRODUCTION

Native American historians have scarcely looked at the Northwest. Yet in American history, this region comprises a unique case study with which one can measure the intentions of governmental policy as it was put into practice in an as-yet-encroached upon locale. From Ft. Mandan in present-day North Dakota to the Pacific coast, the inland region acquired in the Louisiana Purchase is exceptional among all American regions in that it had not operated under prior European sovereignty. In so much as there was a pure American-native policy designed, it was in this geographic locale alone where it was an initial construction. From a Eurocentric point of view, the region between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean, north of Spanish America, was the last, great, unexplored region on the North American continent. Despite the voluminous records of explorers, there is neither a current study of policy intent and execution, nor a general study of Native American-white contact within the region at large. To a large degree, early-American diplomatic contact with Native Americans in the Northwest, and the policy constructed by American policymakers to support it, has been overlooked.

This work was borne from my readings on “Indian history,” but it does not fall into that genre. Indians are addressed but they are not the primary subject. The direction here is similar to one taken by Francis Paul Prucha in his 1981 work *American Indian Policy in Crisis*, although to far different ends. The subject for us both is the “white, sincere, religious-minded men who believed intensely in both American expansion and positive relations with the Indians.” These are the men who chose to solve the Northwest by completely “Americanizing” the Indians.¹

¹ Francis Paul Prucha, *Indian Policy in the United States*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), iv.

Prucha says that while Indian reaction comprises an important piece of this story, one should question if scholars have the ability to address this problem in more than a very general way. In truth, each tribe was unique and different in its reaction to white legislation and settlement.² There was no pan-Indian movement against settlement, and for the same reason, there is no pan-Indian history. However, Prucha proved that it is possible to write of the white Americans as more of a single entity. Government officials were closely united both in outlook and in goals. They had a single program which they meant to apply to all the Indians. This work will attempt to assess the piece of this policy regarding the fur trade and the Northwest.

This study will focus on the twenty year period between 1789 and 1809. These two decades span the era between the creation of an autonomous American government to the end of Thomas Jefferson's second term as president. The story of America's subsequent rapid, and often violent, nineteenth century western expansion has been told elsewhere, yet few have looked into these initial twenty years of American government and policy. It can be seen that rather than beginning in the early nineteenth century, American policy addressed the Pacific Northwest, settlement, and the indigenous tribes during the Federalist era. The purposes of this work are dual. First, it will show how the decisions Thomas Jefferson made in the nineteenth century were largely made by eighteenth century policies. Second, it will shed light upon Thomas Jefferson's decisions, and investigate why he chose the policies he did.

There were choices, consciously made and executed with exacting detail by Thomas Jefferson, which led directly to the unorganized western land grab. Under President George Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox, the United States had previously considered

² Ibid.

direct involvement in the Pacific Northwest. These two men laid the groundwork for their successors to potentially expand government-controlled commercial enterprise to the Pacific Northwest. The government also, under President Jefferson, considered mimicking the British fur trade companies visible in Canada as a method of settling the West in a more pacified manner. Ultimately, however, these two choices were eschewed and the government chose not to act, allowing the Pacific Northwest to be settled independently. The discussion surrounding these other choices, why Jefferson made them, as well as the link between the preceding Federalist policies and the eighteenth century decisions provide a deeper understanding of how the Pacific Northwest was “won.”

Deciphering Jefferson’s intended Northwest policy, its implementation, and its results, comprises a three-part study. Chapter one assesses the American Indian policy preceding Thomas Jefferson and the range of choices he had as president in order to understand his choice of policies. Attempting to accurately pin down a consistent American-Indian policy has proven difficult. Finding consistency within the field of native-white studies is equally as challenging. “Old” Indian history, except for a few works specifically completed to address Indians in and of themselves, stressed the righteousness of the whites who settled the land. They often spoke of American policy and Indian removal as necessary and proper. Indians were obstacles to overcome.³

R. David Edmunds penned an article in 1995 entitled *New Visions, Old Stories: The Emergence of a New Indian History*. Tracing the new approach and views of native studies,

³ R. David Edmunds, *New Visions, Old Stories: The Emergence of a New Indian History*. (*OAH Magazine of History* Volume 9, No 4, Summer 1995) available at: <http://www.oah.org/pubs/magazine/nativeam/edmunds.html>, accessed October 17, 2009.

Edmunds states that the first job posting at the college or university level was for a position at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point in February, 1969. During this period the most commonly used textbook was Ray Allen Billington's *Westward Expansion*. Scant address was given to Indians in this text. Moreover, the sole chapter dedicated to native discussion was entitled "The Indian Barrier," a label which is an apt description of the 'old' views of white expansion.⁴

This position has largely been revised. Many new works have appeared in recent years stressing Indian agency, accomplishments and perspective. "New" Indian historians, as the authors of these works are called, use ethnography, anthropology, and other techniques to tell the previously untold half of the native-white encounter. These men and women have done credible work exposing previously ignored native societies.⁵ Much of the commentary within this work builds on numerous works by "new" Indian historians such as Richard White, Eric Hinderaker, Stuart Banner, and others. In their revealing look at the native-white encounter in the United States, these historians discuss important aspects of a unique inter-cultural relationship. Their research and conclusions ask new questions regarding diplomatic history. Chapter two investigates the existing diplomatic history regarding the Lewis and Clark expedition.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Numerous works by Prucha, including *Indian Policy in the United States*, look at the American side of Indian policy. Richard White's *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) recreates a locale where the Indian and American culture blended. Eric Hinderaker's *Elusive Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997) reconstructs American colonialism in the Ohio Valley during the eighteenth century.

⁶ Some "new" Indian history works have discussed diplomacy in some locales. Susan Sleeper Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking the Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001) questions how native societies persevered in the face of Euro-American settlement, looking particularly at the role of native women as the links between cultures. James Merrell's *Into the American Wood: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999) looks at the specific diplomats or "go-betweens" who patched schisms between natives and whites.

The Lewis and Clark exploration is a case study through which Jefferson's American Indian policy can be measured. Jefferson's specific instructions to the two explorers outlined for the how to establish the foundation for American policy among the various tribes. Evaluating the instructions affords insight into Jefferson's policies, both towards natives and the Northwest. The American delivery of Jefferson's message to the natives, and the Indian reception, offers a distinctive view into a region occupied by tribes with whom white men had no previous contact. Assessing policy implementation in the areas of the West and Pacific Northwest where there was no previous contact is different from implementation of policies in regions where previous relationships existed. Not surprisingly, this encounter has been looked at by historians. The works of Bernard DeVoto, James Ronda, and Steven Ambrose investigate the initial Indian-American diplomacy of Lewis and Clark.

Bernard DeVoto's 1953 editing of the Lewis and Clark logbooks discussed the diplomacy of the men in their several meetings with native tribes. As a whole, DeVoto concludes the men were imminently successful, and questions the ability of any other diplomat to have carried out their charges with such aplomb. This conclusion was attacked 31 years later by James Ronda in *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians*. Ronda castigates the explorers, citing the powerful tribes the men instigated altercations with as careless and unnecessary actions. In *Undaunted Courage*, Steven Ambrose agrees with Ronda's findings, agreeing the enemies Lewis and Clark made precluded success. Lewis and Clark's performance as diplomats can be re-assessed with the same questions posed by "new" Indian history. What was the Indian response to Jefferson's

paternalistic white policy? How did natives impact Lewis and Clark's diplomacy? The questions drive the reassessment of Lewis and Clark's Indian diplomacy in chapter two.⁷

The third chapter will review additional policy factors which affected the Native American-United States relationship, as well as assess the policy's intended and unintended consequences. Americans entered the West in 1803 with prepared statements and objectives. Over time, other factors mitigated against initial intentions. Fiscal constraints and individual trade rights forced Jefferson to compromise his vision. When faced with decisions, Jefferson would transfer control of settlement and trade in the Northwest from government auspices to private business control. Chapter three discusses the background behind Jefferson's decision. Although there were choices and the path was never predetermined, the settlement of the Northwest mirrored white expansion into other regions of North America.

This work links Jefferson's Indian policy to the policies Washington and Knox established in the 1780s and 1790s. While there were distinct differences in policies, those Jefferson established in the West emerged from a culmination of previous measures. Studying his intended American policy and its actual practice within a region not previously entered by whites isolates some of the variables that caused the schism between intent and result. This policy becomes clear in Jefferson's instructions to Lewis and Clark, and can be measured through its recorded application in the Pacific Northwest. Viewing the emerging American policy in a locale untouched by previous attempts to settle or govern may bring scholarship closer to a more complete understanding of the United States Indian policy.

⁷ Bernard DeVoto, ed. *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1953, lv-lvi; James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1984), 55; Steven Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 55.

CHAPTER 1

“Oh East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.”

Rudyard Kipling - *The Ballad of East and West*

In mid-January, 1807, Thomas Jefferson was faced with the decision to either control the trade and settlement of the newly-acquired Louisiana Territory or to let westward expansion be unregulated by the government. Jefferson's decision to mobilize the government to support a far-reaching, organized, factory system to control trade in the West was not an undertaking without complications, however. While it would not have been the first breach of executive powers that Jefferson committed regarding the acquisition of Louisiana, more complicated may have been expanding the army and budget to accommodate the necessary network of government posts. Surely, critics would have emerged. Many of Jefferson's opponents had argued against the purchase of Louisiana just three years before. Yet this was the path George Washington had laid out to Congress in 1789. This was the concept that Lewis and Clark brought with them along with their maps and stories. This was the decision that only Jefferson could make. Either he could mobilize the army, set up trading posts to control the fur trade and bring a measure of control to the Indians on the frontier, or he could choose to do nothing.

Jefferson's policy for the West was shaped by his predecessors. In regards to land, trade and the economy, and the treatment of natives, Jefferson began by looking at the previous policy and the recommendations made by others. These areas, however, were ultimately addressed by Jefferson in far different ways. What led to Thomas Jefferson's choices in policy towards the

Northwest and the Indians inhabiting the land? The initial thrust of Jeffersonian policy emerged in the frontier policies established at the end of the eighteenth century.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, the West on the minds of American settlers was the large Northwest Territory brought under Congressional jurisdictions in the Ordinance of 1785. The Ordinance superseded claims made by individual states and brought over 160 million acres of land north of the Ohio River under uniform Congressional procedures.⁸ This area lay entirely to the east of the Mississippi River, between the Ohio River to the south and the Great Lakes to the north. It contained in entirety the present-day states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin as well as the eastern edge of Minnesota. By the time Thomas Jefferson was sworn in, the “Old Northwest,” as it would come to be called, had been mapped, surveyed, and largely settled. Ohio itself met the required population level of sixty thousand and was inducted as a state in 1803.⁹

The West and Northwest of Jeffersonian America discussed in this study is the massive tract of land attained in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the American nation by acquiring all French land holdings in North America, approximately 828,000 square miles, for \$15 million. For fewer than three cents an acre, Jefferson’s agrarian and commercial ambitions found a satisfactory outlet. Where exactly Louisiana ended was unknown. According to the treaty ushering in the new lands, the United States had obtained possession of all lands of the western Mississippi River drainage basin, from the river itself to the base of the Rocky Mountains. The land extended from the Spanish land claims in the south,

⁸ The Ordinance of 1785 would be expanded to address the creation and admission of new states in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. A full text copy can be found at:

<http://www.ambrosevideo.com/resources/documents/104.pdf>, accessed May 5, 2009.

⁹ Original documents regarding the Ohio statehood process can be found at: <http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/ohio-statehood/>, accessed June 17, 2009.

in present day north Texas, to the northern source of the Mississippi River, the location of which was yet unknown. It is this region I will be referring to when referencing the West.¹⁰

The Louisiana Territory presented a dichotomous combination of opportunity and conflict during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, a man often described in similar terms. Thomas Jefferson has been called the “American Sphinx,” a nickname hinting at the complexity and often secretive nature in which he operated.¹¹ In truth, Jefferson’s western policy reflected this strange mixture of good intentions and unbridled greed that comprised the American position regarding the newly-acquired Louisiana territory. True to form, Jefferson’s shaping of the initial American expedition into the West was a large-scale cultural encounter with a similarly bipolar construction.

Influenced both by the policies which predated him and his distinctive personal factors, Jefferson’s policy towards the Northwest and its inhabitants sprang from a tumultuous crucible. Looking at the European and American policy initiatives tells only half the story, but in terms of Jefferson’s policies for the West, these preexisting policies are the most important influence. A British attempt to hold back settlement in the Ohio Territory, the Proclamation of 1763 drew a line separating Indians from whites. Once under American control, the sale of land in the Ohio was legally established and exclusively reserved for the federal government. George Washington and Secretary of War Henry Knox both addressed the Northwest, and were able to

¹⁰ Copies of the Treaty of Cession for the Louisiana Territory and the two individual purchase conventions (the first for \$11.25million, the second for \$3.75 million) are available online at: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/louistxt.html, accessed October 13, 2009. The terms of sale are not disputed. The information regarding the amount of land purchased is also consistent among historians, and can be found in any encyclopedia. The figure of three cents per acre is thereby established by applying math (1 sq. mile = 640 acres).

¹¹ Joseph Ellis’s 1997 work *The American Sphinx* used this very nickname to point to the complex character of Thomas Jefferson. Many Jeffersonian scholars lament his elusiveness; in terms of the North West, it is no different.

obtain from Congress the initial legislation creating the factory system in 1795. Dealing with this legislation, and the factory system proposed as the vehicle by which the government could control settlement and trade, was prerequisite to Jefferson's policies. Discussion of Jeffersonian policy must therefore begin with the English colonial period as well as cover the actions of Congress and the presidential administrations that preceded his own. Long before the birth of the American nation, Jefferson would have been aware of the Native policy put forth by the English who claimed sovereignty over tribal lands.

The culmination of the French and Indian war was a turning point for the English policy towards Indians. In the 1763 Treaty of Paris, Britain acquired all French territories in North America. As Colin Calloway notes in *The Scratch of a Pen*, the torrent of migration and land settlement in the West began with the Treaty of 1763, as British colonists moved west in large numbers. While the acquisition of this land opened up lucrative trade possibilities for the crown, it was met by resistance from numerous tribes who did not wish to submit to English authority, the best example of which was Pontiac's Rebellion.¹²

The Proclamation of 1763 was the British response to the frontier tensions created by the transfer of land from French dominion. The proclamation attempted to create a reserve for the Indians beyond the Appalachian Mountains by drawing a line between the colonies on the Atlantic coast beyond which white settlement could not extend. In eliminating the privatization of the land beyond the eastern colonies, the Crown set the precedent which would be continued after the American Revolution by the independent state governments. The first United States Congress further centralized Indian land purchasing in 1790 by establishing the new federal

¹² Colin Calloway, *The Scratch of a Pen*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 50-54.

government as the only legal purchaser. In his legal study of English frontier law, Stuart Banner points out that the Proclamation of 1763 was the moment when the white government assumed the power to control the land in the native-white relationship. The United States government has reserved the exclusive right to buy and sell Indian lands ever since.¹³

The Crown based the Royal Proclamation of 1763 on information provided by the Board of Trade, the government agency which held the most colonial information. The Board had long advocated imperial rather than local control of Indian affairs.¹⁴ Following the defeat of France in the Seven Years War, the Board of Trade took over land control from the colonial governors, but was unable to curtail either rapid land speculation or frontier violence. Positing that the protection of whites could best be realized by regulating the Indian trade, and in an effort to establish control, the Royal Proclamation was issued. This statute tried to prevent the exploitation of the Indians by white traders, a fertile cause of conflict, and intended to stop land-grabbing whites from encroaching upon Indian lands. The Board of Trade was clear that no Imperial role in Indian affairs could be conceived that did not involve the use of the British Army. Its members assumed Indian resistance was sure to mount from any European governmental controlling the sale of western lands, and a standing army would need to be in place in order to suppress rising tensions.¹⁵

Native resistance to British sovereignty and policies would serve as an ominous precursor to the future American policy which would be similarly constructed. In both British and American policy, governments established a great distance from the frontier made the decisions

¹³ Stuart Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 104.

¹⁴ Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 52-55.

¹⁵ Arthur H. Basye, *The Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations* (New Haven, Conn, 1925).

how to govern and chose who would receive parcels of western lands. Indians were uninformed of such grand contrivances as the Board of Trade and secretaries of state. Easily seen, however, were the white settlers sweeping over their lands and the white traders who continued to defraud the tribes. Indians were imposed on by whites, their lands were appropriated, and they were forced to accept reduced and limited trade goods, upon which natives had come to depend. Bloody rebellions exploded across the frontier as Indians violently resisted the British occupation.¹⁶

The most dramatic response to the British occupation and the policies imposed by the Crown was Pontiac's Rebellion, which began in 1763. Indians were not happy with the new English trade policies which were not as favorable as those they enjoyed with the French. In a series of ruthless assaults, native warriors attacked and cut frontier settlements to pieces in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, and captured all British military posts west of Fort Pitt with the exception of Detroit. Britain eventually quelled the rebellion by late 1764 by agreeing to modify their policies, though no definite concessions were made. Britain maintained their policy in the Ohio without significant alteration until they were forced to leave the territory after the War of 1812, although land and trade tensions remained. While unable to enforce complete control, America gained claim to the land after the Revolutionary War. American legislators introduced policies to control the Indian trade and settlement of the land. Policymakers such as Washington and Jefferson would tread in the footsteps of the English policy.

After the American Revolution, Congress first addressed Indian policies in the Articles of Confederation, granting itself exclusive power to regulate the Indian trade. The West presented

¹⁶ Gregory Evans Dowd, *War Under Heaven*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 84.

an opportunity to the American nation, just as it had presented great prospects to the French and English frontiers which predated it. It also brought myriad theoretical and practical problems-- problems which Thomas Jefferson contemplated. Jefferson's land policy was grand in scope. In its initial deliberations over western land, the Continental Congress debated different forms of national expansion. It was primarily up to Thomas Jefferson, who, according to historian Eric Hinderaker, had "perhaps considered the problem of the West more carefully than any other member of Congress," to formulate a proposal that embodied this American vision of national expansion.¹⁷

Congress adopted Jefferson's "Plan of Government for the Western Territory" in April 1784. His vision for the West was spectacular in scope, simplifying the West by sweeping away regional complexities. Jefferson's proposal divided the area between the Mississippi River and the eastern states into sixteen regions, mindful of neither geographic contours nor the regions' inhabitants.¹⁸ Instead, the trans-Appalachian West was presented as a blank canvas upon which the portrait of the new American empire would be constructed. Old boundary lines would be removed and drawn anew to support American needs. Jefferson's proposal was adopted by Congress on April 23, 1784, although his proposed names for the territories were dropped. The plan remained in force until the Northwest Ordinance, which was passed unanimously by Congress on July 13, 1787, updated it by incorporating new land cessions by Connecticut and Massachusetts, in 1785 and 1786, respectively. The Northwest Ordinance, building upon

¹⁷ Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 227-8.

¹⁸ Jefferson's "Plan for Government of the Western Territory" can be located in Julian Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J., 1950 -), vol. VI, 591.

Jefferson's plan, established the precedent by which the United States would expand westward by the admission of new states in lieu of the expansion of existing states.¹⁹

The Northwest Ordinance reinvented empire in a way that solved some of the most vexing problems that had confounded the British Empire. The crucial aspect of Jefferson's policy which materialized in the Northwest Ordinance was not the relinquishing of states' rights and the carving out of new land areas. Rather, it was here that Congress theoretically established a commitment to unlimited westward expansion. In *Elusive Empires*, Eric Hinderaker notes that by creating a flexible mechanism for settling the Ohio Valley, Congress thus accomplished what the British ministry had failed to do for more than a decade since they pushed back Pontiac's Rebellion.²⁰

The Northwest Ordinance made mention of the land's inhabitants in Article III: "The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their land and property shall never be taken without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed."²¹ What future white lawmakers, including Jefferson, considered the "utmost good faith," or the measure of native consent, was relative to the individual and the situation. Congressional efforts to extend control over the lands it hoped to partition into states

¹⁹ The Northwest Ordinance, or Ordinance of 1787, reconciled many outstanding grievances related to the "Old Northwest." The Library of Congress collection of "Primary Documents in American History" collection provides ample background into the ordinance, stating "It established a government for the Northwest Territory, outlined the process for admitting a new state to the Union, and guaranteed that newly created states would be equal to the original thirteen states. Considered one of the most important legislative acts of the Confederation Congress, the Northwest Ordinance also protected civil liberties and outlawed slavery in the new territories." The Ordinance and related documents, as well as the supplementary information listed above, can be found at: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/northwest.html>, accessed 17 July 2009.

²⁰ Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 232.

²¹ Northwest Ordinance, July 13, 1787; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M332, roll 9); Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, 1774-1789, Record Group 360; National Archives. Available at: <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=8>, accessed August 15, 2009.

would depend on their ability to untangle--and eradicate--the intricate pattern of Indian land claims in the West. White agents would be forced to engage the Indians, who had their own ideas regarding land use and settlement. The process began with the Continental Congress's 1787 decision to instruct the first line of agents, the appointed Indian commissioners, to meet with the Indian population of the Northwest at a small, tribal level.²²

Along with the congressional decision to "localize" native-white affairs, in the 1780s and the 1790s, Henry Knox and George Washington generated significant policies. Both men were often compassionate and just towards natives, and the effects of their policies were far reaching. General Henry Knox had succeeded George Washington as the senior officer of the much-reduced Continental Army in December, 1783. Shortly thereafter, Knox's army was dispatched to remove white squatters from Indian lands north of the Ohio River. Knox recognized that the army would neither be able to remove all violators, nor prevent more from settling. He also knew war against the aggrieved tribes, a legitimate possibility if white settlement could not be curtailed, could require as much as \$2 million to fight. Knox offered Congress an alternative, suggesting that it would be much less expensive to purchase the land from the Indians. He estimated the required bill of sale for the land to be under \$20,000, or less than one percent of the cost of war. Congress agreed with Knox.²³

In 1785, Knox was appointed Secretary of War by the Continental Congress under the Articles of Confederation, a position he maintained under President Washington when the inaugural cabinet was constructed in 1789. Driven by the late-eighteenth century enlightened

²² Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 231. Agents did in fact meet and form treaties with individual tribes. When the agents were put in the position of meeting with multiple tribes simultaneously, they kept treaties distinct.

²³ Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 130.

idealism that grew out of the Revolutionary War, which contended that Americans had the chance to build a virtuous foundation, Secretary Knox assessed the Indian problem as one having its roots in white malfeasance. Recognizing the Indians as owners of the land, Knox insisted, in Congressional testimony, purchase could be done “without the least injury to the national dignity.” To the contrary, he suggested after the new constitution went into force, “it would reflect honor on the new government, and be attended with happy effects, were a declarative law to be passed, that the Indian tribes possess the right of soil of all lands within their limits, respectively, and that they are not to be divested thereof, but in consequence of fair and bona fide purchases.”²⁴ Working with Washington in the design of policy, Knox would impart his vision into proposed legislation regarding Native Americans.

George Washington’s frontier experiences give him a unique position regarding Native Americans. His vision of American expansion began on the frontier, the very place which would become the focus of his attention and policy in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Between 1748 and 1752, Washington surveyed over one hundred tracts of land, starting in Culpeper County at the age of seventeen before moving into the “northern neck” frontier region of Virginia. During his years on the frontier he “established a reputation for fairness, honesty, and dependability.” The close association with and practical knowledge of the land that Washington gained as both a surveyor and land speculator brought him into direct contact with Natives to a degree matched by few other colonists.²⁵

²⁴ Journal of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904-1937), vol. 34, 125-126.

²⁵ Sarah Hughes, *Surveyors and Statesmen: Land Measuring in Colonial Virginia* (Richmond: Virginia Surveyors Association and The Virginia Association of Surveyors, 1979), p. 163. Available online at: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/gmdhtml/gwmaps.html#N_6_#N_6, accessed October 18, 2009.

Washington's role in the French and Indian War brought him to the frontier once again. He not only volunteered to deliver the message to the French authorities at Ft. LeBoeuf-- something for which his backcountry knowledge made him the perfect selection--but he also used his map-making skills to produce a propaganda map highlighting the French threat. In the war's first skirmish on May 28, 1754, it was a twenty-two year old Washington who headed the small scouting party of British, Virginians, and Indians that ambushed a French detachment. This experience allying and fighting with natives impressed upon Washington at an early age the power and sagacity of native tribes who, over the next several decades, his brethren would displace. After the French and Indian war, the alliances between the federal government and the Iroquois, Catawba, and Cherokee tribes would be replaced by familiar land-based frontier tensions.²⁶

In addition to their pay, those who enlisted to fight the French in Lieutenant Colonel George Washington's Virginia Regiment were offered a parcel of land in a two hundred thousand-acre region west of the Ohio River. Thus, Washington and the men who served under him were among those who were negatively affected when the English issued the Proclamation of 1763 and barred private claims. Speaking on behalf of himself and the empty-handed men who had fought for him, Washington commented on the proclamation:

I can never look upon the Proclamation in any other light (but this I say between ourselves) than as a temporary expedient to quiet the minds of the Indians. It must fall, of course, in a few years, especially when those Indians consent to our occupying those lands.²⁷

²⁶ An excellent treatment of the frontier tensions present before and after the French and Indian War can be found in Fred Anderson, *The War that Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

²⁷ George Washington to William Crawford, September 20, 1767, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Consent is an interesting inclusion in the above quote, congruent with the thought prevalent among the first generation of American leaders. In practice, these men of enlightened thinking, including future presidents Washington and Jefferson, as well as their secretaries of war Henry Knox and Henry Dearborn, sought ways to bring about the transformation in Indian society which they believed possible and inevitable.²⁸ After the American Revolution empowered these very men to ordain and implement policy, Washington was unequivocal in his belief that the nascent American government must ensure just treatment for Indians; just treatment here being defined as taking measures to pacify the Indians which would broker no further rebellions, while acquiring the land for white settlement.²⁹

Treatment of Indians on the frontier left much to be desired. Washington lamented the cavalier manner in which settlers killed Indians, and the ill-will it was certain to portend for America. As he wrote to his old Revolutionary War aide David Humphreys on July 20, 1791, Washington saw “[little] prospect of living in tranquillity with them so long as a spirit of land jobbing prevails, and our frontier Settlers entertain the opinion that there is not the same crime (or indeed no crime at all) in killing an Indian as in killing a white man.” In short, he informed the future minister to Portugal and Spain, Americans had to learn to treat the Indians justly.³⁰

Modern Indian historians who discuss the Northwest policy towards natives as something more than forced removal or coercion, such as Prucha, Banner and White, are joined by native voices. One example is Iroquois writer and scholar Doug George-Kanentiio, whose writing

²⁸ Prucha, *Indian Policy*, 184.

²⁹ An excellent discussion of Washington’s desire for peaceful coexistence is Joseph J. Ellis, “His Excellency George Washington,” *Futurecasts Online Magazine*, November 1, 2005, <http://www.futurecasts.com/Ellis.%20George%20Washington.htm>; accessed October 27, 2007.

³⁰ Washington to Humphreys, November 19, 1791 as quoted in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931-1944, vol. XXXI), 320.

accords George Washington his due. While the “father of his country” may not have been the greatest Native American benefactor, “he was wise enough to know they played a key role in the survival of the infant United States.”³¹ Washington approved of Article 6 of the U.S. Constitution, which stated quite plainly the international agreements or treaties entered into by the United States would be the “supreme law of the land” binding Congress, the judiciary, and all states to a treaty’s provisions. He also agreed with Article 1, Section 8, which allowed Congress the authority to define trade and commerce with native nations and granted tax exempt status to Indians. Both provisions clearly acknowledged the special status of native nations, who were not counted as American citizens.³²

Between 1789 and 1795, Washington and his Secretary of War Henry Knox crafted the legal mechanisms and recommendations which would leave a deep impression. As secretary of war, Knox was responsible for managing United States relations with the Indian tribes within its borders. Knox used his new position to argue that the United States needed to honor Native Americans' rights, opposing the all-too-common policy of white men engaging into treaties with tribes with no intention of keeping their end of the bargain. Opposed to land acquisition by any means, which seemed the Congressional modus operandi in the 1790s, Knox sought a better long-term solution. His contentions were, above all other considerations, born of fear that a policy of constant provocation would lead to costly frontier wars capable of economically

³¹ Doug George-Kanentiio, “George Washington Supported Native Treaties,” (March 1999) online article available at: <http://www.iroquois.net/pages/georgewash.htm>. Accessed June 19, 2009.

³² Ibid.

crippling the nation. This policy did not hold back settlers, as the Proclamation of 1763 had attempted, but similarly tried to ease frontier tensions.³³

Secretary Knox urged President Washington to make reforming the United States Indian policy a priority. In the Northwest Ordinance, Congress had established the framework for new governments in the Northwest, recognizing that the Indians owned the land and that the government would pay them for it. To ensure this end, Knox argued that the United States should treat Native American tribes as sovereign, foreign nations. He envisioned a humane policy of treaties that would not be broken, granting Indians “enclaves in the West” where American citizens would be forbidden to settle. Joseph Ellis discusses the ideology of Knox in his 2007 work *American Creation*. Ellis describes how Knox strove to protect these enclaves by federal law, lobbying Washington to enforce all Indian treaties by congressional acts, and even strenuously opposing demographic removal of Indians by garrisoning troops on the Indian border to block migration and expel dissenters, if necessary.³⁴

In these formative years, American policy again chose to mold itself along the lines of cost efficiency--the young nation was fiscally strapped--and humanity. It also molded itself around the premise of white expansion. The consideration of relocating white settlers and withdrawing from the contested land was not entertained by the court of public opinion, congress, or the president. The two practical choices for Knox and Washington were fight or purchase, and money represented a far cheaper price to pay, both in terms of expense and lives, than electing to embroil the army in yet another frontier skirmish. Additionally, the government

³³ Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic*. (New York: Knopf, 2007), 138.

³⁴ Ellis, *American Creation*, 139; an example of Knox’s recommendations can be seen in his July 7, 1789 letter to Washington, available at: http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/collection/pres_1789jul7.html, accessed October 17, 2009.

desired to treat the Indians well by providing a fair price in order to alleviate tensions and incorporate willing tribes into the American body politic.

Washington and Knox also arranged treaties with the Indians to procure peace before conflict became unavoidable. To secure the frontier, Washington agreed to the request of the Iroquois and signed into law the 1790 Trade and Intercourse Act, a statute prohibiting states from expropriating Native lands without Congressional approval.³⁵ Washington also agreed to terms with the Iroquois Confederacy and the Seneca tribe who occupied large tracts in central and western New York. By affixing his signature to the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, Washington and the U.S. government acknowledged the land granted under previous treaties with the State of New York as sovereign unto the Seneca and the Six Nations of the Iroquois.³⁶ The treaty specifically provided the Indians an unambiguous land claim, but also inserted a caveat that the United States would retain the right of purchase:

United States will never claim the same, nor disturb the Seneca Nation, nor any of the Six Nations, or of their Indian friends residing thereon, and united with them, in the free use and enjoyment thereof; but it shall remain theirs, until they choose to sell the same, to the people of the United States, who have the right to purchase.³⁷

Not every problem could be solved by negotiating treaties before whites stole into Native American lands. Settlers rushed to the old Northwest and the southern frontier so rapidly that, occasionally, Washington and Knox would attempt to keep a tenuous frontier peace and defuse tensions by purchasing land after the fact. In addition to establishing new, pro-Indian treaties,

³⁵ An Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse With the Indian Tribes, 1790; electronic version available at: http://www.uoregon.edu/~mjdennis/courses/hist469_trade.htm, accessed October 21, 2009.

³⁶ The land in dispute was the entire western section of the state of New York, ranging from Seneca Lake to Lake Ontario, north of the New York-Pennsylvania border. It encompasses roughly 6,000,000 acres.

³⁷ Treaty of Canandaigua, November 11, 1794; electronic version available at: <http://www.sni.org/treaty.html>, accessed September 26, 2009. Specific quote and boundaries of the reserved lands can be found in Article 3 of the treaty.

Washington worked to uphold the existing treaties which had been invalidated. On November 28, 1785, the Confederation Congress had negotiated a treaty with the Cherokee Nation, allotting to the Cherokee certain lands to be used as hunting grounds. The treaty also stipulated that no non-Native settlers would be allowed on the land.³⁸ President Washington noted that the treaty with the Cherokees has been violated by white settlers, and seeking to resolve the issue, delivered a letter to the U.S. Senate on August 11, 1790. The letter read, in part,

Although the treaty with the Creeks may be regarded as the main foundation of the southwestern frontier of the United States, yet in order fully to effect so desirable an object the treaties which have been entered into with the other tribes in that quarter must be faithfully performed on our parts... That the White people settled on the frontiers openly violated the said boundary by intruding on the Indian lands.³⁹

After placing blame upon the white encroachers and dutifully reminding the senators that they must remain faithful to their promises and honor the treaty, Washington then presented a recommended course of action. By stating that he was “bound to exert the powers entrusted to me by the Constitution” to carry into execution the treaty unless a new boundary could be erected, Washington urged the senate to devise new legislation which would allow the natives to be compensated and justify the white expansion. In truth, Washington and Knox knew they would not be able to remove whites who had already settled without arousing domestic ire. Also clear was that the government was poorly prepared to stop future encroachments. In this situation, a return to the status quo that existed at the time of the original treaty seemed implausible.⁴⁰ Embracing the settlements through new legislation and compensating the

³⁸ *Congressional Treaty With the Cherokee*, November 28, 1785; electronic version available at: <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/vol2/treaties/che0008.htm>, accessed January 10, 2010.

³⁹ Washington to Senate, August 11, 1790, as quoted in Fitzpatrick, *The George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799*; electronic version available at: <http://memory.loc.gov/learn///features/timeline/newnatn/nativeam/gwletter.html>, accessed July 7, 2009.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Cherokees for the cessions was the only viable solution left that might be amenable to both settler and Native Americans. Placating the settlers at the expense of the Indians shows that the administration did have consideration towards natives. As a satisfied Henry Knox explained afterward, the United States was finally “acquiring land the right way.”⁴¹

Peaceful methods of land acquisition were preferred, but regardless of the means there was an unequivocal American commitment to westward expansion. American settlers moving westward made an effective land control policy very difficult. In order to reconcile illegal land claims of white squatters and settlers who defied federal policies and treaties, the United States government either needed to reconfigure existing land claims or reach new purchase agreements with numerous tribes.⁴² National leaders such as Washington and Knox desired, in principle, to respect Indian claims and gain land by diplomatic means. Open-ended national land acquisition by treaty was not plausible, however, unless the Indians were willing sellers and the U.S. Army was a willing defender of Native American property rights.

Further complications came from an interpretation of The Northwest Ordinance that undermined the presumption of Indian sovereignty and justified westward expansion. The ordinance divided the land into equitable parcels and stated terms for future statehood, and in the eyes of the American people, this implicitly granted legitimacy to expansionist impulses.⁴³ The government passed legislation providing that the land would, at some point, become new states.

⁴¹ Linda Grant, ed., *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*, (De Pauw et al. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972-), vol. 2, 153.

⁴² Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 231.

⁴³ Stuart Banner in *How the Indians Lost Their Land* provides an excellent legal discussion of sovereignty versus ownership regarding Indian lands. I agree with his assessment that once sovereignty was removed, ownership of Indian lands followed.

Once put into effect, the government was in a difficult position of holding back settlers from these lands until measures could be taken to ensure organized and peaceful settlement.

Several policy makers, chief among them Washington and Knox, felt these expansionist impulses needed to be purged of certain negative influences. The tendency of unscrupulous private traders to defraud and anger Indian tribes could potentially make the American expansion into its own land more problematic, and was a legitimate governmental concern.⁴⁴ The elimination of these men, their hurtful impact upon the Indians, and Knox saw the introduction of government controlled trade and settlement as the cure for native-white frontier troubles. Beginning in Washington's administration, the federal government set up a system of government trading posts known as factories, which were intended to eliminate the abuses in the Indian trade by squeezing out the private sector.⁴⁵

In his fourth annual message to Congress, dated December 3, 1794, Washington reiterated his equitable stance towards natives. He desired to bring a binding attachment between the two groups, potentially easing future white settlement as well as reducing frontier violence, through equitable trading. His message articulates the perceived benefits of just treatment:

Commerce with [Indians] should be promoted with regulations tending to secure an equitable deportment toward them...Establishment of commerce with the Indian nations on behalf of the United States is most likely to conciliate their attachment.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Washington's Third Annual Message to Congress, October 25, 1791, available at the University of Virginia's online collection of documents at: <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/union/state3.html>, accessed October 15, 2009. Particular insight related to the dilemma facing our young nation regarding private traders is found in Washington's statement that "efficacious provision should be made for inflicting adequate penalties upon all those who, by violating their rights, shall infringe the treaties and endanger the peace of the Union." The minutes attached to the message contains advice from Knox that generous treatment of the natives and strict punishments for lawless men who impinge upon them would win both their allegiance to the United States and a lasting peace.

⁴⁵ Prucha, *Indian Policy*, 84.

⁴⁶ Washington's 4th annual message to Congress, as quoted in James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, (Washington, 1896). Vol.1, part 1, 173.

After a year of inaction, Washington urged Congress a second time to consider the government control of the Indian trade in his fifth annual address to Congress, delivered on November 19, 1794. Washington stated that he saw no prospect of tranquility on the frontiers until Congress had defined and regulated the methods by which Indians could alienate their lands. His address went on to say that regulation of the trade would also bring about a reduction in frontier hostility: “But I cannot refrain from again pressing upon your deliberations, the plan which I recommended at the last session, for the improvement of harmony with all the Indians within our limits, by the fixing and conducting of trading houses.” This time, Congress listened.⁴⁷

Government regulation of the burgeoning fur industry became American policy shortly before the beginning of the nineteenth century. Congress endorsed the factory system in 1795 with the appropriation of \$50,000 to establish trading posts. Historian John Upton Terrell stated that President Washington had “defined the official policy: peace with the Indians could be attained only by giving them justice.”⁴⁸ The appropriation was an addendum to the 1793 Indian Intercourse Act, which was renewed after the two-year term had expired.

However, some of Washington’s policies proved injurious to Indians. One such policy, the Naturalization Act of 1790, has been pointed to by some “new” Indian historians as evidence that Washington and Knox’s policy was not pro-Indian. This act prevented foreigners and people of color from becoming citizens by placing residency periods and other stipulations upon

⁴⁷ Washington to Congress, November 19, 1794 as quoted in Washington, George, 1732-1799. The writings of George Washington from the original manuscript sources Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library; available at: <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/WasFi34.html>, accessed October 19, 2009.

⁴⁸ John Upton Terrell. *Land Grab: the Truth About the “Winning of the West,”* (New York: Dial Press, 1972), 124.

the American democratic ideal. After a two year period, free whites who had demonstrated good moral character were granted citizenship. Eric Hinderaker argues that the 1790 Naturalization Act introduced a “crucial innovation in legal language that creatively addressed the need for natural markers of citizenship.”⁴⁹ This new language used to address minorities included a “whiteness clause,” was ostensibly included with African Americans in mind. In practice, however, the clause was exclusive to all minorities by providing citizenship only to free white men, thereby identifying race as a marker of social difference.⁵⁰

As Richard White notes in *The Middle Ground*, this policy was not intended to transform the status of Indians, but the citizenship requirements included within it was being turned against them. While the Naturalization Act was not deliberately aimed at the Indians, it was used by unscrupulous individuals to leverage Indian lands in the Ohio Valley.⁵¹ By applying the “whiteness clause,” settlers labeled natives as non-citizens and questioned the Indian land claims. Washington and Knox had continually stressed reliance on treaties and trading houses to transform the natives. Through these treaties and trading houses, they would regulate the white settlement, even as the administration’s Naturalization Act was being used in ways that undermined the very treaties the government negotiated.

Appointed secretary of war in 1785, Henry Knox would decide the usual practice of Congress needed drastic revision and stressed American purchase of tribal lands. The factory system outlined by Washington in 1789 embraced the ideas of Knox, and was one part of the

⁴⁹ Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 261.

⁵⁰ A copy of the Naturalization Act of 1790 can be found in: *United States Statutes at Large*, (vol. I), 103-104. The *United States Statutes at Large*, commonly referred to as the *Statutes at Large*, is the official source for the laws and resolutions passed by Congress. Online access (eighteen volumes) covering the laws of the first forty-three Congresses, 1789-1875, is available at: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsl.html>, accessed October 20, 2009.

⁵¹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, 473.

larger federal plan of making the Indians culturally indistinguishable from the Americans. Rather than being overtly hostile to the tribes, Washington and Knox sought ways to ease frontier tensions, alleviate problems, and assimilate Indians into white culture. Assuming this assimilation and extinction of Indian culture was preferable to extinction of the Indians themselves, the factory system was, in the words of historian John Update Terrell, “an opening...a sensible and practical approach, and one that properly administered and honestly conducted would have been of incalculable benefit to the Indians. It would have averted much of the bad faith and corruption.”⁵² It goes without saying that this policy was at best paternalistic. However, Terrell validly asserts here that the very ethnocentricity this policy was based upon would have been definitively less damaging to either side than the frontier hostility that existed in its absence. This policy, premised on creating a system that would reduce tensions, also went against certain factions in both the public and private sector.

To frontier settlers, factories appeared to be a form of government monopoly. They were in opposition to the freedom and promise offered by the West and seen as instruments of European governments that were forced upon peoples by oppressive sovereigns.⁵³ This alone was enough made them contemptible to American individualists who had gone west in hopes of experiencing their first real taste of freedom. Nevertheless, it was not merely frontiersmen who raised vociferous objections to the proposed policy. Congressmen such as James Madison took issue with factory system as well.

Congress debated the proposed 1796 Indian Trade and Intercourse Act in April of that same year. The faction of Jeffersonian politicians led by Virginia’s James Madison argued for

⁵² Terrell, *Land Grab*, 124.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

the inclusion of measures to ensure that the government would not be able to create a monopoly. Madison was concerned that this act could lead to violations of the rights of U.S. citizens. One particular proposed tool within the bill, Section Five, related to the confiscation of settlers' estates that were west of the Indian-white boundary established by the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act. Madison, a believer in individual freedoms and a federal government that left as small a footprint as possible, abhorred the elimination of private claims. He argued against the bill, standing before the House stating that he "would not say that it was against the letter, but it was certainly against the spirit of the Constitution."⁵⁴

Despite the powerful arguments raised by the Jeffersonian faction, the 1796 Indian Trade and Intercourse Act was passed, including the proviso granting federal authority to confiscate the estates of intruders into Indian lands.⁵⁵ But the 1796 Act was a compromise between the sharply divided Federalist and Republican Congress. The 1796 Indian Trade and Intercourse Act gave the government arbitrary enforcement powers to protect Indians. However, Congress would not allow a monopolistic government enterprise, and insisted on continuing the practice of permitting private fur traders licenses to trade.⁵⁶

While Congress gave Washington the factories he has asked for, this decision shattered the effectiveness of the president's policy. John Upton Terrell delivers a scathing indictment of Congress regarding this decision, blaming them for the demise of the factory system:

⁵⁴ Annals of Congress, 4th Congress, 1st Session, 905, available at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwaclink.html>, accessed October 14, 2009.

⁵⁵ The law was passed over Madison's opposition by a vote of 47 to 36. An excellent paper discussing this act and the debate can be found at: <http://www.madisoncounty.org/motf/Oneida%2011.pdf>, accessed October 25, 2009.

⁵⁶ For a copy of the act presented to Congress see Prucha, *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 16-17.

Under such a situation, the factory system was...degraded to the level of a competing trader, forced it to fight totally irresponsible and lawless rivals...It is improbable that any more stupid provisions and rules ever burdened a Government program.⁵⁷

Congress decided that curtailment or infringement of individual rights or private enterprise was not to be countenanced. Fewer than twenty government factories were opened, with no more than a dozen ever operating at one time. Worse yet, they operated within a limited geographic scope, being established solely on the fur-rich waters of the Missouri River.⁵⁸ In extending national power westward in the 1790s, the Federalist vision of controlled and orderly expansion was compromised by the Jeffersonian resistance to discretionary federal powers and the ongoing pressures of unencumbered settlement.

There are no guarantees that a government-controlled factory system would have led to less disorder and violence than was experienced under privatized fur trading and settlement of the West. With certainty, we can say that in place of an organized attempt, here was conceived, in Thomas Jefferson's felicitous phrase, an "empire of liberty."⁵⁹ The implicit paradox here is obvious; "Empire" implies coercive domination--or at least organization--and Natives were left to wonder which part of Western settlement contained any fair measure of tribal liberty.

When Jefferson was sworn into office in 1801, he was in the unique position of picking up the factory system policies at almost the exact point where they had been left when he was the secretary of state under Washington. John Adams, taking over as the second president of the United States, had allowed the laws to linger, be ignored, and fall dormant during his presidency.

⁵⁷ Terrell, *Land Grab*, 125.

⁵⁸ Hinderaker, *Elusive Empires*, 262.

⁵⁹ This expression has become one of the key phrases attributed to Jefferson's legacy, and was the title of a 1990 work on Jeffersonian statecraft by Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson. It was first used by Jefferson in a letter to George Rogers Clark, December 25, 1780; Julian Boyd, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), vol. IV, 237.

In *The Great Father*, Prucha notes that Adams did not push the policy aggressively. The Indian Intercourse Act, signed into temporary status in 1796, lapsed on March 3, 1799.⁶⁰

Prucha also states “Adams appeared to have little interest in Indian problems while he was president, although he later prided himself of observing peace.” Adams inexplicably wrote of himself:

I was engaged in the most earnest, sedulous, and, I must own, expensive exertions to preserve peace with the Indians, and prepare them for agriculture and civilization, through the whole of my administration...I had the inexpressible satisfaction of complete success. Not a hatchet was lifted in my time; and the single battle of Tippecanoe has since cost the US a 100 times more money than it cost me to maintain universal and perpetual peace...My labors were indefatigable to compose all difficulties and settle all controversies with all nations, civilized and savage.⁶¹

Adams comments are in complete opposition to his actions, and as a result, his memoirs appear to be an attempt to create an alternate historical record as pertains to his Indian involvement. It is safe to say that Jefferson took a far more interested approach to Indian affairs than the benign neglect practiced by his predecessor.

Thomas Jefferson brought his individual predilections and biases with him when he assumed the presidency in 1801. In terms of both his Indian policy and his decisions regarding the newly acquired Louisiana Territory inhabited by tens of thousands of natives, it is important to ascertain his personal opinion towards the continent’s first inhabitants. In *The Trail of Tears and Indian Removal*, Amy Sturgis recollects Jefferson’s early experience meeting the impressive Cherokee chief Ostenaco, who was frequently entertained by his father in their Virginia home. In 1762, Ostenaco’s path crossed Jefferson’s yet again when he delivered a speech at William

⁶⁰ Prucha, *The Great Father*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 118.

⁶¹ Adams to James Lloyd, March 31, 1815, as quoted in Charles Francis, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1850-1856, 10 vol.), 10:153.

and Mary College. Sturgis insinuates that Jefferson's high opinion of native sagacity and his visions of American-native cooperation may have emerged from these early encounters.⁶²

Although he strongly suspected that the African American was an inferior being, Jefferson never relegated the Indian to such status.⁶³ Outright racism towards blacks was countered by sheer paternalism towards Indians. Jefferson thought of Indians as noble savages who could be civilized and brought into the body politic as full citizens. In 1785, Jefferson wrote to Francois Jean Chastellux, a French Aristocrat and soldier who traveled extensively in America and with whom Jefferson regularly corresponded. His letter stated: "I believe the Indian then to be in body and mind equal to the white man."⁶⁴ In *Undaunted Courage*, Steven Ambrose claims that Jefferson was not unique in his beliefs, stating "When Jefferson or young Virginians like [Meriwether] Lewis and [William] Clark looked at an Indian, they saw a noble savage ready to be transformed into a civilized citizen." This ethnocentricity would permeate nearly every aspect of Jefferson's Indian policy, both as Secretary of State under Washington, and during his tenure as President.⁶⁵

Jefferson's most determined defense of the Indians came in his 1781 work *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Here Jefferson refuted the criticisms that appeared in the celebrated work of the French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon. Buffon had described the natives as deficient in stature, strength, energy, mental ability, and family attachments. Jefferson refuted these assertions point by point, insisting the native was in each regard equal to the white

⁶² Amy Sturgis, *The Trail and Tears and Indian Removal*, (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 5.

⁶³ Prucha, *Indian Policy*, 51.

⁶⁴ Jefferson to Chastellux, June 7, 1785 as quoted in Julian Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), vol. 8, 186.

⁶⁵ Steven Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 55.

in similar situations. Physically, too, Jefferson insisted that the Indians were a match for the white, classifying them as brave, active, and affectionate.⁶⁶

If indeed Thomas Jefferson was convinced of racial equality regarding Native Americans, it explains the physical as well as cultural amalgamation of the Indians with the whites his policy outlined. In February 1803, Jefferson wrote to Benjamin Hawkins, the General Superintendent of Indian Affairs for all tribes south of the Ohio River regarding the possible reduction or elimination of frontier conflicts. Jefferson stated “In truth, the ultimate point of rest [and] happiness for them is to let our settlements and theirs meet and blend together, to intermix, and become one people.”⁶⁷ Moreover, since Jefferson admitted in *Notes* that Indians by nature possessed the capacity for civilization, Jefferson paternalistically admits the responsibility of the whites to aid the natives in that great goal.

In the same letter to Hawkins, Jefferson went out of his way to depict the Indians as a “noble race” who were the innocent victims of history: “Endowed with the faculties and rights of men, breathing an ardent love of liberty and independence, and occupying a country which left them no desire but to be undisturbed...they have been overwhelmed by the current, or driven before it.”⁶⁸ Many of Jefferson’s observations regarding Indians combine authentic admiration with a sense of misfortune about their fated outcome. In 1790 it was Secretary of State Jefferson who, seeking to staunch the flow of traders and settlers, had introduced the Act to Regulate Trade

⁶⁶ An excellent summary of this can be found in both *Notes on the State of Virginia*. (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1853), 62-69, 215-218 and Prucha, *Indian Policy*, 52.

⁶⁷ Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins, February 18, 1803, as quoted in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904-1905), vol. 9, 447.

⁶⁸ Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 258; Jefferson to Benjamin Hawkins, February 18, 1803, as quoted in Ford, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol.9, 447.

and Intercourse With the Indian Tribes to Congress.⁶⁹ The Act limited travel into Indian lands to those who obtained license from the Superintendent of the Indian Department. No license would be granted for a period longer than two years.

Contrary to his well-stated personal opinions of Natives, Jefferson's dichotomous Indian policy has been viewed by many historians as more injurious to natives than perhaps any other politician, save Andrew Jackson. Biographers Joseph J. Ellis and Merrill Peterson are among those who have criticized Jefferson's Indian policies. Ellis has noted Jefferson's intentions are so difficult to truly assess they can be, and have been, legitimately used to support opposing positions in the Indian policy debate. Peterson's biography of Jefferson, while painting his subject in heroic hues, still stated that the president's statements about Indians being assimilated show deviousness and hypocrisy.⁷⁰

Others have gone further in their indictment of Jefferson's Indian policies. Robert J. Miller in *Native America, Discovered and Conquered* assesses the whole of Jefferson's policy, labeling him the "Father of Indian Removal." Miller concluded he was either hypocritical or that he engaged in detailed political spin, fully expecting that American settlers guided by the force of manifest destiny would force the disappearance of Indians.⁷¹ Jefferson expert Peter Onuf sees no contradiction in Jefferson's policy, arguing that Jefferson's rhetoric veils his purely self-seeking interests. His dreamed-of American birthright was threatened by the Indians. According to Onuf, Jefferson never expected that Indians would assimilate in the white body politic.

⁶⁹ *1790 Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse With the Indian Tribes*, online version available at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/na024.asp, accessed October 14, 2009.

⁷⁰ Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 8; Merrill Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), viii.

⁷¹ Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, and Manifest Destiny*, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 94-95.

Knowing that the Indian nature was to resist and perish, the president pretended to work towards Indian citizenship only to allow him to escape the moral onus of his real designs for Indian removal.⁷²

These claims are justified to some degree, as under Jefferson the basic decisions for American land acquisitions were made. This land acquisition would proceed by deporting massive segments of the Indian population to lands west of the Mississippi.⁷³ The essence of Jefferson's thinking is illustrated in a letter he wrote on February 27, 1803 to the man entrusted with enforcing much of the Indian removal policy, William Henry Harrison:

In this way our settlements will gradually circumscribe and approach the Indians and they will in time either incorporate with us as citizens of the U.S. or remove beyond the Mississippi.⁷⁴

Jefferson went on to say that incorporation would mean the termination of Indian culture and traditional lifestyle. Despite this, he felt it essential to cultivate native love for Americans and "proceed from motives of pure humanity only." This quote reveals the two tenets of Jefferson's policy and thinking. Humanitarian words towards the Indians were uttered in conjunction with native removal in order to create room for the expanding American "empire of liberty." Jefferson idealized his policy with a mixture of charity and cruelty, and it was presumptive and paternalistic in conception. Jefferson and Enlightenment-era Americans believed that this policy was, for all intents and purposes, well intentioned towards Indians. Nevertheless, it left the Indians a "doomed species."⁷⁵ Indians needed to recognize their cultural survival depended on abandoning their nomadic hunting societies – these required too much land

⁷² Peter Onuf, "The Scholars' Jefferson," *William and Mary Quarterly* (October, 1993): 671-699.

⁷³ Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 239.

⁷⁴ Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, eds. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, (Washington, D.C., 1905), vol. X, 369.

⁷⁵ Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 239.

– and adopting an agricultural way of life, eventually the English language, and gradually assimilating into white society. Impossibly, Indians would be given the opportunity to survive and prosper by ceasing to be Indians, eschewing their traditions for new avenues.

Jefferson's attitude towards natives combined with a new understanding of land ownership. In the early 1790s, land not yet purchased from the Indians was thought to be owned by natives. By the early 1820s, that land was assumed to be owned by the state and federal governments. Like many transformations in legal thought, according to Banner this was "so complete that contemporaries often failed to notice that it had occurred."⁷⁶ The United States government maintained the right of preemption since the time of Washington and Knox, granting them exclusive land purchasing rights from the Indians. Jefferson cautioned Congress in 1790 that "our right of preemption of the Indian lands, [did] not as amount to any dominion, or jurisdiction, or paramountship whatever."⁷⁷ However, the policy established after 1801 was strikingly different. Congress granted parcels of land to settlers first, purchasing the land from Indians later. Indians saw their rights of ownership legally subverted by congressional acts, until soon they were thought of as mere tenants. All memory that things were once different was swept away, a casualty of westward settlement.

Jefferson sought to make the Indians one with the Americans and culturally indistinguishable from them yet was committed to westward expansion. Employing the concept of imperial benevolence made it possible to reconcile the two seemingly incompatible aims of saving the Indians and stripping them of their lands. This policy assumed that Indians could

⁷⁶ Banner, *How the Indians Lost Their Land*, 150.

⁷⁷ Linda Grant De Pauw et al, ed., *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972-), vol. 5, 1005.

assimilate. More importantly, it also assumed that this change could only move one way.⁷⁸

Indian removal, or even Indian death, became part of the accepted order of American business.

This attitude may have been more harmful to Native culture than pure, unadulterated Indian hate.

Fully measuring the Enlightenment mind of Jefferson casts doubt on the simplistic analysis of Jefferson's Indian policy as, primarily, the desire to gain the Indians' land and, only secondarily, if at all, a concern for Indian welfare.⁷⁹ These two elements seemed to have comprised a unitary whole. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the Indian policy of the federal government reflected the fundamental intellectual patterns of American life. Religious sentiment dominated American people, affecting all aspects of national life, including Indian removal. It is not insignificant that key changes in Indian policy were proposed under the rubric of "reform," and "advanced with a moral fervor of frightening intensity."⁸⁰ Since the Indian was naturally gifted with the skills and endowments prerequisite to civilization, Jefferson felt white responsibility to aid Natives in that glorious accomplishment.

More than any other major figure in the revolutionary generation, Thomas Jefferson viewed the West as America's future, a place where, in the words of Ellis, his agrarian idyll could "postpone the crowded conditions and political congestions which plagued Europe."⁸¹ However, the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory in 1803, an enormous region with poorly defined boundaries, the contents of which were not known, gave birth to the idea of a reservation policy. Explaining his plan to William Henry Harrison, Jefferson proposed his factory system as an efficient method of pushing American goods on Indian tribes at a cost that private traders

⁷⁸ White, *The Middle Ground*, 470, 473.

⁷⁹ Prucha, *Indian Policy*, 9.

⁸⁰ Prucha, *Indian Policy*, 21-22.

⁸¹ Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 252.

would not be able to match.⁸² White settlers who had already crossed the Mississippi River into the Upper Louisiana Territory would be relocated back into the Eastern half of the continent and given land holdings equal or bigger. Remaining Indians would be civilized and incorporated. Those who remained uncivilized would be sent west of the river, into what would be a vast Indian reservation.⁸³

President Jefferson was not the only American who idealized the potential of the West. Immigrants and emigrants who wanted their share of free land, and no law or statute could hold them back. In Jeffersonian America, the public defined a singular Indian policy in spite of the efforts made in Washington; get out of the way or be killed. And, this policy proved non-negotiable. The Louisiana Purchase ensured that moving the Indians to the West was a temporary fix, as soon, white migration would flow over the Mississippi River.⁸⁴ Jefferson believed those Indians who resisted assimilation deserved nothing less than extermination or banishment west of the Mississippi. He included, in his second inaugural address, a line stating that Indian leaders who “clung tenaciously to tribal mores and insisted on inculcating reverence for the custom of their ancestors” must be ruthlessly expunged.⁸⁵

Seemingly the unexpected purchase of Louisiana from France provided America the land which Jefferson had always expected, at some foreseeable point, to come under white domination. As he wrote to James Madison in 1801, “It is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will...cover the whole northern, if not the whole

⁸² Jefferson to William Henry Harrison, 1803, as quoted in Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents: 1783-1854*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 84.

⁸³ Terrell, *Land Grab*, 37; Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 347.

⁸⁴ Ellis, *American Sphinx*, 240.

⁸⁵ Thomas Jefferson’s Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1805 as quoted in Ford, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. VIII, 345.

southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws; nor can we contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture on that surface.”⁸⁶

Having no place in his imagination for an American society in which Native Americans lived alongside whites while retaining their own Indian values, we return to the familiar theme of assimilation.

Jefferson seemed to support, through words and actions, a government factory system which would impose American goods onto native cultures. This system would lead directly to the adoption of white methods of agriculture and lifestyle. It would also lead to indebtedness which could only be reconciled by the cession of land. The Indians would not be exterminated, per se; they would be swallowed whole. Lewis and Clark would be sent west with the critical mission of mapping the territory, discovering the most navigable method of travel, and being the advance salesmen for the American trade empire.

Historians have taken the tract of exploration and discovery of an all-water route to the Pacific as primary focus of trip. By focusing on this, they have unintentionally silenced a secondary theme, one very useful in the discourse of understanding American policy in the era of Jefferson: the government’s Indian policy towards the inhabitants of the Northwest. Citizenship, land ownership law, trade regulation, and other aspects of Indian policy were all transferred into this new territory. These inhabitants, unlike the tribes of the Ohio Valley or the South, had never before fallen under dominion or sovereign charge of any European power. In this endeavor, the policy of the United States government embarked, for the first and only time regarding Indians, into virgin territory.

⁸⁶ Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, November 24, 1801, as quoted in Ford, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. VIII, 103-106.

CHAPTER 2

*“The President has been all his life a lover of letters, very speculative and a lover of glory, and it would be possible he might attempt to perpetuate the fame of his administration not only by measures of frugality and economy which characterize him, but also by discovering or at least attempting to discover the way by which the Americans may some day extend their population and their influence up to the coasts of the South Sea.”*⁸⁷

-Spanish Minister Marques de Casa Yrujo, December 2, 1802.

Thomas Jefferson has often been categorized as a sphinx-like and complex man who, regarding both his personal life and his role in establishing an early-American policy, held incongruent goals. Espousing equality for all men while tethering slaves to the yoke of racial oppression complicates his message, or at the least, inserts a caveat of racial superiority into Jeffersonian thought. This specter of superiority was as apparent in Jefferson’s words and actions directed towards Indians as it was towards blacks. Paternalism took the place of slavery, leaving the natives little room to maneuver, despite the claims by “enlightened” minds of the eighteenth century that natives held good character and ability. Nevertheless, the historical focus regarding various aspects of Jefferson’s life has concentrated upon the incongruence in Jefferson’s policy and personal life. This focus has deflected an essential and ironic truth behind the man and his practices; he desired both expansion and a good relationship with Native Americans.

Jefferson held a personal perspective towards Indians that seems inconsistent with his law, thought, and policy towards them, yet he was remarkably consistent in the application and

⁸⁷ Carlos Martinez de Yrujo to Pedro Cevallos, December 2, 1802. Yrujo was stationed in the Louisiana Territory and had been in correspondence with President Jefferson. Copy found in Donald Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 4.

creation of legislation affecting them. Put another way, with the purchase of Louisiana from France for fifteen million dollars, Jefferson proverbially put his money where his mouth was. Jefferson had long espoused two things in his earlier policies. First, the United States of America would grow to encompass the West. Second, the Indians would be given fair and humane treatment, for everyone's own good, especially their own. Louisiana would prove a case study for the coexistence of these two seemingly incompatible tenets of Jeffersonian policy.

While Jefferson's dispatch of James Monroe and Robert Livingston to Paris was an attempt to buy only the Isle of Orleans, the president was looking towards a certain future where the nascent American nation would possess all of Louisiana. Notably, the formulation and determination of the plan which guided Jefferson's determined Indian policy emerged long before Louisiana flew the "Stars and Stripes." The emergence and administrative execution of the policy, the tangible afterbirth of the emergent idea, came later. Neither plan nor execution can be studied effectively without the other.⁸⁸ Meriwether Lewis and William Clark are most often written of as explorers, pioneers, and to a lesser extent, diplomats. Investigating Lewis and Clark's voyage brings forward Jefferson's thought and political vision.

This chapter will first investigate Jefferson's background and situation, showing how Jefferson appears to have followed the policy line of Washington and Knox, but highlighting the drastic differences in his ends and means. Too often his policy is misinterpreted, and in relation to Lewis and Clark, it obfuscates their mission's intentions. This chapter will next examine the two captains and their executively-ordered voyage of discovery as an extension of Jefferson's imperialist policy. As argued by Bernard DeVoto in his masterpiece *Course of Empire*, this

⁸⁸ Prucha, *Indian Policy in the United States*, 14.

brand of imperialism was “peculiarly, even uniquely, our own kind,” but indubitably the dispatch of the Lewis and Clark expedition was an act of imperial policy.⁸⁹ The captains’ adherence to each instruction will be measured in order to gauge accurately their implementation of Jefferson’s vision.

Jefferson’s policy would represent a break from the idealized practices of the two men who predated Jefferson in the formation of America’s Indian policy, George Washington and Henry Knox. These two statesmen had formed the basis of the American Indian policy in the decade preceding Jefferson’s election. Their ideas of land purchase and government-owned factories would not be completely eschewed by Jefferson, but they were not to be his preferred tack toward natives. In his distinctly more paternalistic and grander political vision, the Lewis and Clark would go forward into a land America held sovereignty unto. Needing only to convince the Indians to accede to the white demands without violence, as opposed to the genuine concept of treaty and purchase espoused by Knox and supported by Washington, was more simplistic. What is more, it is a position based upon both might and self-appointed racial right. Jefferson expected Americans would impose this vision onto the West. Cooperation with the natives merely saved money, and the ethnocentricity in white’s opinion of their savage neighbors gave them an assumed moral right. Jefferson’s presidential policies were evident before his election, however, and were not born in a moment of pressured or required executive decision.

Well before the American acquisition of Louisiana, Jefferson had expressed interest in various western expeditions into foreign territory. Jefferson knew the West held unfathomable potential, and he also believed that in time, by sheer demographic growth alone, the American

⁸⁹ Bernard DeVoto, *The Course of Empire*, (Cambridge: 1952), 411. DeVoto uses chapters viii and ix specifically to address Northwest expansion.

nation would spill over any negotiated border and populate the land. In 1792, the same year Captain Robert Gray sailed into the river he named for his vessel *Columbia* and fixed its coordinates, Jefferson proposed an expedition to the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia. The goal of this expedition would be to traverse the continent by land and reach the Pacific Ocean. A teen-age Meriwether Lewis was among those who petitioned to captain the exploration, but the society selected French botanist Andre Michaux in his stead. In a wild tale of international espionage and intrigue, Michaux was discovered to be an *agent provocateur* who intended to undermine America's western holdings, and he was recalled by the French government after reaching no farther than Kentucky. It would be eight years later, as Jefferson assumed the presidency, that he again attempted to authorize, plan and finance a mission to the Pacific coast.⁹⁰

To say he did not have this expansionist idea in mind upon taking office would be to neglect both his previous endeavors and the conspicuous selection of young Captain Meriwether Lewis as his personal secretary in 1801. Thomas Jefferson conceived, obtained congressional funding for, and planned the entire Lewis and Clark exploration. His instructions regarding the venture and the travelers' conduct were written in April 1801, after careful contemplation by a good many people over many years.⁹¹ With the full scope of the mission to the Pacific in mind, Jefferson chose Lewis to live and learn at the capitol, to be inculcated with the right and proper skills to conduct an epic journey, and to have stressed upon him the policy goals embedded into the mission. As John Bakeless states in *Lewis and Clark: Partners in Discovery*, "The

⁹⁰ Steven Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 37, 70-71. Ambrose discusses Michaux's particular qualifications and the instructions Jefferson had given him. Michaux had his own goals, including a desire to raise a western force to attack Spanish land holdings in the Southwest.

⁹¹ DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, 344.

determination to send an exploring expedition overland to the Columbia must have been fully matured in [Jefferson's] mind when he entered on his Presidency in March 1801, for there was no other reason to make Meriwether Lewis his private secretary."⁹² Lewis would be the executor of Jefferson's detailed instructions, the culmination of which, it was expected, would garner appreciable commercial and trade wealth.

Jefferson's instructions can be broken into two overlapping categories, commercial and diplomatic. It is with the commercial agenda in mind that Jefferson spoke to the Spanish minister of Louisiana Marques de Casa Yrujo in November, 1802. In this discussion, Jefferson stressed "the advancement of geography" as the ostensible reason for the mission, and posed an "unofficial" question to the Spanish minister. Jefferson asked if Spain "would take it badly" should America "explore the course of the Missouri River," which lay wholly within the territory of Spanish Louisiana.⁹³ Yrujo was not to be fooled; he knew the American president coveted the West for its commercial potential and had an eye on the lucrative fur trade. Yrujo was right.

A mere two months later, on January 18, 1803, Jefferson would send congress a special, secret message request for the funding of an expedition outside of American territory.

Specifically, Jefferson asked for congress to approve and provide the sum of \$2,500 to send a small contingent to the Pacific. The sole reason provided, as astute diplomats such as Yrujo would have expected, was commerce. The expedition would have four explicit purposes which

⁹² John Bakeless, *Lewis and Clark: Partners in Discovery* (Dover: Dover Publications, 1996), 3-5.

⁹³ Jefferson met with Minister Yrujo in November, 1802. This discussion is the object of Yrujo's January 31, 1803 letter to Pedro Cevallos, available in Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 14-15. At this time Louisiana was in Spanish possession, but it was scheduled to transfer to French control under the treaty of San Ildefonso. Jefferson was aware of the pending transfer, and may have hoped that Spain, soon to vacate title to the land, would fail to object. He may also have predicted that objections would be given, but that Spain would provide less resistance to an American foray than they would likely face from their new French neighbors. In any event, even after transfer to the French and the subsequent Louisiana Purchase, the expedition once having crossed the Rocky Mountains entered a Columbia Territory claimed by four separate powers: Spain, Russia, Great Britain (by terms of the Nootka convention) and the United States (by virtue of discovery by Robert Gray in the *Columbia*).

fell under the general heading of commerce. First, the men sent would affirm for Jefferson the presence of an all water route to Asia, the very same route which had been sought since the voyages of Columbus centuries before. Second, an expedition would provide Americana a direct overland connection to the maritime trade of the Northwest coast. Third, this commercial venture would amass details and lay the groundwork for the United States to challenge the British North West Company for control of the fur trade. Fourth, an expedition would buttress American land claims to the Oregon country, which at this time rested on the *Columbia's* discovery. Much of this information would be repeated in Jefferson's instructions to Lewis.⁹⁴

Jefferson drafted his final letter of instruction to Meriwether Lewis on July 20, 1803. Foremost, the instructions revolved around the commercial motives of the American nation, ordering the expedition to navigate the Missouri River in order to find the most practicable water route to the Pacific Ocean. Jefferson also requested the men make geographic observations of all the major tributaries and natural marks of the river, so as to map and coordinate future forays. Just as important, the men were to make the acquaintance of the natives they encountered. The future trade would require knowledge of the Indians in the Missouri River area, and Jefferson knew it. While making this acquaintance, the men were instructed to obtain the extent and limits of the native possessions and find the "articles of commerce they may need or furnish." Additional investigations into the state of natives' morality and religion were also requested, as it may better enable those who "endeavor to civilize [and] instruct them." Jefferson also wanted to

⁹⁴ Jefferson's Secret Message to Congress, January 18, 1803; electronic version available at: <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=old&doc=17>, accessed January 11, 2010.

assess the ability of Louisiana to sustain a large population, leading him to request that Lewis ascertain the quality of soil and the weather in the newly purchased territory.⁹⁵

The instruction made a point to state to Lewis the need to treat the Indians as well as possible, in Jefferson's words, in as friendly a manner "which their own conduct will admit." The president closed with a reminder to be diplomatic in their encounters. Lewis was charged to satisfy the Indians of the journey's innocence, and of "our wish to be neighborly and friendly with them." Jefferson also wanted the men to send native chiefs back to Washington, and more telling, to have them send their young men to be "brought up with us" and be "taught such arts as may be useful to them." This part of the instructions speaks volumes about the representative racism implicit at the turn of the nineteenth century. It shows that for even the most liberal minded white Americans, among which Jefferson and Lewis should be counted, there is an undeniable expectation of both American superiority and paternalistic ethnocentricity towards Indians. Assessing these instructions sheds light on the essence of Jeffersonian Indian policy and can be evaluated in action by tracking the performance of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

While some aspects of the expedition lend themselves to accurate and detailed advances in knowledge, such as the massive new amounts of botanical and zoological data the men catalogued, other advancements remain difficult to quantify.⁹⁶ Certainly, the value of the geographic knowledge obtained was high, and this expedition, traversing over ten thousand miles on foot, boat or horseback and lasting over three years, satisfied Jefferson's first two requests. William Clark was a gifted cartographer who surveyed the route as the men traveled west, fixing

⁹⁵ Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis July 20, 1803. Copy found in DeVoto, *Journals*, 481-487.

⁹⁶ Lewis discovered and described 178 new plants and 122 species and subspecies of animals. Statistics here are taken from Paul Russell Cutright, *Lewis and Clark: Pioneering Naturalists*, (Bison Books, 2003), 423, 447.

the latitude and longitude of all the major waterways the expedition encountered.⁹⁷ Countless hours along the way were spent talking to Indians, gathering as much information about the land as possible to both facilitate their westward journey into the unknown and bring back to Washington the first reliable, accurate map of the western half of North America.⁹⁸ On New Year's Day 1807, when Lewis made his first visit back to see the president, the two men got down on their hands and knees and poured over Clark's map. Unfortunately for Jefferson, the map confirmed that the all-water route to the Pacific, the hope of his first request, did not exist.

Addressing his second instruction, the map provided by the expedition illustrated the path along which the overland trade to the Northwest could be conducted. This information gave Jefferson more knowledge of the West than any other American, Canadian, or European leader, and alone was arguably worth the incurred expense. Beyond planning potential commercial ventures, this geographic knowledge allowed the savvy politician to obtain pertinent information regarding how best to steal the fur trade from the British, the third objective he gave to Lewis. Even more, this same knowledge could be utilized effectively to settle ongoing northern and southern boundary disputes with both the British and the Spanish. Lewis learned much about the Spanish territory to the south from the Shoshone Indians he encountered, later directly to reporting this information to Jefferson. Lewis also led a small party up the Marias River, hoping

⁹⁷ A summary of Clark's cartographical contributions and their impact can be found in Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 331.

⁹⁸ Dates, events, and exact quotes from Meriwether Lewis or William Clark used within this chapter, as they relate to the expedition, are taken from Bernard DeVoto's *Journals*, as this work comprises the most convenient day-by-day account of the explorer's writings available. Quotations attributed to the explorers, unless otherwise noted, are from DeVoto's work. Clark and Lewis spent the majority of their 1804-1805 winter stay at Ft. Mandan discussing geography with the natives to gain knowledge of the water route that lay ahead. Brief firsthand commentary on this is found in Lewis's log book entry for January 5, 1805 and January 16, 1805. DeVoto gives an excellent secondary account of this process on pages 88-89. Further west, the process continued. Lewis's entry on August 20, 1805 describes a session with a Snake Indian where maps were drawn in the dirt in an effort to describe the flow of the western waterways.

to find headwaters extending past the forty-ninth parallel and potentially move the border between the United States and British Canada farther north.⁹⁹

By being the initial travelers to reach the territory by land, Lewis and Clark accomplished Jefferson's fourth objective and buttressed the American claim to the Columbia River estuary. As a whole, these objectives alone would have been enough for congress's January 1803 decision to fund the foray into the North American unknown. However, Jefferson had much more in mind for the expedition, especially after the news of the Louisiana Purchase reached America that June. These requests regard the Indians, and were more diplomatic in nature. Lewis and Clark's diplomatic mission itself did not need to end with a change in the native way of life, but they would, in the words of Steven Ambrose, be the first brick laid on the path towards the establishment of "American sovereignty, peace, and trading empire in which the [native] warriors would put down their weapons and take up traps."¹⁰⁰

Lewis and Clark recorded more about their travels than any other explorers of their time. Out of these voluminous writings, certain critical editions and works have addressed these diplomatic goals. There was a great degree of overlap between the commercial goals of Jefferson's instructions and the non-commercial, diplomatic aspects of the expedition. However, the dominant theme within the historiography has been a discussion and evaluation of the mission's commercial aspects. Nevertheless, three authors who have either edited or penned significant works on the expedition do give a cursory evaluation of the diplomatic performance

⁹⁹ Lewis held discussions with the Shoshone Indians on August 20, 1805, where he learned both the distance from and route to the Spanish traders. Between July 3 and August 12, 1806, the Expedition separated into two groups. Lewis was with a small contingent to execute Jefferson's charge to find any existing northern tributary of the Missouri which extended past the 49th parallel, the boundary having been drawn there by Britain and the United States based on the latitude of the northernmost reaches of the river. He was unsuccessful.

¹⁰⁰ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 154.

of the men. In his comprehensive 1953 editing of the Lewis and Clark log books, Bernard DeVoto praises the expedition's diplomatic accomplishments. He consolidated numerous accounts of routine daily events, highlighted critical interactions, and updated the existing works by Nicholas Biddle and Ruben Gold Thwaites, reducing the editing stylistics of the former and the repetitive entries of the latter.

The Journals of Lewis and Clark provides a balanced hearing of events. The expedition's failures are not hidden, as the editor is often very critical of certain decisions and comments.

Nevertheless, assessing the diplomacy of the mission DeVoto concludes:

What is altogether beyond expectation, and beyond praise too, is the captains' management of the Indians they met. In personal dealings with them, they made no mistakes at all. In so much that at the critical points it is impossible to imagine a more successful outcome or a better way of achieving it, whereas it is easy to instance similar occasions when less skillful men failed badly.¹⁰¹

In support of this statement, DeVoto points to the permanent attachment of the Nez Perce and the Flathead tribes to the American interest, simply stating "their loyalty was created by Lewis and Clark." More adamant still, this work opines that the expedition "established so great a good will as to make the early years of the fur trade era a good deal less violent than they could possibly have been without it."¹⁰²

In contrast, James Ronda states in *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* that Lewis and Clark failed as diplomats. Ronda cites the captains' poor use of Sacagawea and numerous incidents where the men depended too much upon native support for their accomplishments. Ronda cited the men's "naïve optimism [which was] typical of so much Euro-American frontier diplomacy. [They] believed they could easily reshape upper Missouri realities to fit their

¹⁰¹ DeVoto, *Journals*, lv-lvi.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

expectations...[But] to the surprise of the explorer-diplomats, virtually all Indian parties proved resistant to change and suspicious of American motives.”¹⁰³ This scathing indictment departs from the DeVoto view and brands the Americans as paternalistic and fortunate opportunists.

In his 1996 *Undaunted Courage*, Steven Ambrose concurs with Ronda, calling the men ineffective. Ambrose’s work is a biography of Meriwether Lewis. Through the eyes of the captain and based upon his words and actions, the author provides an assessment which cites the same neglect of the Sacagawea’s skills. Ambrose considers this misuse of such a valuable asset, as well as other miscues and concludes that Lewis did not act as an effective diplomat. Despite detailed instructions, Lewis is said to have had no plan and held no discussions of how to use the translators. Additionally, he held no discussions with the men regarding what to do when encountering Indians, a failure to prepare that led to many awkward meetings. Ambrose contends that while the expedition experienced successes, as Lewis sailed into St. Louis “his Indian diplomacy had so far been a failure. The Sioux and the Blackfeet, the strongest and most warlike tribes in Upper Louisiana, were enemies of the United States.”¹⁰⁴ Ranging from heroes to blunderers, the historiography allows for a wide swing in interpretation, but none of these works directly and primarily addresses how Lewis and Clark executed the diplomatic charges of President Jefferson.

In order to address the diplomatic performance of the expedition a more thorough view of the men and their adherence to each non-commercial instruction needs to be completed. It is important to note that the intensity with which Jefferson prepared Lewis for this exploration underscores how important the instructions and the expedition were to Jefferson. What Jefferson

¹⁰³ James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1984), 55.

¹⁰⁴ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 263-4, 403.

could not instruct Lewis of himself, the young aide was sent to the best minds in early America to be trained, educated, and prepared for this excursion.¹⁰⁵ The president expected this training would inculcate within Lewis abilities he would need in order to assess any number of complex situations, understanding, of course, that the expedition would be void of any outside assistance. Additionally, these varied cartographical, medical and scientific skills would help Lewis in his performance of Jefferson's non-commercial instructions, the first of which was to prepare native tribes for the coming American traders.

Preparing the tribes for the coming American trade would consist of earning Indian friendship and loyalty through ceremonial gift-giving and assessing the particular trade goods the tribes possessed and needed. This was to be done in conjunction with another critical aspect of the initial meetings. Lewis and Clark would promote and advertise the superiority of American trade goods. Above all, Jefferson desired the men should "satisfy [the Indians] of your journey's innocence," but also impress upon them the size and power of the United States of America.¹⁰⁶ The Sioux, a large tribe whose control of the upper Missouri River had proven troublesome to traders over the last several years, were specifically mentioned regarding this demonstration of American power. Resistance would be swept away in the face of desirable goods and strong displays of American power. It can be inferred from this directive that Jefferson was ethnocentric but held, for the turn of the nineteenth century, a very liberal point of view. Indians could willingly choose to embrace the arrival of the Americans and learn to coexist on white

¹⁰⁵ In addition to personal presidential instruction, Lewis was dispatched to Philadelphia to work with numerous intellectuals, such as Albert Gallatin (who furnished maps), scientist Robert Patterson, and botanist Dr. Benjamin Smith Barton. Anatomical guidance was provided by Dr. Caspar Wistar, and physician Dr. Benjamin Rush furnished medical advice.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Jefferson instructions to Meriwether Lewis, June 20, 1803. Full copy found in appendix 1 of DeVoto, *Journals*, 481-487.

terms, or they could be forcibly removed. For the age he lived in, this was a progressive position.

In light of Jefferson's positions regarding the future of the West, the diplomacy Lewis and Clark would be practicing with Indian tribes was non-traditional. The men became mouthpieces, offering the natives limited choices and flaunting strength to those who opted for an alternative position. In this vein one last instruction was given to Lewis; after informing the tribes of their sovereignty of their new "Great Father," the explorers were to persuade tribal chiefs to travel to Washington to meet with President Jefferson and to be impressed with the great size and power of the American nation. Jefferson expected that a successful execution of these instructions would bring about an inter-tribal prairie peace, under the power of the American government, and based on beneficial trade. With peace, established trade could flow from the Pacific to the Atlantic and fill the American coffers.¹⁰⁷

Ranging from initial contact to the establishment of continental peace among the varied tribes, Jefferson showed no shortness of vision--nor must it be supposed any lack of confidence in Lewis--in the instructions given to his hand-picked diplomat. An investigation into this American policy as it was implemented can be measured, if not in a vacuum, in a very isolated locale. Both Lewis and the cross-continent exploration he led are parts of Jeffersonian policy from its inception through its execution. Carrying out these tasks makes the Lewis and Clark expedition the executors of American policy and de facto ambassadors to the tribes who occupied the western half of North America. Investigating not only the instructions outlined by Jefferson but the scrupulously kept log books from the expedition, it can be concluded whether

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

or not Lewis and Clark executed the president's instructions fully and consistently. Assuming the men did indeed follow the letter of Jefferson's instruction and were instruments acting out presidential will, the expedition itself allows us to measure the effectiveness of Jefferson's intended Western policy.

These non-commercial instructions were not going to be easy to follow. From the native perspective, whites were uninvited trespassers. Moreover, the arsenal of weaponry and trade goods the expedition brought with them, if confiscated by belligerent Indians, would have given a tribe the ability to dominate a region.¹⁰⁸ For even the friendliest and most docile tribes, this massive cache must have been a great temptation. Constantly faced with a severe numerical disadvantage as they encountered populous native tribes, the men of the Corps of Discovery needed to show great strength in order to deter aggression, yet simultaneously follow the orders from Jefferson to avoid conflict at all costs and initiate talks. Any accomplishments the mission may have procured, whether in the form of geographical knowledge or rudimentary trade relations, required maintaining a skillful balance. At any time, whether instigated by a young explorer making a rash decision or a native tribe making a play for power, the mission could have easily been lost. On this possibility Jefferson could not have been clearer. Establishing Indian relations and commerce was desirable, but these goals could be sacrificed if needed. The explorers must do whatever they needed to do in order to reach Pacific safely, and subsequently, return to Washington to tell their tale.

Not only were the whites uninvited visitors, many native tribes viewed the furs as their resources, taken by white trappers without permission and without payment. Harnessing the

¹⁰⁸ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 144-145. Ambrose vividly describes this point in his narrative, calling Lewis and Clark's journey a "military expedition into hostile territory."

land's bounty for American ends was largely contingent on Indian acquiescence, and, as Ambrose states, "one had to doubt they would continue to allow white men to trap their creeks and rivers."¹⁰⁹ Jefferson's paternalistic objectives sought to alleviate this issue by converting natives from competitors to partners. The establishment of American western sovereignty, and a profitable trade empire, could be accomplished when Indian warriors would put down their bows and instead take up their traps.

Lewis and Clark's Indian negotiations began after leaving St. Louis on May 14, 1804. Traders had previously mapped the route from St. Louis up the Missouri River as far as the Mandan Villages, in present day North Dakota. Although the Mandan were to some degree familiar with whites, contact with these tribes had been limited to isolated traders. The men took care to be "honest brokers," as Jefferson phrased it, making a point not to take anything from the natives. William Clark later noted in his log book on October 14, 1805, that the expedition had "made it a point at all times not to take any thing belonging to the Indians even their wood."¹¹⁰ When faced with Indian thievery, numerous examples are cited where the men show mercy and fairness. Their numerical disadvantage and their instructions not to wage conflict certainly contributed to this conduct.

The expedition fell into a predictable pattern as Lewis and Clark turned their paddles upriver towards the Mandan Villages. They carried out the first portion of the instructions Jefferson provided; meet and befriend the tribes, assess the goods they had and needed, and

¹⁰⁹ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 146.

¹¹⁰ Gary Moulton, ed. *The Journals of the Lewis & Clark Expedition*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986-93. Moulton's 8 volume set updates the original 1815 accounts compiled by Nicholas Biddle, the 1904 Ruben Gold Thwaites production, which was the first complete publication of the log books, and Bernard DeVotos edited version, which was the first comprehensive scholarly treatment of the logs. It adds the previous works with much new information, and for the scholar is currently the definitive edition.

approximate the size of the tribes. In addition, they gave each tribe myriad gifts, all of which were carefully selected to advertise the superiority of American trade. These gifts--medals, flags, calico shorts, vermilion face paint, ivory combs, hats, coats, tobacco, handkerchiefs, paint, awls, knives, beads, brass buttons, tomahawks, looking glasses, scissors, mirrors, whiskey, and more--represented what the United States could offer them as trade partners, promoting commerce and helping smooth over any conflicts.¹¹¹ Lewis and Clark informed the Indians that the American nation they represented desired commerce, not land. With the quantity and quality of trade goods the Americans alone could offer, they hoped to convince the natives that dealing exclusively with American traders was in their best interest. Ambrose describes the trek along the Missouri as a functioning “mercantile and hardware display case for a trade empire on the move,” but this alone was not enough to complete Jefferson’s instructions.¹¹²

Jefferson’s instructions called for more than dealing honestly with the tribes and overwhelming them with gifts; it also meant delivering the president’s prepared speech informing them of U.S. sovereignty. This carefully worded presentation, delivered by Lewis as the advance agent of Jefferson’s Indian policy, informed the natives of their American “Great Father” to whom the tribes must give their allegiance. In representing the American government, Jefferson’s speech clearly shows the resolve of the American government to establish the fur trade in the Missouri region. It also indicated that, if at all possible, the United States would establish control under auspices of peace:

Children, the Great Chief of the 17 nations of America has sent us out to clear the road, and make it road of peace...Children, you are to live in peace with the white man. Injure not person of any traders who visit you under the protection of Great Father’s flag...Children, follow his councils and you with have nothing to fear, because great

¹¹¹ Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians*, 9.

¹¹² Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 155.

spirit will smile upon you nation, and in future ages will make you outnumber the trees in the forest.¹¹³

The speech, over 2,500 words in length and taking over half an hour for the men to deliver, was based on the possibility that peaceful methods of American integration and control of the Louisiana Purchase Territory were achievable. In the event the Indians were uncooperative, the threat of force served to provide the necessary impetus that brought forth Indian acquiescence. Jefferson's instructions called for the Indians to all be informed of their allegiance to their new great father and stressed that troublesome tribes, particularly the Sioux, must be impressed with American strength and authority. The ever-dutiful Lewis informed each and every tribe the expedition contacted that the government of the United States would, and could, use force if necessary.¹¹⁴

Translating the speech through various interpreters, Lewis made certain the tribes knew they were "bound to obey the commands of their great chief the President who is now your only great father...Do as we say, or no white man will ever come back and trade with you. Displease [your] great father and he will stop all traders and consume you as the fire consumes the grass of the prairie." Forecasting Jefferson's intended policy, Lewis promised that American trading posts would soon be set up in their country, telling the Natives there would be "steady jobs and a secure income if they would go to work instead of war, take furs rather than scalps."¹¹⁵

If the intended policy succeeded, American trade would dominate Louisiana, bringing peace and furs down the Missouri River. As an additional measure of enticing Indians into strict trade and compliance with the American nation they were now sovereign unto, Lewis and Clark

¹¹³ Lewis and Clark to the Oto Indians, August 4, 1804. Copy found in Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, vol. 1, 203-208.

¹¹⁴ Jefferson's instructions to Lewis, June 20, 1803, found in DeVoto, *Journals*, 481-487.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

urged tribal chiefs to travel to Washington. Jefferson expected to use personal meetings to win tribal loyalty through a combination of bribes and threats, telling Lewis the meetings would “impress [the natives] strongly not only with [American] justice & liberality, but with our power.” Before departing St. Louis in April, 1804, Lewis coordinated the Indians’ journey with Captain Amos Stoddard, an artillery officer who assumed the post of military-civil governor of Upper Louisiana on March 10, 1804. Stoddard was authorized to act on Lewis’s behalf and draw bills of exchange on the secretary of war, sparing no reasonable expense in getting the chiefs to Washington.¹¹⁶

Stoddard escorted forty-five Indians from eleven different tribes back to Washington, arriving in January, 1806. They were also taken to Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. Cannon were fired and troops were paraded in front of them. In *Undaunted Courage*, Steven Ambrose questions how much good the visits did for America. Jefferson talked of a cooperative future built on trade, but the chiefs had their own tribes at home to appease. Also, at least four Indian chiefs died from diseases. This unfortunate occurrence created mistrust in native villages.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, as Jefferson explained to Congress, good relations with the tribes on the Missouri were “indispensable to the policy of governing those Indians by commerce rather than by arms.”¹¹⁸ The president frugally calculated that the expenses associated with cooperation were a fraction of the costs accrued by use of force.

¹¹⁶ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 137; The chiefs were also given medals bearing Jefferson’s likeness as a goodwill gesture.

¹¹⁷ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 343. Numbers given here in terms of head count and tribes depends upon Ambrose’s work.

¹¹⁸ Jefferson to Senate, December 31, 1804. Copy of address found at www.loc.gov, accessed January 11, 2010.

Lewis and Clark encountered the known tribes along the Upper Missouri; delivered Jefferson's prepared speech to them; and arranged for chiefs to travel back to Washington. In this way, the expedition accomplished a large portion of Jefferson's instructions in a prepared, predictable pattern. But departing the Mandan Villages in April 1805 meant that the negotiations would now be undertaken in a decidedly different fashion. The reasons were simple; from this point on the men entered the realm of geographic rumor and guess, crossing into areas which heretofore had remained unknown. The natives encountered within this expanse were also unknown commodities. Equally as important, the white men who entered their territory from the east were the first these tribes had encountered. The captains' execution of the instructions depended largely on how they were received by the natives.

The expedition would endeavor to do as Jefferson requested; contact the tribes; ascertain their numbers and trade capabilities; impress upon them the strength and benevolence of their new "Great Father;" and, if all went well, survive to encounter the next tribe on the way to the Pacific. In these interactions the expedition can be seen as the originator of an Indian-American cultural middle ground in the Louisiana Territory. Mission success would be dependent on not only their message and the natives' responses, but would be built upon a difficult cross-cultural brokerage and initial diplomacy.¹¹⁹ An example of this initial interaction, the difficulty it entailed, and the risks associated, is seen when the Corps of Discovery encountered the Shoshone Indians in present day Montana.

The expedition had followed the mighty Missouri River all the way to its terminus. At this point, the explorers found themselves in need of native help. Without horses to carry their

¹¹⁹ For a thorough and enlightening description of the native-white "middle ground" and a deeper explanation of the term itself, see Richard White's *The Middle Ground*, especially pages ix-x.

load over the continental divide, the trade goods and remaining stores would be lost, and the mission would fail. As the expedition attempted to locate and make contact with the Shoshone, a tribe they had been told of by the Mandan Indians that winter, Lewis knew he needed horses.¹²⁰ He must also have known he would not be bargaining from a position of power. To complicate matters further, as they had been with every tribe encountered to date, they would be faced with a numerical disadvantage and inherently in danger.

On this occasion, the numerical disadvantage would be more pronounced. The expedition was stuck at the Three Forks of the Missouri without means of transporting their goods, and Lewis was forced to scout ahead for the Shoshone in hopes of obtaining horses. Lewis took only two other men with him. Lewis elected not to bring an interpreter with him, even though he had in his party Sacagawea, a member of the Shoshone tribe he was searching for. Had the Shoshone chosen to, or had they believed the men to be enemies, their war party could have overwhelmed this trio and then have pressed forward, routing the remainder of the expedition in a matter of minutes. Victory would have more than doubled their firepower in rifles, and claimed more knives, tools, and trinkets than any other Rocky Mountain Indian band had ever seen.¹²¹

The Shoshone tribe was embroiled in bitter warfare with both the Blackfeet and the Hidatsa, two large and powerful tribes. Lewis expected this conflict to provide him an

¹²⁰ Meriwether Lewis, logbook entry for June 16, 1805. The need for horses to effect the portage over the Rocky Mountains was prevalent the entire summer, and the chief reason the Shoshone were so important.

¹²¹ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 269. Ambrose takes Lewis and Clark to task over this encounter with the Shoshone. He highlights the massive failure to plan the initial encounter, and chastises them for leaving the event largely to chance. Certainly, they did take a risk and were fortunate to have the encounter go so smoothly. The Shoshone were at war with other tribes and the men could have been regarded as a threat. Additionally, Lewis took with him two men, and chose to leave behind his Shoshone companion, Sacagawea, who could have interpreted and assisted greatly. Regardless, when the meeting took place between the two sides, the men were warmly welcomed by the Shoshone Indians. Once again, the men acted on behalf of the president to broker trade between the two sides.

opportunity; the Shoshone would need guns in order to defend themselves from multiple, powerful enemies. Lewis and Clark expected that the American promise to be a reliable trade partner and provide a steady supply of guns and ammunition would allow the expedition to incorporate the Shoshone, and their supply of otter, ermine, and exotic furs, into the American trade empire. Of course, this required the Shoshone to think with an eye on the future. The Lewis and Clark expedition brought no guns with them; they were advance agents who carried only promises. They would have to depend on their ability to convince the tribe to think long-term. This posed a problem as the men were confronted with short-term needs, namely horses and guides for the arduous mountain portage. Fortunately for the expedition, the men obtained roughly a dozen horses for a pittance in trade goods, but negotiations with the tribe to guide and assist the Corps of Discovery across the mountains would prove to be a harder sell.

Initial contact had been made, promises of friendship, trade, and prosperity had been offered, and assistance over the mountains had been requested. All this was in line with following Jefferson's instructions and acting as the forward voice of American empire and the furthering of this vital mission. However, the Shoshone wanted to leave and head east for their seasonal hunt rather than stay and help the men go west. Lewis's response to this was to threaten the Shoshone, telling them that if they refused to help "no whitemen would ever come to trade with them or bring them arms and ammunition."¹²² In Lewis's defense, the expedition may have had little choice. Success without guides was a grim prospect. Nevertheless, and perhaps for no other reason than no one had expected a mountain portage necessitating native help, this instance

¹²² Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for August 15, 1805.

did not go quite as smoothly as he would have been liked. The Indians delayed their hunt and helped the whites portage the mountains.

Once across the divide, traveling downriver for the first time, the expedition raced towards the Pacific Ocean. As requested by Jefferson, interactions with the tribes on the western side of the Rocky Mountains were conducted, and were characterized by warm, receptive welcomes. The natives in this region had never before encountered whites, and this initial contact was an overwhelming success. Notably, the men no longer portrayed themselves as agents of a “Great Father” who claimed sovereignty over the tribes. Having crossed the continental divide, the expedition had left American-owned Louisiana and entered a region of disputed claim. They were, however, still ardent trade agents for the burgeoning American empire.

Two of the largest and most renowned of the western tribes, the Flatheads and the Nez Perce, welcomed the American contingent warmly. On September 4, 1805, the men “met a part[y] of the Tushepau [Flathead] nation, of 33 lodges about 80 men 400 total and at least 500 horses, those people rec[ei]ved us friendly, threw white robes over our Sholders & Smoked in the pipes of peace, we Encamped with them & found them friendly...I was the first white man who ever [was] on the waters of this river.” Both Lewis and Clark’s log books also praised the Nez Perce’s friendliness and hospitality. The Nez Perce earned the trust of the expedition quickly and agreed to take care of the expedition’s herd of horses until the Americans’ return trip.¹²³

¹²³ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for September 4, 1805. This entry discusses the initial meeting and cites the expedition as the initial whites to contact the Flathead tribe. His entry on October 5, 1805 notes the men branded and left 38 horses with the Nez Perce to watch until the whites returned. The Nez Perce were true to their promise to look after the herd. When the men returned on May 9, 1806 they found their horses waiting for them.

This interaction is all the more remarkable when it is considered that the expedition arrived at the Nez Perce village gravely ill due to dietary complications. While the Americans were ill and fatigued, scarcely able to walk, the Nez Perce could easily have overwhelmed the men and taken possession of a formidable arsenal. The oral tradition of the tribe tells that they did indeed consider killing the white travelers, and credits the women among them for restraining the men. Initial white encounters largely went exactly as Jefferson had envisioned and hoped for. As seen with the Nez Perce tribe, the men were welcomed, horses were readily obtained and watched over, friendships were forged, and the expedition brought back statistical information which could be leveraged for the future American fur trade.¹²⁴

From the time the mission departed the Mandan Villages, the initial native-white interactions followed a discernable trend: the further west the whites traveled the less familiar the natives they encountered were with whites and white trade goods. This gradual reduction in cultural familiarity and tribal exposure to whites continued as they crossed the Continental Divide. As they sailed down the Clearwater River and entered the eastern branch of the Columbia, intercultural familiarity remained non-existent. Natives who had never before seen whites, or large expeditions traveling down river, fled in fear before the expedition. Owing much to the work of Sacagawea and three Nez Perce chiefs who had offered to accompany them, however, Native trepidation was quickly transformed into what Lewis called “god-like adoration” for the coming whites.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ DeVoto discusses the illness, likely dysentery, in *Journals*, 241. Entries from Lewis’s logbook from September 29 to October 7, 1805 discuss the particulars and specifics of the “heaviness at the stomach;” the Nez Perce oral tradition indicated the original intent was to “do away with [Lewis and Clark]” can be found at <http://www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/idahonatives/nez/journey.html>, accessed January 11, 2010.

¹²⁵ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for October 19, 1805.

The men experienced interactions with the natives who had not been tainted by previous native-white encounters. This was an incalculable benefit to the Lewis and Clark expedition. On this blank slate, the captains were able create the picture of beneficial white trade and friendship that Jefferson had crafted. But this tendency would be reversed as the men approached the Pacific Ocean. As they approached the coast, Lewis and Clark were now to be confronted by numerous tribes who had become familiar with European traders of many nationalities. In the last days of the eighteenth century, the coastal fur trade had come to dominate the Columbia, and the men now pushed Jefferson's message upon veteran traders. These tribes were familiar with not only white men, but also with white trade, tools, culture and language.¹²⁶

As they had done countless times since their departure, they would meet and befriend the Indian tribes they encountered, but were now forced to give up two or three times as many pieces of cloth, beads, and medals to obtain canoes and horses. Increased familiarity forced a hard bargaining position upon the men. Despite hardships dealing with hardened Indians who had learned to manipulate white traders, the men did remarkably well in accomplishing what Jefferson had instructed. As the expedition wintered along the Pacific coast from November 1805 to March 1806, Lewis gathered precious trade information, such as the names and populations of the coastal tribes, what quantity of goods they possessed, what European nations they had encountered and traded with, and at what interval these Europeans arrived.¹²⁷ Additionally, by the very virtue of their presence, the men buttressed the American claim to the

¹²⁶ Numerous sailors had contacted the indigenous tribes along the northwest coast of North America, most notably James Cook (1778), Robert Gray (1791), and George Vancouver (1792).

¹²⁷ A complete list is found in DeVoto, *Journals*, 296-7.

Oregon country, one of the integral facets Jefferson had outlined for the mission. Lewis and Clark had made the land traverse first. Setting sail back east, the men left the coastal Clatsop tribe letters to give to European traders who were expected to arrive later in the spring. These letters would inform the arriving Europeans of the American claim to the Columbia River basin.¹²⁸

A negative aspect of the increased familiarity was a sharp increase of native forcefulness and attempted theft. Clearly, the white man did not intimidate the coastal natives. Between November 4 and November 15, 1805, three separate notable incidents were documented in the log books. On November 4, Lewis noted the theft of a pipe-tomahawk and a canoe during an encounter with the Skilloot Indians, calling the natives “assumeing and disagreeable” as well as “troubesom.” On November 7 Lewis noted an encounter with a tribe who called themselves the “Warciacum” where the men detected two Indians attempting to steal a knife. On November 15 Lewis describes the theft of a gig and basket, as well as an attempt to steal the sentries’ guns as they slept. These attempts and actions illustrate the uninhibited nature of the coastal Indians in regards to white men. This stands in contrast to the first two years of the men’s journey, where rarely was any mention made of Indian theft or forcefulness.¹²⁹

For their part, the men handled these occurrences admirably, but it cannot be said that they were always perfect in execution or action. For nearly two years, these men had alternately suffered from illness, hunger, depravation, lack of shelter, and adverse weather conditions. Given the dire straits the men often found themselves in, on at least one occasion, the choice to steal was made. Due to the great poverty of the expedition and the escalated price the Clatsop

¹²⁸ For a full written account of the letter Lewis wrote see DeVoto, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 331.

¹²⁹ DeVoto, *Journals*, 275-286.

tribe requested for a canoe, the Corps of Discovery deliberately chose to steal the needed vessel when disembarking the Pacific coast. James Ronda has called the act “a particularly sordid tale of deception and friendship betrayed...at worst criminal and at best a terrible lapse of judgment...The essential honesty that distinguished Lewis and Clark from explorers like Hernando De Soto and Francisco Pizarro had been tarnished.”¹³⁰

Ronda rightfully castigates the men for this theft, but the comparison of an expedition promoting peace to explorers who brought wanton destruction to the Indians is extreme and certainly misplaced here. The decision to steal the canoe was not a premeditated act of thievery, but a last resort of explorers who felt they had no choice. As Steven Ambrose points out, there would not be any crossing of the mountains before winter set in if they could not get to the falls of the Columbia first. When given the choice between delay and probable death or the theft of a canoe, Lewis acted.¹³¹

Moreover, that this singular incident is noteworthy in and of itself illustrates how deeply Lewis and Clark, as well as their accompanying troop, adhered to Jefferson’s message. Despite the paternalistic and racist belief in white superiority that was common among eighteenth-century Americans, the men endeavored to treat Indians on equal, and fair, terms. The Americans coming to open the trade and connect their empire into the Indian trade network intended to operate as honest brokers, as whites who could be trusted, and as examples they expected the Indians would soon emulate.

As ordered, Lewis and Clark had executed their instructions and prepared the natives for the coming American trade empire by giving a variety of gifts, informing the tribes of their new

¹³⁰ Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians*, 211.

¹³¹ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 335.

“Great Father” to the east, and convincing many tribal chiefs to visit the American capital. All their gains depended upon one last remaining instruction, however. The president expected Lewis and Clark to awe the Indians with the power, size, and technology of the United States. Impressing the natives of the great strength and prowess the American nation could potentially muster in the face of resistance would guarantee cooperative measures, such as the very friendship Lewis and Clark brokered, would grow into a vast prairie peace and a profitable trade empire. Weakness would be met with greater resistance.

Demonstrating the control the United States was capable of projecting into Louisiana was done in two ways. One way was through overt discussions and displays of their martial abilities. The quintessential example of this was a frank, direct speech backed by loaded field pieces against a hostile Sioux nation. An altercation with the Teton Sioux began on September 25, 1804, and continued over the subsequent three days. The Sioux, personally identified by Jefferson as a problem the expedition would need to deal with, were practicing a hostile brand of river piracy upon the few traders whom they allowed to pass. The Americans, who bluntly refused to give tribute and demanded the Missouri River be opened and remain so under order of the president, the Sioux’s new “Great Father,” engaged in an escalating instances of brinksmanship with the tribe.

The Sioux were numerous, armed, and hostile to traders. Demanding tribute from all who wished to navigate the Missouri, their non-appeasement policy threatened to choke the American trade route. In anticipation of their meeting, Clark purchased a bronze cannon in St. Louis and mounted it on a swivel. The cannon was able to fire either a one pound lead ball or sixteen musket balls in any direction, a highly effective deterrent that would be, at the time, the

largest armament ever taken up the Missouri. Clark also purchased four blunderbusses, also to be mounted on swivels. Installed on the main keelboat as well as the expedition's smaller pirogues, the blunderbusses, loaded with either buckshot or musket balls, were a devastating close range weapon.¹³² The August 1804 meeting between the Sioux and the Americans would prove to be Lewis and Clark's first real test of frontier diplomacy, and the men went prepared to show, and potentially use, force.

Although greatly outnumbered and far from home, when the several hundred Sioux warriors drew arrows, the Americans did not respond as the French and Spanish had before them; the Americans loaded their weapons and called the Sioux bluff. A firsthand account of one such tense moment was recorded by John Ordway, a sergeant assigned to the Corps of Discovery who kept his own log book during the trip:

Capt Lewis who was on board [the keelboat] ordered every man to his arms. the large swivel [was] loaded immediately with 16 Musquet ball in it the other 2 swivels loaded well with Buck Shot [and] each of them manned. Capt Clark used moderation with them...that we were not Squaws. but warriors. The chief Sayed he had warriors too and if we were to go on they would follow us and kill and take the whole of us by degrees or that he had another party or lodge above this [and] that they were able to destroy us. then Capt Clark told them that we were Sent by their great father the President of the U.S. and that if they misused us that he or Capt Lewis could by writing to him have them all distroyed as it were in a moment.¹³³

The Sioux proved unwilling to back up their bluster; native warriors lowered their bows and allowed the expedition to leave without paying tribute. They did not follow the white men. From this point forward the Missouri River would be open to American traders. As such this four day meeting proved climactic in many ways. The altercation had called the Sioux bluff; they were no longer in a position to demand tribute. From this point forward they were pushed aside

¹³² Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 127-128

¹³³ John Ordway, log book entry for September 25, 1804.

by future American envoys. As Bernard DeVoto writes, the “moral of the episode was that a new breed of white man had come to the Upper Missouri, one that could not be scared or bullied.” This news spread fast along the Indian underground ahead of the expedition, paving the way for the expedition to smoothly continue on to the Continental Divide without further diplomatic impediment. The men were welcomed with respect.¹³⁴

Despite the altercation with the Sioux, brinkmanship was neither the prevailing method of impressing upon the Indians the great power America possessed, nor was it always necessary. On at least one occasion, Lewis passively threatened the Snake Indians with being excluded from the trade, a tactic that proved very effective. Lewis wrote in his log book “we made [the Indians] sensible of their dependence on the will of our government for every species of merchandize as well for their defence & comfort.”¹³⁵ The Snake chief thanked the men for their friendship and the tribe helped the men transport their luggage over the mountains. Another instance, involving the Chinook Indians residing in the Columbia basin, shows the coercive power of the white’s technology. In his journal entry for January 24, 1806 Lewis describes a joint hunting trip where “the Indians witnessed Drewyer’s shooting some of those Elk, which has given them a very exalted opinion of us as marksmen and the superior excellence of our rifles compared with their guns; this may probably be of service to us, as it will deter them from any acts of hostility.”¹³⁶ Exclusion and technological superiority impressed upon tribes the power of the American nation, but in certain situations, the men returned to threats.

¹³⁴ DeVoto, *Journals*, 34.

¹³⁵ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for August 17, 1805.

¹³⁶ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for January 24, 1806.

It is worth noting that the men of the expedition took a firm stance against any Indian threat or attempted theft. Faced with enhanced thievery in the Columbia Territory, an exasperated Clark noted “I informed those Indians all of which understood some English that if they stole our guns &c the men would certainly shute them...the sentinal which was over our Baggage allarmed them verry much.”¹³⁷ Guarding the baggage was of vital importance to the safety of the mission, and theft would not be tolerated. A second incident along the Columbia, captured by Lewis on April 11, 1806, showed the frighteningly tense moments the experienced by the expedition:

[t]he War-clel-lars...crowded about our camp in considerable numbers. [T]hese are the greatest thieves and scoundrels we have met with. [The Indians] attempted to take a dog from [Private John Shields] and pushed him out of the road. He had nothing to defend himself with except a large knife which he drew with an intention of puting one or both of them to death before they could get themselves in readiness to use their arrows, but discovering his design they declined the combat and instantly fled through the woods. Three of the same tribe of villains stole my dog this evening...sent three men in pursuit of the thieves with orders if they made the least resistence or difficulty in surrendering the dog to fire on them...[I] informed them by signs that if they made any further attempts to steal our property or insulted our men we should put them to instant death...Our men seem well disposed to kill a few of them.¹³⁸

The men refused to cave in the face of harassment or bluster. This refusal to compromise or tolerate disruption must be listed as one of the paramount factors allowing the mission to attain success. The men would treat with natives, offer them large amounts of trade goods, and broker good terms whenever possible, but they would not be dictated to or coerced by native threats. Any sign of weakness would have been exploited by native tribes who enjoyed an astounding numerical advantage. To that end, on occasion the men had to follow through on their threats.

¹³⁷ William Clark, log book entry for November 15, 1805.

¹³⁸ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for April 10, 1806.

After Enesher Indians had pilfered six tomahawks and a knife the previous night, Lewis “ordered the indians from our camp this evening and informed them that if I caught them attempting to purloin any article from us I would beat them severely.”¹³⁹ Despite this warning, another tomahawk was stolen the next day, and when Lewis personally observed an Indian attempting to steal an iron socket from the canoe pole. The Indian was given “several severe blows” and ordered to leave the camp. Captain Lewis then informed the Indians that “I would shoot the first of them that attempted to steal an article from us. [T]hat we were not affraid to fight them, that I had it in my power at that moment to kill them all and set fire to their houses, but it was not my wish to treat them with severity provided they would let my property alone.” These Americans were not to be trifled with, and whether their practices were aggressive or benign, they did their best to ensure each tribe came to respect the force of both the expedition and the nation from which they came.

The concept of impressing the natives extended past shows of martial ability. Whites, a never-before-seen oddity, had entered native lands on the northern Missouri River sailing upon large boats. They brought trade goods and promises of wealth and weapons to the plains Indians. The spectacle surrounding them appeared as “great medicine” to the tribes.¹⁴⁰ Time and time again, from the Mandan Villages to the Shoshone who summered at the base of the Rocky Mountains, to the Columbian plains in present day state of Washington, the “whiteness” of the men served as a curiosity that engendered the tribes to expedition. However, the most shocking racial reaction did not come from the white men who entered native lands, but the lone black

¹³⁹ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for April 20, 1806.

¹⁴⁰ William Clark, log book entry for October 28, 1804. Clark notes that the Mandans, upon seeing the large boat the men sailed upriver on, called the vessel “great medison.”

man. The Indians found York, William Clark's servant, to be perhaps the most intriguing American curiosity of all.¹⁴¹

York was 34 years old when the expedition left St. Louis, the same age as William Clark, the man he had served since boyhood. The journals of Lewis, Clark, and Patrick Gass all cite several instances portraying York as a trusted and equal member of the expedition, sharing in the duties, risks, and labors of the exploration. Of all his notable accomplishments, perhaps York's the most valuable contribution was the impression he made upon the natives. York's very presence often astonished and won over the Indians, opening up positive relations and diplomatic opportunities. For example, York caused a sensation when the expedition arrived among the Arikaras on the Upper Missouri in mid-October 1804.

Clark recorded that the "[natives were] much astonished at my black Servent, who did not lose the opportunity of [displaying] his powers Strength, &c. this nation ever Saw a black man before...Those Indians wer much astonished at my servent...all flocked around him & examined him head from top to toe...."¹⁴² This scene was repeated when the Americans encountered the Mandan and the Shoshone, who took a special liking to York. When Lewis attempted to obtain Shoshone support in transporting supplies from the Three Forks of the Missouri across the Rockies, York proved pivotal. When negotiations stalled, Lewis told the Indians that "we had a man with us who was black and had short curling hair, this had excited their curiosity very much, and they seemed quite as anxious to see this monster as they wer[e] the merchandize which we had to barter...."¹⁴³ Once racial curiosity had sufficiently opened

¹⁴¹ DeVoto, *Journals*, 48-49, 52, 59, 201, 205. The logbooks are littered with example of the excited reaction and wonder inspired by York's mere presence.

¹⁴² William Clark, log book entry for October 9-10, 1804.

¹⁴³ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for August 16, 1805.

doors, the men showed off their force, military skill, and superior weaponry to impress the Indians.

Demonstrating advanced weaponry was another method by which the men impressed the natives with their power and issued a warning to tribes that their white “Great Father” was not to be trifled with. The most intriguing weapon was the pneumatic rifle, or air gun, which Lewis purchased in Philadelphia. As described by Ambrose, the “[guns] stock was the reservoir, and it could be pumped full of air to a pressure of five to six hundred psi, at which point it was not much inferior in hitting power to the Kentucky rifle. That it produced no smoke or noise astonished the frontiersmen.”¹⁴⁴ Time and again, the men demonstrated the air gun, leaving Indians incredulous. In the words of Meriwether Lewis, “My Air-gun also astonishes them very much; they cannot comprehend its shooting so often and without powder; and think that it is *great medicine* which comprehends every thing that is to them incomprehensible.”¹⁴⁵ The intention of the expedition using the air gun was to so impress the tribes that no thoughts of resisting the whites, who could so easily and completely eradicate the natives with their power and technology, ever arose.

The use of medical and spiritual wonderments was one last method of astound the tribes with the great power held by Americans. Both legitimate white medical practices and scientific parlor tricks were employed, and they seemed to the Indians evidence of a great mystical power they could not defeat. Lewis recounts in his log book an incident with the Nez Perce which illustrates the value of white medical practices. Lewis gave medical treatment and “healed” the

¹⁴⁴ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 108.

¹⁴⁵ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for January 24, 1806. Lewis was demonstrating his gun to the Clatsop tribe in the Columbia basin.

wife of a Nez Perce chief in order to acquire horses the tribe would not sell.¹⁴⁶ Providing medical eye water to Indians afflicted with cataracts and liniments to natives with aches and pains, the men engendered themselves to numerous tribes. Clark wrote that the men “[took] care to give them no article which can possibly injure them, and in many cases can administer & give such medicine & surgical aid as will effectually restore in simple cases.”¹⁴⁷ Using medicine as diplomacy formed a genuine bond between the Americans and the Indians they encountered, and it also impressed upon the natives the great skills and ability of the whites.

Keen on amazing the Indians, the captains employed a variety of methods. Non-medicinal miracles continued the impression of great white spiritual powers. Magnetism, magnifying glasses and other incomprehensible objects testified to the omnipotence of the white emissaries. Using medicine as diplomacy formed a genuine bond between the Americans and the Indians they encountered, and it also impressed upon the natives the great skills and abilities of the whites. The men often took on the role of the shaman healing the sick and performed mystical feats. At other times the men proved to be fierce warriors who brooked no challenges to their authority.

It is clearly seen that the two captains endeavored to carry out each instruction President Jefferson given them. Regarding the instruction to prepare the natives for the coming of American traders, the evidence is indisputable. Among each tribe the men encountered they endeavored to befriend the Indians through gifts and delivered Jefferson’s speech which stressed, in part, the future American trade which would come to them. Jefferson’s instructions directly

¹⁴⁶ William Clark, log book entry for April 18, 1806. Clark cured the Nez Perce woman of back pains, using “camphere and worm flannel.”

¹⁴⁷ William Clark, log book entry for May 5, 1806.

state that “in all intercourse with the natives treat them in the most friendly & conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit...[and] our wish to be neighborly, friendly & useful to them.”¹⁴⁸ Concerning the Sioux, whom the administration was well aware of for their many incidents of river piracy, their conduct did not allow a friendly response.

The major works assessing the expedition’s performance have disagreed on this last point. In confronting the aggressive Teton Sioux, Ambrose interprets the equally-aggressive response of the Americans as a failure to execute Jefferson’s instructions. Believing the men needed to make a good impression on the Indians and to make them into friends of the United States, Ambrose believes this riverbank conflict was the “exact moment Jefferson had had in mind when he told Lewis in his formal orders to exercise caution.” Assessing the overall diplomacy with the Sioux as a negative, Ambrose states that Jefferson had hoped to leave a favorable impression, and argues that by responding with sarcasm, threats, and loaded guns, the expedition “felt no sense of triumph” when departing the Sioux.¹⁴⁹

The sarcasm Ambrose referenced concerned William Clark’s response to the native demand for a tribute, when he threw the tobacco the Sioux requested in the face of one of the Teton chiefs. Clark is also cited as the man who lit the taper for the guns and approached them. Clark, usually the even-headed leader and by far the ablest negotiator of the expedition, was of the mind there was no other option but to call the Indians’ bluff. Bernard DeVoto agrees. His depiction of the American expedition who sent the message to aggressive, demanding, bullies that the “white [men] would fight, not yield” was completely revised by Ambrose. Under close

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Jefferson instructions to Meriwether Lewis, June 20, 1803.

¹⁴⁹ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 170-174. Ambrose pulls no punches in his assessment of the men while among the Sioux.

scrutiny, DeVoto's interpretation appears to hold merit. In fairness to the expedition, the Sioux were impossibly difficult, feigning drunkenness and grabbing the cable tethering the boat to the shore and preventing American departure. DeVoto is correct in pointing out that the "career of the Sioux as river pirates ended here."¹⁵⁰ Is it not the case that the Sioux were ably impressed, if not by the great opportunity for friendship and trade with the whites, by their force of will and arms?

On occasion with Lewis and Clark diplomacy transcended normal conventions and took on Machiavellian practices. In effectively following Jefferson's desired ends, diplomacy sometimes resorted to force and American will was imposed at the point of the gun. Jefferson and his envoys hoped that the removal of any impediments to the coming American trade would be accomplished diplomatically. Failing that, any means of opening the Missouri for travel was approved. The assumption here stems from the prevalent opinion whites held towards Indians in the Jeffersonian Era. Natives were held to a different diplomatic standard than Europeans, one that would allow the blatant use of force to impose diplomatic ends.

The racial overtones of the period held that Indians were not the equal to white men, and, what is more, never would be. European diplomacy was largely based upon shifting and changing balances of power; while England may have in one century dominated France, the situation often switched and power transferred back to the French. Whites moved west assuming that their force overmatched the Indians, and natives would never be able to turn the balance of power back upon the onrushing whites. This assumption of ethnic strength made the instructions

much easier to follow, as inherently permission seemed to have been bestowed upon Lewis and Clark to use force when diplomacy stalled.

This vantage point made following Jefferson's order to advertise the superiority of American goods perhaps the easiest instruction to follow. The men set sail up the Missouri with an abundance of trade goods, pre-packaged and divided into parcels for the "known" tribes, with a large reservoir for additional tribes the expedition contacted. These gifts were specially selected to impress the Indians and represent what the United States could offer them as trade partners. These objects were well received. Through many different methods, the Americans did impress the Indians through Louisiana and in the Columbia of their power.

Whether by force of arms, by implication they would exclude the tribes from the valuable trade route they promised to establish, or a combination of real and assumed spiritual, medicinal and mystical powers, a clear message was sent across the continent. The United States claimed sovereignty, they were the power to be reckoned with, and they would not be denied. As Jefferson envisioned, and the explorers effected, numerous chiefs traveled to Washington, further cementing this message. Escorting them around the capital, Jefferson told the visiting dignitaries "We are now all of one family, born in the same land & bound to live as brothers...No wrong will ever be done you by our nation."¹⁵¹ While Jefferson's words to the Indians stretch the point past breaking, his intentions seem clear and his instructions had been well executed. It could be argued and justified that instances where they had deviated were matters of necessity or survival; however there were definitive shortcomings visible within the implementation of Jefferson's vision.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Jefferson to the Osages, July 16, 1804. Copy found in Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, Vol. 1, 201-203.

Two things regarding Lewis's mission can be concluded. First, Jefferson's instructions were carried out completely and with a high degree of success. Secondly, Meriwether Lewis was not an able diplomat. The men of the Lewis and Clark expedition carried out each presidential instruction with the utmost in good faith, and allowing for intercultural differences which could not have been foreseen, resulted in near-complete success. Where the men failed to incorporate perfect diplomacy they often met with fortune. However, Lewis's personal conduct and choices belie this success. Most instances where Lewis was overly angry or aggressive with Indians were countenanced by his level-headed co-captain, William Clark.¹⁵²

When confronted with native impertinence, an angry Meriwether Lewis reacted violently. One such incident, when dining with the Chopunnish Nation in the eastern Columbia River basin, was touched off when the natives mocked the American practice of eating dog. Clark recounts the event:

Capt L[ewis] was so provoked at the insolence that he caught the puppy and threw it with great violence at him and struck him in the breast and face, seized his tomahawk, and shewed him by sign that if he repeated his insolence that he would tomahawk him.¹⁵³

While in this case provoked, Lewis did not respond in the manner begetting an emissary charged to befriend and win over future trade allies. Clark, in contrast, would be recalled by the Indians as an able diplomat and be labeled "the Red Headed Chief." DeVoto argues in *Course of Empire* that Clark had a genuine understanding of the Indian mind and was loved and admired in return. For years after, when Clark resided in St. Louis as the commissioner of Western Affairs, natives would seek him out to defend their claims. *Course of Empire* argues that while he

¹⁵² Lewis was an able leader, especially in times of crisis. However, he had a quick temper and too often he acted upon it. DeVoto discusses the role of each captain in *Journals*, li-lii. His conclusions are evident to any reader of the log books: Clark is the noted negotiator and had the greater gift of dealing with Indians. Lewis was mercurial, Clark was even-tempered.

¹⁵³ William Clark, log book entry for May 5, 1806.

“notably served the United States, the Indians got more help than they ever got from any of his successors.” The abilities of Clark covered up numerous missteps made by Captain Lewis.¹⁵⁴

Demonstrating the importance of Clark, when Lewis ventured off on his own to explore the northern reaches of the Marias River during the summer of 1806, effective diplomacy was lacking. Lewis’s small four-person contingent was nearly killed when they encountered a group of Piegan Indian, one of the three Blackfeet tribes. The Piegan, a very hostile tribe the men had been warned of by both the Nez Perce and Atsina, attempted to rob the Americans, taking their carelessly unguarded guns and attempting to abscond with their horses. Lewis shouted a warning in English, most likely not understood, before shooting the Indian thief through the belly. In the fighting, another Indian had been stabbed and killed by Private Rueben Fields. Bad enough he had forsaken Jefferson’s order to not spill blood, Lewis inexplicably “left the [American] medal about the neck of the dead man that they might be informed who we were.”¹⁵⁵ This entire encounter, captured for posterity by Lewis in his own words, is a series of colossal mistakes and blunders. In the end, Lewis went out of his way to make enemies of a powerful tribe. In defense of the captain, his burden was remarkably heavy, as Jefferson’s instructions were remarkable in their breadth.

The Lewis and Clark expedition departed with the expectations that it would address myriad issues such as soil, climate, volcanic activity, and animal life in addition to commercial and diplomatic ends. One thing they do not mention is the factory system that Jefferson idealized for the West. Yet repeatedly Lewis discussed the factory system with tribes, using it as

¹⁵⁴ DeVoto, *Courses of Empire*, 437.

¹⁵⁵ Meriwether Lewis, log book entry for July 27, 1806.

a bargaining piece and promising a lucrative coexistence between native and white.¹⁵⁶ Where exactly Lewis was informed of the details and future plans Jefferson had for the West, plans the president did not feel inclined to outline in his written document, is not known. It can easily be deduced that as close as Lewis and Jefferson were, and with as much time as they spent living together planning this expedition, Lewis was well aware of Jefferson's thoughts on the matter. As a representative of the American government he extended a cursory preview of this thinking to the tribes he encountered.

While wintering at Ft. Mandan in 1805, Lewis compiled an "*Estimate of the Eastern Indians*."¹⁵⁷ The voluminous report, sent to secretary of war Henry Dearborn, contained a large table, which gave a characterization of each tribe and potential courses of action in future American relations. Jefferson used this information in his annual report to Congress, delivered February 19, 1806. Titled "A Statistical View of the Indian Nations Inhabiting the Territory of Louisiana," the report reflects ideas espoused by George Washington and Henry Knox a decade earlier, suggesting locations Lewis had listed as desirable for the establishment of trading houses.¹⁵⁸ This is no mere coincidence. The captains were both thinking of this government factory plan the entire trip, scouting out suitable locations and tribes with which to implement the plan. Jefferson delivered this information to Congress, stressing the same desire as both his

¹⁵⁶ One particularly good example of this detailed description of future "tradeing houses for their relief" was given to the Nez Perce by Lewis on May 11, 1806. The Nez Perce, with whom the tribe established great relations, were highly pleased.

¹⁵⁷ Lewis to Jefferson, April 7, 1805. Copy found in Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, vol. 2, 231-236. The original to Dearborn (not found) is referenced herein. Jefferson credits it in his Congressional report.

¹⁵⁸ Jefferson Report to Congress, February 19, 1806; electronic version available at: <http://www.jeffersonianparty.com/doc/6.htm>, accessed January 11, 2010.

emissaries Lewis and Clark, and his predecessors Washington and Knox. To assume that Lewis was not following instructions conspicuously absent from Jefferson's list seems implausible.¹⁵⁹

The journey had been completed. While Lewis was not to prove preeminent in his diplomacy, the instructions were nevertheless followed with a high degree of success. With the groundwork laid and a repository of new information gathered, the American government now had a decision to make. How to best govern the frontier and conduct commerce in the West would be a critical decision in the future of the country. Jefferson had ideas, but his vision was not to be followed. What followed in the wake of Lewis and Clark was a massive land grab. In this crescendo of American manifest destiny, how would the government would implement an effective, coherent strategy?

¹⁵⁹ DeVoto gives good hearing to this factory system and the coordination of the mission in conjunction with preconceived plans in *Course of Empire*, page 458.

CHAPTER 3

“Truth telling is not compatible with the defense of the realm”

George Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House*

Regarding westward expansion, the American government was confronted with a moment of decision in the first decade of the nineteenth century. How to best govern the frontier and conduct commerce in the West would be a critical turning point for the young American nation. The early-American government had implemented policies and hoped to control the organized settlement of the West. However, the decision to allocate a pitifully small amount of resources ensured this vision was not to be followed. In the wake of Lewis and Clark a massive, chaotic land grab ensued. In this crescendo of American Manifest Destiny, the government failed to implement an effective, coherent strategy.

Meriwether Lewis arrived in Washington in late December, 1806. By this time the explorer, via post, had already given Jefferson some advance notice of at least the broadest details of his mission.¹⁶⁰ Jefferson recorded nothing of their meeting on that day. All that can be said with certainty is that President Jefferson absorbed the new material provided to him into his pre-existing body of knowledge as he faced a pivotal moment for the growth of the American nation. The information Lewis furnished, while groundbreaking, was only one piece of the puzzle.

¹⁶⁰ Lewis wrote the president from St. Louis after his arrival on September 23, 1806, giving a cursory summary of his health and findings. Letter available in Jackson, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 182.

Jefferson was faced with three options. First, he could follow the precedent of Washington and Knox, continuing the establishment and extension of government-run factories. In this way, the president could control trade and establish friendships with the natives. Through these auspices, settlement would follow peacefully. Second, the president could mimic the existing British system. He needed only to look north to find their profitable system to copy. Granting governmental advantages to an American company which the British companies did not possess, such as the ability to sell to foreign markets directly, would combine with natural geographic advantages and allow a government-backed private company to outperform foreign competition. And third, Jefferson could elect to do nothing and let private traders push the frontier forward.

The first option, the factory system, followed a clear course of action. The Washington administration desired western settlement to be ushered in by a combination of land treaties and trade control. The method Secretary Knox proposed to use was a government-controlled factory system, and this was instituted in the 1790's.¹⁶¹ Meriwether Lewis returned from the West with similar notions. Writing to President Jefferson on September 23, 1806, Lewis recommended the government establish two posts, one at mouth of the Columbia River and one at the Nez Perce camp on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains. This letter, written the day Lewis arrived back in St. Louis, went on to state

If the government would only aid, even in a very limited manner, the enterprise of her Citizens, I am fully convinced that we shall shortly derive the benefits of a most lucrative trade from this source, and that in the course of ten or twelve years a tour across the

¹⁶¹ For specifics on George Washington, Henry Knox and the ever-changing Indian policy of the early republic, see chapter 1 of this work.

continent by the rout[e] mentioned will be undertaken by individuals with as little concern as a voyage across the Atlantic is at present.¹⁶²

Jefferson was therefore aware of the position both his predecessors and charges espoused, but as Steven Ambrose points out, the expense of an operation so logistically massive may not have been feasible. Ambrose argues the factory system, as envisioned by Lewis, would take action at considerable expense to the public. Additionally, it would “take an expanded army, acting aggressively against hostile Indians on the Missouri.” Ambrose indicates how these tactics went against the overall philosophy of Jeffersonian government, and by inference, illustrates they were untenable.¹⁶³

Ambrose’s analysis overlooks an obvious counter-argument. This exact same argument can be made regarding Jefferson’s illegal purchase of the Louisiana Territory, and in fact, was the tactic employed by Federalists who attempted to undermine the treaty. Jefferson was willing to abandon his strict interpretation of the Constitution and accrue a large federal debt in order to acquire the agrarian land he desired and promote western expansion. The question in 1806 was would the president be willing to adopt these measures consistently? And, would the Louisiana Purchase represent a singular deviation from his principles in order to acquire land, or would his future policy operate in a similar fashion, imposing American order and control upon the West? Meriwether Lewis, appointed the Governor of the Louisiana Territory in 1807, would continue to play an important role, funneling both information and recommendations to the policy makers in Washington.

¹⁶² Meriwether Lewis to Thomas Jefferson, September 23, 1806, Meriwether Lewis Papers, Missouri State Historical Society.

¹⁶³ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 407.

Lewis collected information on the West from his post in St. Louis, formulating more specific recommendations of what the American role in the West should be. Observations collected between August 1807 and August 1808 were combined into a policy paper and dispatched to Secretary of War, Henry Dearborn. Lewis's recommendations centered on "Americanizing" the Indians, while simultaneously, improving the American fur trade. The paper pointed out the British fur trade was still operating in American territory, and recommended the government apply force and remove trespassers. Lewis weighed in on the side of the merchants as opposed to potential western settlers, recommending the government abolish private trading licenses. Instead, the government should take steps to control Louisiana and implement "fair competition among all our merchants." His recommended method of equity and control was a massive expansion of the small government factory system implemented by Washington and Knox in 1795.¹⁶⁴

In 1806 the government had established a total of eleven trading posts located predominantly throughout the South. These posts in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and Arkansas were distant from the profitable fur trade. In *Undaunted Courage* Steven Ambrose evaluates Lewis's policy recommendations to bring an enlarged system to the West. Ambrose believes that by virtue of his well-established position the governor of Louisiana was a credible source. Lewis had seen more of the tribes west of the Mississippi than any other American.¹⁶⁵ Given his extensive dealings with native affairs, both as a private citizen and government official, it is hard to imagine a more qualified expert. Evaluating his policy shows that his desire

¹⁶⁴ Meriwether Lewis, "Observations and reflections on the present and future state of Upper Louisiana, in relation to the government of the Indian nations inhabiting that country, and the trade and intercourse with the same," 1807-1808, printed in full in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, (New York: Arno Press reprint, 1969), 369-388.

¹⁶⁵ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 443.

to establish government-controlled and defended fortifications at strategic locations on the Missouri River stemmed from his hopes of creating an open market in the West. More importantly in terms of American policy, Lewis argued that free trade would only emerge when whites were controlled, stating the “first principle of governing the Indians is to govern the whites.”¹⁶⁶

Meriwether Lewis’s letter proposed the United States drive the British out of Louisiana, use the army to build and protect forts, and establish an open market based on fixed prices. The system devised by Lewis supported and protected the St. Louis traders by giving them control in a similar fashion to the British empowerment of the Northwest Company. Dearborn and Jefferson would have realized instantly that this proposal, if implemented, would require expenses far in excess of any previously contemplated policy. Lewis’s policy paper represented an expansionist policy for the West, but there was not complete agreement among all government officials concerning the factory system. Others within the government remained skeptical and desired to maintain only a small cadre of factories. While minimized, due in part to an overwhelming congressional majority in both houses for Jefferson’s Democrat-Republican party, there is evidence of internal dissension and debate over the factory system’s projected role.

In the election of 1800, the Democrat-Republican party, earlier founded by Jefferson and James Madison, gained control of the executive position and both houses of Congress. It remained the dominant political party in America until 1824. According to Kenneth Martis’s

¹⁶⁶ Lewis, “Observations and reflections,” in Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 388.

statistical breakdown of Congressional party affiliation, the Democrat-Republican percentage was as follows:¹⁶⁷

Table 1: Distribution of Seats During the Jeffersonian Era

Election Year	1798	1800	1802	1804	1806
House	43%	63%	73%	82%	83%
Senate	31%	53%	74%	71%	82%

Federalist dissension or debate must have been minimized by this overwhelming numerical advantage; the majority exceeded eighty percent of both houses by 1806. Nevertheless, in making every effort to uncover debate regarding the factory system, objections and questions have been uncovered. While they remain sporadic and sparse, owing perhaps to the unilateral control President Jefferson’s party held over Congress, they offer another potential influence on legislation.

In his work *A History of the United States Factory System, 1795-1822*, Ora Brooks Peake discusses the skepticism within the American government, despite the overwhelming political majority. Peake writes that the “[trading houses] were the subject of frequent investigation by committees from the Senate or the House of Representatives.”¹⁶⁸ Peake is correct in as much as there were several committees and investigations into the factory system, their method of operation, and suggested future policy. However, the official reports within the congressional record indicate that the factory system received support and approval from these committees. A

¹⁶⁷ Kenneth C. Martis, *The Historical Atlas of Political Parties in the United States Congress, 1789-1989*, (New York: Random House, 1989), 182.

¹⁶⁸ Ora Brooks Peake, *A History of the United States Factory System, 1795-1822*, (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2007), 186.

report dated February 5, 1801, entered into the record by Tennessee Congressman William C.C. Claiborne, favored the continuation of trading houses and an expansion of trade.¹⁶⁹ Claiborne's report is representative of the findings by numerous committees which were established between 1800 and 1806. Together, these reports indicate congressional approval for the factory system was attainable provided the method of implementation was not too expensive or disruptive.

Deeper investigations into the congressional record reveal more discord regarding the factory system, trade, and expansion in general. Not surprisingly the source of dissent was often the remaining Federalist politicians. In a vitriolic speech given in the House of Representatives on October 17, 1803, Federalist Thomas Griffin of Virginia argued that expansion into the West posed insurmountable hardships, postulating that "this Eden of the New World would prove a cemetery for the bodies of our citizens."¹⁷⁰ Griffin was not alone in his opposition; Federalist Congressman Gaylord Griswold of Connecticut agreed that expansion into the West would harm long-term American interests. Griswold countered the majority of his government peers, arguing against growth and the potential imbalance it would lead to:

The vast and unmanageable extent which the acquisition of Louisiana will give the United States, the consequent dispersion of our population and the destruction of that balance which it is so important to maintain between the Eastern and Western states threatens at no very distant day the subversion of our union.¹⁷¹

Proving the influence that those who were opposed to expansion, trade and government factories had upon the formation of American governmental policy is difficult, as no concrete statements exist within the writings of Jefferson or within the Congressional record. It is

¹⁶⁹ William C.C. Claiborne Papers, 1800-1807, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, (Washington, D.C.).

¹⁷⁰ *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, Eighth Congress, Second Session, 1803 (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1852), 443.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

noteworthy, however, that a counter-argument and pervasive anti-expansion and anti-factory cadre existed within the American government. In his 1979 work *The Fur Trade and the American West*, David Wishart argues that these Federalist arguments had a large influence on Jefferson's policy towards Louisiana. Wishart points to Jefferson's 1803 message to Congress as a measure of compromise. In this message, the executive posited that all natives could be transported across the Mississippi River into Louisiana and a patrol established to "prevent emigrants from crossing the river until we shall have filled up all the vacant country on this side."¹⁷²

Wishart's point is Jefferson held a compromised stance affected to appease dissent until he was ready to undertake concrete steps to expand into the West. If Jefferson sincerely meant what he wrote to Congress in early 1803, he had changed his mind by the second half of the year. Sending the Lewis and Clark expedition into the West with definitive instructions to interrupt the existing British trade with the natives indicates Jefferson was not willing to remain east of the Mississippi River and allow foreign trade to flourish. In fact, his instructions to Lewis written on July 20, 1803, show the president hoped to encourage fur traders to move into Louisiana in the immediate future. These fur traders, following the opening Lewis would create, would coexist with the natives within the current Indian system in the West. In this manner, explorations into the West would "pave the way to eventual American political domination."¹⁷³

The absence of serious opposition within the government implies unanimity. The Democrat-Republicans had control of the presidency and both houses and were free to execute

¹⁷² David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West 1807-1840*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 17-18; Thomas Jefferson, *Annals of the Congress of the United States*, Eighth Congress, Second Session, 1803 (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1852), 1064.

¹⁷³ Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis 20 July, 1803, as quoted in DeVoto, *Journals*, 481-487; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 18.

policy. According to Francis Paul Prucha, Jefferson's western policy was most strongly influenced by his predecessors Washington and Knox. The panacea for all Indian troubles remained the elimination of private traders and their "pernicious influences."¹⁷⁴ It would not appear as if the president had other options; his 1803 message to Congress indicated he refused to let the British control the West and the fur trade. He had precedence and support within the government. Moreover, the Lewis and Clark expedition had acted as a catalyst for western expansion. The popularity and celebrity of the mission was a topic of great interest in 1803. Well before their return to St. Louis in September 1806, traders moved up the Missouri River. The government would have to stay ahead of, or at least up with, these men.

Jefferson's decision to settle the West speaks to his political tenets. The whole of these positions and policies, dubbed "Jeffersonianism" by historians, was given effective definition in Drew McCoy's *The Elusive Republic*:

A specific configuration of assumptions, fears, beliefs, and values that shaped a vision of expansion across space-the American continent-as a necessary alternative to the development through time that was generally thought to bring with it both political corruption and social decay.¹⁷⁵

McCoy's definition places an absolute need for expansion within Jefferson's belief structure. Through expansion Americans would be protected from societal corruption and decay. In this light his politics appear to be much more radical in nature than previously realized. Rather than the traditional interpretation of Jefferson as a liberal theorist, the strict definition of "Jeffersonianism" and his belief in continual expansion place him as a sponsor of natural rights for people and property which exist outside of the government.

¹⁷⁴ Prucha, *Indian Policy of the United States*, 84.

¹⁷⁵ Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 10.

Richard Matthews explains this point of view in his 1984 work *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson*. Matthews opines that if Jefferson's political philosophy is seen in this light, settling the West through government sponsorship and managed trade would create American market society and legitimize a democratic American future. Presenting a radical critique of the American market society which shows Thomas Jefferson's actions hold a meaning very different from the norm, Matthews argues that Jefferson's course of action on the topic of western expansion was a consciously made, legitimately democratic decision. *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson* researches Jefferson's opinion of and actions towards American Indians, concluding that the philosophical Jefferson is "beyond liberal-democratic tradition[s] of the nineteenth century." Instead, Jeffersonian ideology is labeled "communitarian anarchism."¹⁷⁶

Pointing to the president's deep admiration for the tribal community, Matthews is convinced Jefferson felt that "man was a social, harmonious, cooperative and just creature who, under the appropriate socio-economic conditions, could happily live in a community that did not need the presence of the Leviathan." This interesting hypothesis leads to two potential conclusions. First, these positions place Jefferson on the radical fringe of democratic theory. And second, if Jefferson felt the Indian communities could thrive and prosper without supervision once whites provided the proper tools, it would explain why Jefferson inexplicably opted not to build factories and control the trade.¹⁷⁷

Despite this perspective, Jefferson inexplicably decided to forego deep government involvement in the western trade. Recommendations from his predecessors and the men who

¹⁷⁶ Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 15, 16.

¹⁷⁷ Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson*, 17.

explored the West argued otherwise. Congressional approval existed. And, equally as importantly, Jefferson had shown the ability to compromise his constitutional stance and beliefs of a proper governmental role to purchase Louisiana. When faced with the choice to breach his strict constitutional stance once more by extending governmental power to the western frontier, Jefferson decided not to act. This decision led to more violence and friction between the natives and whites. He could repeat this decision in 1806.

Private traders had been operating with government approval since the Washington administration. All private traders were required to apply for and obtain trading licenses from either congress or territorial administrators. This process was never adjusted after the acquisition of Louisiana or the expansion of the factory system under Jefferson. There are no guarantees that government factory posts would have eliminated or even significantly reduced the turmoil which unfolded on the western frontier. However, had regulation, law, and troops on the ground been available and used in the West, it may have made a drastic difference in native-white relations. Government implementation of factory posts moved slowly.

In 1796, four years before Jefferson took office the first two forts were established and given a combined budget of \$150,000. Over the next fourteen years the budget doubled, expanding to \$300,000 for trade goods and operation. Unfortunately there were now eleven factories to support. Two things stand out when analyzing these figures. First, an average annual budget of \$27,272 per factory, while a large sum in 1806, represents a pittance compared to the potential profits in the western fur trade. Second, eleven factories stretching over a

frontier from present day Canada to the Gulf of Mexico is far fewer than would be required to be functional.¹⁷⁸

In light of this analysis, it is not surprising that the government factory system did not greatly impact the West. Jefferson does not seem to have anticipated this outcome, sincerely believing a limited system would work. In a February 27, 1803, letter to William Henry Harrison, the governor of the Indiana Territory, Jefferson described how he anticipated the government posts would force out private traders. Discussing the trading houses, Jefferson wrote:

We mean to sell so low as merely to repay us cost and charges...this is what private traders cannot do, for they must gain; they will consequently withdraw from the competition, and we shall get clear of this pest without giving offense to the Indians.¹⁷⁹

This letter shows that Jefferson felt private trade was undesirable to the government and Indians alike. However, he miscalculated the level of commitment and support the government would have to provide in order for this plan to work. This was not the only flaw in Jefferson's calculations.

If the government wanted to retain low prices in order to build a trade empire and avoid a more cut-throat open market, it made the error of relying on sanctions to control the system. Ora Brooks Peake gives credit to the factory system, writing that "no effort was made by the United States government to make money out of the Indian factory system. The whole purpose of the factories was to help the Indians to secure goods at their actual cost and thus render a service to

¹⁷⁸ List of factories in operation in 1810 as given by General John Mason, Superintendent of Indian Trade, with the date of establishment, as quoted in Katherine Coman, "Government Factories: An Attempt to Control Competition in the Fur Trade," *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Papers and Discussions of the Twenty-third Annual Meeting (April, 1911), 368-388.

¹⁷⁹ Jefferson to William Henry Harrison, February 27, 1803 as quoted in Jerry Holmes, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: A Chronology of his Thoughts*, (New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2002), 186.

the red man.” This policy was hoped to have tangible results, such as appreciation, returned in the form of friendship, and avoidance of war, which benefited tax payers. There was a caveat attached to the policy, however. Peake points out that:

If the Indians were not friendly to the United States, then goods were withheld until amicable relations could be re-established. In other words, the American Indians were to be controlled through the use of sanctions.¹⁸⁰

These actions indicate that the factory system was established to incur gratitude. Sanctions were a high-pressure sell, at best a coercive measure of introducing American goods on American terms.

Had the government been the sole player, direct involvement may have accomplished the goal of building a bond of friendship and amicable trade between natives and whites, despite sanctions. Jefferson miscalculated in assuming that lower government prices would run private traders out of business. As a result, the government failed to fully take over the Indian trade in the same way it had taken over the mail, the coinage of money, and taxes. Jerry Holmes points to this fact in his 2002 work *Thomas Jefferson: A Chronology of his Thoughts*. Holmes argues this adherence to private enterprise as a supreme right handicapped the existing government posts. The well-intentioned fixing of prices, allowing the factories to be undersold by traders, as well as the banning on liquor sales ensured that the government factories would not be able to compete with private traders.¹⁸¹

Perhaps the greatest reason no one questioned the retention of licensed private traders was the firm belief in free enterprise. In *Land Grab*, John Upton Terrell blames the strong anti-

¹⁸⁰ Peake, *A History of the United States Factory System, 1795-1822*, 3.

¹⁸¹ Holmes, *Thomas Jefferson*, 198.

monopoly sentiment which was prevalent in early eighteenth century America. Citing congressional refusal to monopolize the fur industry, it is Terrell's contention that:

Congress put the government in the fur trading business then degraded it to the level of a competing trader, forced it to fight totally irresponsible and lawless rivals...Congress itself provided the legislative afflictions that made the system's early demise inevitable. It is improbable that any more stupid provisions and rules ever burdened a Government program.¹⁸²

Terrell concluded his argument by saying that "under such a situation, the factory system was doomed from its inception." Certainly, the prevailing legislative opinion was never to countenance any curtailment or infringement of individual rights or private enterprise. Nevertheless, Jefferson alone faced the decision of whether or not to establish a system that was both large enough in scope and exclusive to the federal government. Having the established precedent of Washington and Knox, as well as political control of congress, he declined to do so.

Many reasons could be assumed as to why Jefferson failed to block private trade, thereby undermining the governmental effort. Jefferson was a frugal administrator fixated on a balanced budget and reduction of expenditures. He also preferred to use commerce to achieve diplomatic leverage rather than generate revenue. As a result of this predilection towards thriftiness, and the limited governmental involvement, a void existed within the lucrative and expansive fur business. Within this void private traders began to shape a frontier very different from the ideals of Washington, Knox, and Jefferson. Harnessing this force into a government-backed agency similar in form to the model enacted by the British in Canada was Jefferson's second option.

In the country north of Lake Superior, the Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies were engaged in a struggle to control the northern fur trade. These two British companies held a southern line of operations which fell inside the American border. Traders from these foreign

¹⁸² Terrell, *Land Grab*, 123-125.

companies were engaged in trade along the upper Mississippi River and along the Missouri River, venturing as far west and south as the Mandan Villages in present day North Dakota. The men employed by these companies posed a threat to the desired American trade. Hiram Martin Chittenden writes in *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*:

All trade was upon a fixed, though just, basis and the Indians knew exactly what to expect. The traders were men of experience with the natives, and were well acquainted with the Indian character. Inter-marriage with native women was common, from the chief officers down to the ranks, and thus bonds of mutual interest were created. Although this company did not always escape difficulties with the Indians, it was generally on terms of peace with them.¹⁸³

Through these progressive practices the two British companies held a virtual monopoly on the fur trade. The Northwest and Hudson's Bay companies, however, as an article of faith declined to settle or take land. British companies were noted for their cultural accommodation and their adoption of Indian customs, allowing strong trade alliances to form. While American companies did not embrace these same tenets, they still drew Jefferson's interest.¹⁸⁴

At this time, John Jacob Astor, a self-made merchant of considerable wealth, was slowly tightening his control on the American fur trade. His ideas and proposals were changing the landscape of American fur trapping and merchandising. Additionally, after Lewis and Clark returned, other isolated expeditions were ordered west and traveled as far as the Rocky Mountains. While Lewis and Clark's mission was broader in scope than these subsequent forays into the West, other missions, such as the 1806 venture into the Southwest by Captain Zebulon Pike which operated within the southern bounds of the Louisiana Territory, added important geographic knowledge. During Jefferson's presidency, vast new amounts of information

¹⁸³ Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1935), 94, 97-98; Chittenden's work serves as an anthology of the western fur trade. Specific information on every major player in the fur trade can be found within his work.

¹⁸⁴ George Woodcock, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1979), 94.

regarding the West--what the United States had bought and what she now had at her disposal--reshaped the picture of the American nation. New perspectives emerged and were forced to reconcile with the precedents established under Washington and Knox.¹⁸⁵

Through the stories of Astor and Manuel Lisa, the first two large-scale American fur traders, a picture of the fur trade emerges which reveals instances where the government could have positioned itself in a very advantageous way. Lisa, a long-standing St. Louis businessman who had conversed with Lewis and Clark before their departure up the Mississippi, founded the First Missouri Fur Company in 1807. Envisioning a Rocky Mountain trading empire on the upper Missouri, Lisa organized an expedition which founded Fort Raymond at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Bighorn Rivers. His goal was to first monopolize the trade among lower tribes of the Missouri at Fort Raymond, then send an expedition large enough to defend themselves to trap furs on the headwaters of the Missouri River.¹⁸⁶

Lisa's Missouri Fur Company failed miserably. The traders had difficulty managing the relationships with several tribes. By trading with the Crow Indians, they alienated the Blackfoot tribe who occupied the wealthiest fur regions. Facing constant harassment from the Blackfoot, the Missouri Company traders accumulated only thirty packs of beaver before abandoning Ft. Raymond in 1810.¹⁸⁷ Twenty men had been killed. Fur trader Pierre Menard provided details of this retreat in an April 1810 letter to Pierre Chouteau.

[A] party of our hunters was defeated by the Blackfeet on the 12th. There were two men killed, all their beaver stolen, many of their traps lost, and the ammunition of several of them, and also seven of our horses...This unfortunate affair has quite discouraged our

¹⁸⁵ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, 126-135; for information on Zebulon Pike's mission into the Southwest, see Robin Santos Doak, *Zebulon Pike: Explorer and Soldier*, (Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2005).

¹⁸⁶ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, 126-135.

¹⁸⁷ A "pack" equals between 70-100 beaver pelts.

hunters, who are unwilling to hunt any more here...Unless we can have peace with these [Indians] or unless they can be destroyed, it is idle to think of maintaining an establishment at this point.¹⁸⁸

The failure of the First Missouri Fur Company exposes two shortcomings that, presumably, a government system could have avoided. First, the traders involved themselves in tribal politics. Second, these men were not soldiers; they could not rebuff Indian attacks with the same effectiveness. Lisa's gambit ended with the type of results that Washington, Knox, and other proponents of a government co-opted factory system warned against. Private trade had failed, frontier tensions had been escalated, and many men were killed. The First Missouri Fur Company folded in 1810.

Undaunted, Lisa formed a Second Missouri Fur Company in 1812. David Wishart investigated this effort in *The Fur Trade of the American West*. Evidence suggests that more than any other factor, private trading ventures succumbed to poor timing. The War of 1812 sealed off shipping from New Orleans to the east coast markets. Additionally, the price of beaver was declining. With no port available and a glut of furs, pelts were being sold for the average price of \$2.50 at St. Louis markets, compared to pre-war price of \$4.00.¹⁸⁹ War time alliances with the British turned the tribes of the upper Missouri against the United States. Lisa's traders were forced to trade in a restricted area around St. Louis. Once again, shortcomings in the private trading system surfaced. Only a high level of government banking and investment to subsidize the fur trade could have survived the price fluctuations of 1812. Faced with military opposition, traders once again retreated from the frontier.

¹⁸⁸ Pierre Menard letter to Pierre Chouteau, April 21, 1810, as quoted in Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, 882.

¹⁸⁹ Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West*, 46.

Manuel Lisa was not the only private trader who attempted to organize a large, profitable company in the West. John Jacob Astor, a wealthy businessman who was connected to politicians such as Jefferson, James Madison, Albert Gallatin, and James Monroe had a large influence on the American fur trade. In the 1790s Astor made fur trade profits dealing with the North West Company of Montreal. Astor became motivated to copy the highly profitable model of the British North West Company after reading Lewis's 1807 policy letter to Jefferson. Believing this report clearly indicated the West was commercially viable, in 1808 Astor proposed a plan to Jefferson and New York City Mayor DeWitt Clinton. The plan called for the enactment of a private company capable of building a post at the Columbia River and transporting furs to Canton. It would compete with British Canada along the entire northern boundary.¹⁹⁰

Jefferson liked what Astor proposed, and wrote to Meriwether Lewis that "[Astor] was a most excellent man," and he had promised him "every reasonable patronage and facility in the power of the executive." Jefferson thought that Astor may be able to secure for United States the possession of the Indian commerce, and opted to use trade as a diplomatic weapon against the British. Astor traveled to Washington in September of 1808, met with Secretary of Treasury Albert Gallatin and Jefferson, and left convinced he had sufficient, though non-official, federal government backing. Jefferson wrote to Astor a short time later, encouraging his proposition again, stating he could expect "every facility and protection which the government can properly

¹⁹⁰ John Denis Haeger, *John Jacob Astor: Business and Finance in the Early Republic*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 98; David Lavender, "Some American Characteristics of the AMC," *Minnesota History*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Winter 1966), 179. Astor has been largely ignored by early republic economic historians and fur trade histories. The most thorough discussion of Astor may be Haegers' work.

afford.” The government, unwilling to build the infrastructure themselves, had appeared to offer backing to a private business willing to accomplish the task for them.¹⁹¹

Governor Clinton gave Astor his charter for the American Fur Company in 1808. The government had officially endorsed and handed over the reigns to industry. Astor hoped the American Fur Company would imitate and out-produce the British system by capitalizing on more moderate weather and a shorter portage. However, government help was unlikely in Oregon, the proposed site of Astor’s Pacific trading fort, as the United States had no sovereignty in this territory. The belief was that Oregon would become American through a one-man capitalist enterprise alone was naïve. Astor may have felt he was being given tacit support, but the government definition of “properly afford” was ambiguous.¹⁹²

Fort Astoria was established on the mouth of the Columbia River in March, 1811. The United States first Pacific settlement lasted less than two years. According to both Marshall Smelser and George Woodcock, the ignorance of how to deal with the local Indians led directly to the American Fur Company’s failure. In *The Democratic Republic*, Smelser decried the vanity and brutality of Astor’s subordinates, while Woodcock recounted in *The Hudson’s Bay Company* a specific event highlighting the trouble. When violence erupted between traders and natives at Nootka Sound, off the coast of present day Vancouver Island, this brutality and vanity was on display.¹⁹³ The men, according to Woodcock, had no idea how to trade or negotiate with the natives. Fighting broke out between the parties when American Fur Company traders

¹⁹¹ Jefferson to Lewis, August, 1808, as quoted in DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, 538; Haeger, *John Jacob Astor*, 99, 106-112.

¹⁹² The North West Company was required to first send all furs back to an English port before export to another country. They were unable to ship furs directly across the Pacific to the Orient.

¹⁹³ Marshall Smelser, *The Democratic Republic*, (Chicago: Waveland Press, 1992), 131; Woodcock, *The Hudson’s Bay Company*, 128.

attempted to coerce the Indians. Amidst the chaos, the ship's powder magazine exploded. Casualties were high; the entire white crew and over one hundred Indians were killed. The ship and all the American Fur Company's trade goods were lost. Bernard DeVoto summarized the failure of Fort Astoria with the adjective "premature." DeVoto explains that the War of 1812, internal strife, and poor trading practices all ruined the American Fur Company and left Astoria, re-named Fort George, in British hands.¹⁹⁴

Fort Astoria fell in part to bad timing, having been established mere months before the War of 1812 began. However, whether it was war or peace, all causes of failure could have been alleviated or avoided had the American government, which by this time had transitioned from Jefferson to James Madison, provided proper support. Having made the decision to allow private companies to implement a strategy that could have accomplished a more orderly settlement of the west and more firmly established a bond of friendship between whites and Indians, it should have been firmly backed, decisively established and resolutely controlled. A failure to do so led to the failure of the American Fur Company.

In his *American Fur Trade of the Far West*, Hiram Chittenden notes that the United States government "believed the Pacific coast was better off in the sole possession of one power as opposed to being parceled out among several." The United States wanted to be that sole power, but the government "lent [Astor] no more than tacit encouragement. It is ever to be lamented that [the government] did not see his way to adopt as bold a course in regard to Mr. Astor's enterprise as [they] did the purchase of Louisiana. Had [they] done so the political map of North America would be much different today." Private companies were unable to fend off

¹⁹⁴ Woodcock, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, 138; DeVoto, *Course of Empire*, 539.

foreign threats, and as a result, the United States lost a potential source of great revenue and a piece of territory to the British by rejecting factories and government support.¹⁹⁵ The United States government, Thomas Jefferson, and his successor James Madison in particular, followed the third option by default; they elected to allow private trade to penetrate the West and push back the frontier.

¹⁹⁵ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade of the Far West*, 167.

CONCLUSION

In *American Indian Policy in Crisis*, Francis Paul Prucha explores the American side of western expansion, concluding that the United States government was comprised of white men who, in the majority, desired positive relations with the Indians. Prucha's rationale for concentrating on the white half on the native-white relationship stems from the belief that the Indian portion does not inherently allow for investigations in more than a very general way. Each tribe was unique and different in their reaction to white legislation and settlement.¹⁹⁶ It is possible to write of the Americans as more of a single entity, for the government officials were often closely united both in outlook and in goals. Accepting this position forces a confrontation with an irreconcilable outcome. One must then question how these men of power and positive intentions succeeded only in harming natives by taking their land and destroying their culture.

The importance of the policies implemented under George Washington and Henry Knox cannot be over stressed. Upon assuming office in 1800, Jefferson inherited and directly built on the policies of his predecessors. As such, Jeffersonian Indian policy may be seen as a culmination of two decades of governmental policy. Although there were specific differences, early American policy under both Washington and Jefferson had positive intentions regarding Indian welfare.

Washington espoused a government-based factory system, enacting the factory system into law in 1789 and establishing the first three posts. Under Jefferson, the number of factories expanded to a total of eighteen posts. However, Jefferson espoused different ideals with

¹⁹⁶ Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis*, iv.

reference to the West. The Washington administration attempted to control the land through laws and policies such as the 1787 Northwest Ordinance. This ordinance created a flexible mechanism for western settlement and attempted to hold settlers in check until land claims could be resolved. Jefferson's vision of American identity, rooted in Republicanism, and land itself was directly tied to his American idyll. As such, Jefferson did all he could to extinguish existing land claims and assimilate the Indians. This assimilation would be beneficial to both sides; the whites acquire peaceable settlement and the Indians acquire civilized culture.

The initial envoys of Jefferson's message of trade and assimilation were Lewis and Clark. The enterprising young captains delivered to the western tribes the presidential message of sovereignty as well as a bevy of American goods. Many historians, such as James Ronda and Steven Ambrose, have debated how effective the captains were as diplomats by questioning how accurately the Lewis and Clark followed Jefferson's instructions. The men were charged with contacting the major western tribes, informing them of their new "Great Father" in Washington who they must now obey, and impress them with both American goods and strength. Despite hardships and deprivations, despite poor logistics, great distance, and constant crises, they carried out their instructions with a high level of precision. The Lewis and Clark expedition stands as a valid case study by which to judge Jeffersonian native policy in execution.¹⁹⁷

The primary reason Steven Ambrose believes the captains failed as diplomats is their inability to befriend the two most powerful tribes in Upper Louisiana, the Sioux and Blackfoot. It is important to note that Lewis and Clark were asked, first and foremost, to establish the

¹⁹⁷ Ronda's *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* (especially chapter 5) and Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage* both conclude the men were unsuccessful as diplomats. *Undaunted Courage* provides Ambrose's explanation of what the expedition did not accomplish page 405.

sovereignty of the president over these tribes, impress them of the great strength possessed by the Americans in order to discourage resistance, and offer them trade goods to win them over. Lewis and Clark in their encounter with the Sioux and Blackfoot tribes, delivered the president's message to them via interpreter, and stated the new role of the United States government. And, especially in the case of the Sioux, with whom they had exchanged tense moments of river brinksmanship, they displayed the martial strength of their country. Unfortunately, ably accomplishing the instructions they were charged with precluded immediate friendship. As diplomats, they executed their mission and returned to Washington with a bounty of knowledge.¹⁹⁸

Lewis and Clark, through their adherence to Jefferson's instructions, the establishment of good relations with many western tribes, the opening of the Missouri River to American trade, and the trade recommendations they formed from firsthand knowledge obtained during their journey to the Pacific and home again, practiced a novel form of diplomacy. Richard White used the term "middle ground" in his study of the Great Lakes region. White's "middle ground" is a locale where natives and Europeans met, regarding each other as alien, and constructed a common world. The cultural interaction between natives and whites described in *The Middle Ground* can be viewed as native-white diplomacy.

This world in between empires and villages existed in more than one location, and on a small scale, existed between the Corps of Discovery and the tribes they encountered. A shift in the balance of power occurred when Americans entered the West en masse. Applying Richard

¹⁹⁸ Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, 405; A copy of Jefferson's instructions to Lewis can be found in DeVoto, *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 481-487; for a complete description of the encounter with the Sioux, see DeVoto, *Journals*, 35-44 (entries for September 25-28, 1803). For Lewis's encounter with the Blackfoot tribe, see DeVoto, *Journals*, 433-441 (entries for July 26-28, 1806).

White's paradigm to the Northwest reveals that the whites were quickly able to tip the scales in their favor and force diplomacy off any potential middle ground in the West. In the Great Lakes region, it had taken Europeans centuries to control the land. Indians in the early nineteenth century would not have similar bargaining power in Louisiana, and found no method to force the Americans onto a "middle ground." The American government would dictate how the settlement of the West would be accomplished; the natives would have little impact upon the white migration west, and little determination regarding their own fate.¹⁹⁹

Jefferson faced important decisions in 1806. Recommendations from his predecessors urged him to involve the government directly in the operation of an expensive and large scale system of trading posts. A second option was the emulation of the North West and the Hudson's Bay companies, both subsidized private trade companies under jurisdiction of the British government. Prodded by the proposals of John Jacob Astor, the newly created American Fur Company presented itself as a potential vehicle to bring orderly trade to the West. In the absence of any substantial political resistance during his second term in office, and his Democrat-Republican party controlling both the senate and congress, it is hard to imagine a scenario where Jefferson could not have put his desired legislation into reality.

It may be taken as a maxim of western expansion that nothing would have stopped the expansion of white Americans over the remainder of the North American continent. Throughout the history of the new world, the promise of land has pulled Europeans to this country and pushed settlement further west, regardless of laws. Neither a colonial House of Burgesses nor early-republic government successfully deterred a western land grab. However, accepting the

¹⁹⁹ Richard White, *The Middle Ground*, x.

flow of Americans west was not an issue Jefferson grappled with. Jefferson expected, and felt it beneficial, for whites to expand and populate the whole of the continent. Rather than attempting to stop the expansion, which he felt was both inevitable and desirable, Jefferson at a minimum could have outlined and guided the settlement of the West.

Thomas Jefferson broke his interpretation of the Constitution in order to purchase Louisiana from the French. He decided he would not compromise his constitutional stance again in order to protect the land and assist the citizens through the establishment of factories and trade posts. As such, a conventional reason for the failure of the Indian policy to peaceably settle the West concerns the weakness of the early federal government. One of the most succinct arguments was made by Theodore Roosevelt at the end of the nineteenth century. Prior to his presidency, Roosevelt penned *The Winning of the West*, a four-volume history of the American nations' acquisition of western territories. Discussing the 1780s and 1790s, Roosevelt feels "our central government was then too weak either effectively to control its own members or adequately punish aggression made upon them." Roosevelt spoke broadly of all facets of governmental policy, and particularly targeted the native policy the early republic government established. He argues that the government failed:

As a nation, our Indian policy is to be blamed, because of the weakness it displayed, because of its shortsightedness, and its occasional leaning to the policy of the sentimental humanitarians; and we have often promised what was impossible to perform; but there has been little willful wrong-doing.²⁰⁰

The opinions expressed by Roosevelt echo the words of Washington, Knox, and Jefferson on the key subject of willful malice towards the natives. The historical record seems to validate that the government's treatment of the Indians in the Early Republic was rarely born of malice.

²⁰⁰ Roosevelt, as quoted in Prucha, *The Indian in American History*, (Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press, 1971), 40.

It is also equally clear that the policy was severely paternalistic and detrimental to the natives. In Roosevelt's argument, the culprit behind this mistreatment was governmental weakness, shortsightedness, and sentimentalities.

An additional reason for the failure of the American Indian policy was the United States refusal to emulate the British trade system. The system in place in British Canada was an effective, if small scale, trading system that incorporated many positive aspects. Roosevelt also admonishes the early American government for not treating the tribes in a similar fashion, stating "the Indians could not be seen as individuals at that time. There was no possible alternative, therefore, to treating their tribes as nations, exactly as the French and English had done before us." This could have been done with a much greater degree of effectiveness had the government involved itself in the trade system, dealing with their native neighbors on a more political and governmental level rather than private traders dealing with Indians on an individual level.²⁰¹

There were legitimate reasons to question the effectiveness that would have resulted from emulating the British trading system. First, the small-scale British system worked so well because it was limited. Individual traders mingled and merged with existing tribes. Traders practiced tribal rituals, married native women, and established interpersonal relationships. Factories could have been seen as a large scale intrusion into Indian lifestyle. Second, the British companies emphasized trade, whereas the American motivation was predominantly land and settlement. The specific goals of the American government, to incorporate the Indians into the body politic and settle the West, led to an inescapable, but not inevitable, outcome.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

The United States government had an opportunity during the period between the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century to establish measures of control upon the western settlement. American government officials held no overt malice towards the natives. Natives were, at this time, considered the owners of their lands, requiring Americans to seek treaties and settlements to land claims. Indians were paternalistically regarded as “noble savages” who, while not equal, could become peers if only given the opportunity and yet Indians were forced to assimilate in white culture on white terms or vacate their lands, moving farther west until no more room existed. The tragedy of western settlement is seen in the actions of often sincere government officials who hoped for mutual understanding while doing little to assure peace and equality.

Neither Indians nor whites were given an outline or guidance for the expected assimilation. Unscripted interactions occurred on a frontier where settlers were not interested in assimilation or sharing. In the absence of conviction to introduce legislation and commit on a grand scale, it was impossible to implement a policy that would have both helped settle the West without violence and provide legitimate options to the native inhabitants. In *The Indian in American History*, Francis Paul Prucha questions the ability to construct logistical support for such a grand policy. Prucha argues that factories would not have held back traders who would have found a way around them. Arguing that the government was too far away and too weak to provide a complete crackdown on the frontier, he opines that land was the “promise of America” from new world to the old, and no amount or measure of law could have changed the outcome. This position is hard to refute due to the fact that to argue otherwise one is forced to enter the realm of counterfactual history. The challenge for historians of early republic American Indian

policy is to untangle the absurdity of a government who refused to countenance malice towards the natives yet left their culture to single-handedly fight a battle they could not win.²⁰²

²⁰² Prucha, *The Indian in American History*, 64.

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