‘A Knowledge of Distant Parts’

The Shaping of the Lewis and Clark Expedition

by James P. Ronda

More than a century and a half ago an obscure employee of the powerful North West Company, Canada's boldest fur enterprise, acknowledged the Lewis and Clark Expedition's primacy in the exploration of western North America. "By the journey of Captains Lewis and Clark," wrote Peter Corney, "the whole of that western region is now laid open."

In the years since, the results of the expedition have come into sharper focus. Decades of Lewis and Clark scholarship have revealed an expedition rich in science, geography, ethnography, and imperial history. Few would now challenge Bernard DeVoto's declaration that the expedition was a turning point in American and perhaps even global history. While the meanings and consequences of the expedition have become clearer over the years, much confusion remains about its origins. Eager to launch the Corps of Discovery on its epic journey, scholars and expedition fellow travelers have paid scant attention to the compelling world of discovery and exploration that inspired Thomas Jefferson and gave shape to his several exploratory ventures.

Traditional answers to the question "Where did the Lewis and Clark Expedition come from?" fall into several predictable categories. Textbook wisdom instructs young students that the expedition was the product of Jefferson's lifelong fascination with the West and Native Americans. Commentators with a less romantic bent emphasize the Corps of Discovery as Jefferson's political response to the growing British presence in the Northwest. More recently the expedition has been linked to a search for the fabled Passage to India, a dream that reached back to the age of Columbus. One student of the enterprise has connected it to Jefferson's political philosophy and the need to preserve the nation's rural values.

Each of those answers catches a bit of the expedition's complex origins. Jefferson had a genuine interest in all things western, although it came late in his life. The expedition did not spring from long years of careful planning. Instead, it grew quickly after the president read Alexander Mackenzie's Voyages from Montreal. That important expedition narrative contained British strategy for economic and political dominance in the West, a strategy that forced Lewis and Clark to begin planning the American response. A considerable part of the intellectual energy behind Jefferson's commitment to exploration and expansion was generated by his republican ideology. Jefferson believed that the future of the American republic depended on an unending supply of good agricultural land. Without the promise of land, Americans were sure to slip into the moral decay and political tyranny that had corrupted European Europe. Each of these answers, however, neglects the wider context. Some twenty-five years ago William Goetzmann wrote that "the exploration of the American West was never an isolated event. It belongs to the world rather than national history." To begin to grasp the origins of the Lewis and Clark expedition we need to look to the broader age of global discovery.

William Clark sketched the "Cock of the Plains" in his journal on March 2, 1806.
The Greater Corps of Discovery

Thomas Jefferson once called the Lewis and Clark Expedition the Corps of Discovery. By the time the president ordered his captains west to the Pacific, the ranks of that company were already filled with enterprising adventurers from many countries. Exploration had become a global endeavor well before Lewis and Clark made their overland journey. The senior members of the larger Corps of Discovery were the English maritime explorers James Cook and George Vancouver. They represented a professional, skill, and experience that others could only hope to match.

No single explorer more fully dominated his era than James Cook. Born in humble beginnings on a Yorkshire farm, Cook seemed destined to spend a life of landed lordship. Opportunity came when Cook's father sent him to apprentice with a grocer in the English fishing port of Staithe. In 1753, he joined the merchant and navigator Henry Walker. The Walkers were shipowners at the port of Whitby and active in the coastal coal trade. Cook learned seamanship aboard the coal colliers. The lessons were of wind, weather, tide, and current. Ashore he studied mathematics. In 1755 Cook was offered command of a coal collier but instead joined the Royal Navy as a common seaman. His extraordinary abilities advanced him quickly, and by 1769 he was master of a naval vessel. During the 1760s the Admiralty ordered Cook to conduct detailed surveys of the waters of Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. His extraordinary abilities advanced him quickly, and by 1769 he was master of a naval vessel. During the 1760s the Admiralty ordered Cook to conduct detailed surveys of the waters of Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. His extraordinary abilities advanced him quickly, and by 1769 he was master of a naval vessel. During the 1760s the Admiralty ordered Cook to conduct detailed surveys of the waters of Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland. His extraordinary abilities advanced him quickly, and by 1769 he was master of a naval vessel.

In 1774, Cook arrived in the Pacific for the first time, and his interactions with the local inhabitants left a lasting impact. He became interested in the local flora and fauna, and his observations contributed significantly to the scientific understanding of the region.

Cook's voyages provided a school for many future explorers. No one was a better pupil than George Vancouver. In 1772, at fourteen, Vancouver, an eager learner, joined the crew of Cook's ship, Resolution. A journey of three years taught him the fundamentals of seamanship and an appreciation for the scientific reconnaissance Cook exemplified. Vancouver served aboard the Discovery on Cook's third Pacific venture. In 1781, Vancouver was given command of a major expedition ordered to chart large portions of the north Pacific. That voyage, lasting until 1785, put Vancouver in the highest ranks of Enlightenment explorers.

The Greater Corps of Discovery

For the great European powers of the late eighteenth century, exploration of the Pacific was a growing priority. Both French and Spanish expeditions followed in the wake of Cook. French efforts were led by Jean François de Lapérouse. An experienced naval officer, Lapérouse had been deeply influenced by the Cook tradition. What Cook had done was to make the French government eager to expand national power and glory. King Louis XVI and Minister of Marine Charles Cleret designed a Pacific expedition much like Cook's final journey. With two ships and an impressive group of artists and scientists, the Malaspina expedition conducted a comprehensive survey of the Pacific coast from California to Alaska.

The American branch of the Enlightenment Corps of Discovery was not compared with the European company in scientific education, organization, and official funding. The United States would not mount anything as complex as the Cook voyages until the Wilkes expedition of 1838-1842. Nevertheless, Jefferson's explorers did share much with their fellow adventurers. Attracted to the Pacific as the last great imperial frontier, European nations employed naval officers as explorers. In North America the expedition was not the space of sea but the space of land. Army officers were Jefferson's logical choices. Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and Zebulon Montgomery Pike came to western exploration by way of the profession of arms. Lewis joined the Virginia militia during the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion and entered the regular army the next year. In 1796 he was assigned to the First Infantry Regiment and served as paymaster and recruiting duties. Although other young officers saw much action during the Ohio Indian wars of the 1790s, Lewis gained no combat experience. What would have been a routine career took a dramatic turn in 1807 when Jefferson selected Lewis as his private secretary. Far too much has been made of Lewis's scientific abilities. Largely self-taught, he was a keen amateur naturalist but did not match for his European contemporaries. Nor is there compelling evidence that Lewis spent time studying scientific subjects at Jefferson's Monticello library.

William Clark's military career far better suited him for exploration than did Lewis's limited experience. Son of a distinguished military family, the young Clark followed in the footsteps of his older brother George. From Clark's team Ohio Indian wars service included covert diplomatic missions and several engagements under hostile fire. As a soldier, he learned the value of planning and careful organization. More important, Clark became a skilled cartographer and adept diplomat.

Lewis and Clark came as close as any Americans to full membership in the greater Corps of Discoveries. Zebulon Montgomery Pike aspired to join the ranks but like so many others in his short life, doing so was a dream unfulfilled. Son of a respected army officer, Pike was an ambitious young lieutenant burdened by an inadequate education and an inflated sense of his own importance. While others who sought admission to the global Corps of Discovery read national history and studied mathematics, Pike poured over volumes on strategy and tactics. What promised to be his lifetime career was suddenly changed in 1805 when General James Wilkinson selected Pike to lead two western expeditions, one to the mouth of the Mississippi (1805-1806) and the second into the Southwest (1806-1807). Pike hoped his ventures would bring him a measure of the acclaim being showered on Lewis and Clark. But unfortunate circumstances, the loss of his papers, his own weak education, and an accidental link to the Wilkinson-Burr plot—conspired to make such praise elusive. Pike was killed in 1813 during the War of 1812.

Faced with a shallow pool of talent for his Corps of Discovery, Jefferson was forced to use civilians for his important explorations of the Red River country. Questions of diplomacy and defense required accurate information about the Red River and the boundaries between Louisiana and Spanish territories. Jefferson entrusted much of the planning to William Dunbar, a successful Natchez planter. Whether wide-ranging interests, including medicine, botany, and astronomy. Others associated with the ultimately unsuccessful Red River efforts, included surveyor Thomas Freeman and naturalist Conrad Weidmann. While these voyages did not produce what Jefferson had in mind, they did represent one more effort to pattern American exploration on European Enlightenment models.
George Vancouver, and Alexander Mackenzie. Although some of its ablest practitioners were English, the approach to exploration during the Enlightenment knew no national boundaries. Vancouver once declared that he was "a servant of the world," thus keeping company with explorers like the Frenchman Jean François de Lapérouse and the Spaniard Alejandro Malaspina. Those voyagers embodied what one naturalist called "the thirst for knowledge," a quest that eventually would make him "the life of the third president of the United States."

Three fundamental questions dominated the Age of Enlightenment. The first addressed the subject of inquiry. What should thoughtful people study? For centuries Europeans associated modes of nature and the supernatural were the only appropriate objects for investigation. By the end of the seventeenth century that theocentric view of knowledge was under sharp attack. As the English poet Alexander Pope wrote, "the proper study of mankind is man." Students of natural history would have added that man was but part of a larger natural world worthy of careful scrutiny. The influential French naturalist Comte de Buffon described just how broadly the Enlightenment defined the study of nature. "Natural history," he declared, "is an immense history, it embraces all the objects that the universe presents, and all the climates at once." 

Eighteenth-century explorers and their patrons agreed. The new Enlightenment agenda quickly transformed the goals of exploration. Voyages of discovery that once had been solely for profit or imperial advantage became scientific enterprises as well. When British officials drafted comprehensive instructions for James Cook's second voyage (1772-1775) to the Pacific, they put the Enlightenment's sweeping definition of nature at the heart of the document. Cook and his corps of scientists were to study "the nature of the soil and the produce thereof; the Animals and Fowls that inhabit or frequent it; the Fishes that are to be found in the Rivers or upon the Coasts; the whole was to escape Cook's scientific gaze. The explorers were to keep eyes open for "Mines, Minerals, or valuable stones ... seeds of Trees, Shrubs, Plants, Fruits, and Grains peculiar to the country." Eighteenth-century explorers expected to find populated worlds of wonder. Those "new" peoples were to be studied both for possible economic advantage and for clues about what the Enlightenment was confident universal laws of cultural development. The planners of Cook's voyage ensured him to "observe the Genius, Temper,Disposition, and Number of the natives." 12

Jefferson's guidelines for his explorers reflected the same broad conception of the natural world. Writing to Thomas Jefferson, the president ordered him to see "the soil and face of the country."

"For Jefferson the country's "face" meant plants, animals, terrain, and native peoples. Nature was a book to be read, its pages opened and turned by travelers with a wide vision of what Jefferson once called "an extensive, rich and unexplored field."

If the first Enlightenment question expanded exploration goals, the second defined, for voyages of discovery, a fresh approach to gathering knowledge. How should nature be studied? The Enlightenment stressed direct observation. As Vancouver wrote, "the whole of our time should be usefully occupied in acquiring every knowledge of the distant regions we are to visit." Earlier ages had honored ancient wisdom, sacred tradition, and excluded or excluded meditation as appropriate ways to gather information. The Enlightenment challenged the notion of thought isolated from direct experience. Captain William Bligh, master of Cook's ship Resolution and an explorer in his own right, insisted that mapping errors arose only from sheer ignorance not knowing how to investigate the fact and it is a disgrace to us Navigators to lay down what does not exist."

The Enlightenment also emphasized close observation and immediate participation, an approach surely congealed to exploration. Mungo Park, who explored West Africa at the end of the eighteenth century, made all this intensely personal. "I had a passionate desire to examine into the productions of a country so little known, and to become experimentally acquainted with the modes of life and the character of the natives." The Cook voyages elated to a guiding principle for scientific exploration what naturalist Georg Forster called "the rage of hunting after facts." Cook's scientists were to observe, measure, describe, and classify everything from prominent terrains, features of plants and animals new to European scholars. Seeing the face of the country firsthand became fundamental to exploration. Cook's instructions repeated again and again one key phrase—"carefully observe." The message was unmistakable. Explorers were not merely tourists seeking the picturesque. Rather, they were agents of science busy expanding the empire of the mind.

Not only were explorers to study nature at close quarters, they also were commanded to make painstaking records of all they saw. The Enlightenment taught observation unrecorded was knowledge lost. Travelers and adventurers in earlier times had kept fragmentary diaries and logs. The scientific spirit of the Enlightenment went further, demanding precise record-keeping. As Jefferson explained to one who would-be explorer, science now required "very exact descriptions of what they see."

As before, the Cook voyages set the pattern with three distinct kinds of records. Written accounts were to be exact, minute, personal journals, and scientific and topographic descriptions. Many of these eventually were published in revised form, and at least six found places in Jefferson's extensive library. In this respect, Cook's publications were a bequest to the record of scientific inquiry, and all the Cook voyages employed artists like John Webber, William Ellis, Alexander Buchan, and the incomparable Sydney Parkinson to document native life, topographic features, and important expedition events. Their illustrations comprise the first flowering of expedition art. Many ways George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, Richard Kerr, and the artists of the Pacific Railroad Surveys followed paths already marked by the watercolor sketches and painted for Cook. Maps and charts were a third category of records. Cook, his officers, and expedition draftsmen all worked on what were called "coastal profiles." These "vows" and more detailed hydrographic surveys remained an important part of Pacific navigation well into the twentieth century.


Lamb, "Voyages into Substance," 55.
Bragheschi, "Cook Journals," 1, 1, 318.
Bragheschi, "Cook Journals," 2, 1, 318.
The Cook voyages also set an important precedent for the ownership and publication of expedition documents. At the end of each voyage, Cook was ordered to collect all records and specimens — except those held by civilian scientists — and deliver them to the admiral. The royal government argued that because the voyages were a public enterprise backed by the national treasury, the records belonged to the state. Publication for personal profit might come later but the crown had first claim on the harvest of discovery. Jefferson agreed and in 1816 insisted that the Lewis and Clark journals were indeed public property.

The Enlightenment gave explorers fresh missions, prepared them with the latest scientific methods, and then defined the purposes explorers' knowledge should serve. Here, then, was the third question that guided Enlightenment explorers. What should be done with so much data often collected at great risk? Information laboriously gathered from the close study of nature was not valued for its own sake. Enlightenment explorers and their patrons believed that knowledge found its true value in useful application. When Sir Joseph Banks and a small group of fellow scientists established the Royal Institution in 1799, they made clear this commitment to practical science. The institution was dedicated to the application of science to the common purposes of life.

The word "useful" was everywhere in this age of discovery. Its spirit was expressed by Benjamin Franklin when he declared that "the knowledge of nature if well preserved seldom fails producing something useful to Man." Franklin first suggested what later became the American Philosophical Society in a broadside aptly titled "A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge Among the British Plantations in America." The American Philosophical Society itself put the phrase "useful knowledge" in its corporate title. Utility was the yardstick by which to measure everything—from a newly discovered plant to a national revolution.

For explorers "useful knowledge" meant many things. The phrase certainly had territorial dimensions. Reporting on the successful conclusion of the first Cook voyage, London's "Public Advertiser" confidently announced that "the territories of Great Britain will be widely extended in consequence of those Discoveries." Exploration science was expected to expand the boundaries of empire. Banks, like Jefferson, had an enduring interest in economic botany. A clearer understanding of new plants, animals, and mineral resources might spark and sustain a growing empire.

Useful knowledge also played a key role in the increased pace of privately funded, corporate-sponsored exploration. Nowhere was this clearer than in the connection between the fur trade and North American exploration.

Journeys of discovery sponsored by the North West Company and John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company sought useful geographic knowledge, knowledge that would show itself in the warehouses and on the ledger. Alexander Ross, a notable Astorian and chronicler of fur trade exploration, made all the connections between knowledge, empire, and business in the following lines: "The progress of discovery contributes not a little to the enlightenment of mankind; for mercantile interest stimulates curiosity and adventure, and combines with them to enlarge the circle of knowledge. To the spirit of enterprise developed in the service of commercial speculation, civilized nations owe not only wealth and territorial acquisitions, but also their acquaintance with the earth and its productions."
of the 1780s Jefferson had six of the Cook accounts on his shelves. Perhaps the most important was John Rickman's *Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage to the Pacific*, published in 1784. A lieutenant on board the *Discovery*, Rickman had an intimate knowledge of exploration in the Cook style. His detailed account of Cook's reconnaissance along the Northwest coast in the spring and summer of 1778 undoubtedly interested Jefferson. Reading the *Discovery* narratives taught him important lessons about expedition planning and organization. How well those lessons were learned became clear in the winter of 1802 when the Lewis and Clark Expedition began to take shape.

Jefferson knew about the Cook enterprises through the world of print but he had personal knowledge as well. In Paris as American ambassador to the French court, the Virginian grew closer to the intellectual and official centers of Enlightenment exploration. Goaded into action by Cook's great achievements in the Pacific, the French government mounted its own probe of the South Seas. Jean François de Lapérouse, an experienced naval officer, was to reach the French what James Cook was to the British. The *Lapérouse* expedition was a full-scale scientific venture, something the British *Endeavour* had not been. Jefferson eventually heard of the voyage, feared that it might signal the renewal of French imperial designs on North America, and detailed John Paul Jones to scout Lapérouse's intentions. His report allayed Jefferson's fears since French officials seemed more interested in the South Pacific than the Northwest coast. At the same time, he received a letter from John Ledyard. Born in Connecticut in 1751, Ledyard served as a captain and an expedition leader for the British during the French and Indian War. He planned to explore the Pacific coast and China and by the mid-1780s was deeply involved in several schemes to exploit that trade. One of Ledyard's proposals was a west-to-east expedition across Siberia and through North America. Both Jefferson and Banks got letters from the eager adventurer asking for money and personal support. Through both the *Lapérouse* and Ledyard ventures Jefferson grew closer to the world of the great navigator Cook.

President Thomas Jefferson always summered at Monticello. It was a time to escape Washington's oppressive heat and the press of national business. Those summer days offered a chance to read and reflect away from the clamor of provincial politics and local gossip. Sometime during the summer of 1802 Jefferson began to read *Alexander Mackenzie's recently published Voyages from Montreal*. Most of that volume was a dry, ghost-written account of Mackenzie's voyages to the Arctic and Pacific oceans. But a brief mention at the end of the book pushed Jefferson into action. Like Cook, Banks, and Vancouver, Mackenzie grasped the connection between exploration and the course of empire. What he proposed was a daring expansion of the British colonial domain through the West and on to the Pacific. One sentence alone must have caught the president's eye: "By opening this intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and forming regular establishments through the interior, and at both extremes, as well as along the coasts and islands, the entire command of the fur trade of North America might be obtained."

Jefferson immediately understood what the "entire command of the fur trade" really meant. Mackenzie was not advocating a simple business venture. Generations of empire builders had used the fur trade to secure Indian allies, forestall potential imperial rivalries, and expand territorial domain. The fur trade was always more than stacks of pelts and the whims of male fashion. The course of empire hung on the trade and Jefferson knew it.

But the Canadian explorer had more in mind than a fur trade empire. Mackenzie envisioned permanent colonies in the Northwest. These were the same lands that Jefferson believed would secure the agrarian future of the American republic. Mackenzie's bold plan was a challenge that could not be ignored. The president's response was to fashion an expedition in the Cook mold, a voyage of discovery inspired not so much by the American West as by the fur reaches of the Pacific Ocean.

By the end of 1802 Jefferson was busy creating his own Cook expedition. At the center of English voyages lay the premise that discovery was a national undertaking. Jefferson never doubted that reply to the Mackenzie challenge should be a federally funded project using experienced military officers. The president's private secretary, Captain Meriwether Lewis, was selected to lead the expedition early in the planning process. There is no evidence that Jefferson ever considered employing private traders or independent agents for the journey. He assumed that once government agents made initial reconnaisances, other explorers would follow in their tracks.

Jefferson knew that he could not precisely duplicate the size and scope of the Cook voyages. Maritime exploration required larger numbers of men and greater stores of supplies than an overland journey. Budget concerns alone made such large-scale enterprises unlikely. The Cook expeditions took along professional observers and trained artists. While Jefferson was committed to scientific exploration, he recognized the limitations imposed by a small and barely professional American scientific community. Banks and other European explorers could draw on a large pool of trained scholars and artists. Jefferson had far fewer choices.

As he later explained, "these expeditions are so laborious and hazardous, that men of science, used to the temperature and inactivity of their closet, cannot be induced to undertake them." Jefferson readily acknowledged Lewis's scientific limitations but was also confident that later expedi-
tions would include professionally trained observers. What seemed important was an initial survey. Scientific exploration following the Cook tradition had to become a matter of federal policy. Subsequent ventures might more fully match the ambitious English, Spanish, and French efforts.

The Cook voyages emphasized not only national financing but the central role of comprehensive instructions for each voyage. Since the Enlightenment advanced a sweeping definition of nature, explorers' guidelines were equally wide-ranging. While directions for specific Cook expeditions were never published, even a casual reading of printed narratives reveals the broad outlines of those documents. Jefferson's first experiment in instruction writing came when he drafted directions for André Michaux's abortive 1793 journey to the Pacific. Those who planned Cook's expeditions consistently gave him one key goal—to find the southern continent or the Northwest Passage—and then many secondary missions. Jefferson followed that pattern. Michaux was directed to locate the best passage across the continent to the Pacific. On the way he was to observe and record everything from Indian life and cultures to new plants and animals. In that western land of wonders Jefferson hoped the intrepid Frenchman would encounter packs of llamas, traces of the great mammoth, and exotic things "useful or very curious."

Although the Michaux expedition failed when the explorer abruptly changed his loyalties, the effort did give Jefferson important practical experience in expedition planning. When he came to draft instructions for Lewis during the spring of 1803 the Cook tradition was the guiding force. Jefferson drew up a preliminary document and then circulated it among scientifically inclined friends and political advisers both in and out of official Washington. Working from suggestions made by those experts, he moved to prepare what became the charter for federal exploration in the West. Like Cook, Lewis and Clark were given one central mission. Using words now familiar to every student of western exploration, Jefferson told his captains to "explore the Missouri river, and such principal streams of it, as, by its course and communication with the waters of the Pacific ocean, whether the Columbia, Oregon, Colorado or any other river may offer the most direct and practicable water communication across this continent for the purposes of commerce."

Just as Cook's journeys had many missions, however, Jefferson gave Lewis and Clark generous marching orders. England's Royal Society had once instructed sailors bound across the seas to "study Nature rather than Books." Jefferson wanted his explorers to "study Nature" in the largest sense. A careful reading of his instructions reveals seven areas of scientific investigation. Geographic observation in the Cook tradition was of major importance. Jefferson ordered his captains to take careful note of landforms, waterways, and portages. The American Garden—Jefferson's hopeful image of the West—had to be plotted, marked, and measured just as Cook had charted the vast Pacific. The Enlightenment had a special passion for studying non-European, supposedly "primitive" peoples. Most European scholars, including Jefferson, believed that all cultures went through an evolutionary process that began with hunting societies and ended with "civilized" farmers. To study Indians was to study "civilized" man at the earliest stages of cultural development.

There was a certain touchy nationalism in Jefferson's instruction to study native cultures. Some European scholars had argued that the American environment had a degenerative effect on all living things. Since native people were the most representative part of the American landscape, Jefferson demanded that science indicate Indian physical and mental accomplishments. Lewis and Clark were to examine every aspect of native life, from daily routines and "ordinary occupations" to diplomacy and political leadership. Jefferson hoped his expedition ethnographers might gather a virtual compendium of Native American life. In this he was not disappointed.

Along with geographic description and ethnography were what Jefferson termed "other objects worthy of notice." Those "other objects" amounted to an ambitious scientific program. Geology, botany, and zoology led the list followed by archaeology and climatology. Cook's instructions contained similar lists, but for the American explorers the full burden of scientific inquiry fell on a few shoulders. Despite other pressing responsibilities, Lewis and Clark managed to observe, describe, and collect in most of the categories

This map, from a copy published in London, is the first official map of the region explored by Lewis and Clark. The map was compiled from Clark's determinations of the expedition's course and position, and includes his written observations of canoes where they stopped. The map fulfilled Jefferson's orders to chart the upper Missouri and Columbia River systems.
Jefferson prescribed. And it needs to be remembered that the instructions drafted for Lewis and Clark were not just for one expedition but would serve as the master agenda for all subsequent federal enterprises.

The eighteenth century was equally an age of exploration and an age of rival empires. In the struggle for political and economic dominance, explorers were the vanguard of empire. Cook's voyages were a British imperial thrust into the Pacific. Instructions for each of his voyages emphasized both economic expansion and the direct acquisition of territory. The phrase "commerce and navigation," so common in the writings of Cook, Banks, and Vancouver, always carried the implications of empire. Jefferson fully embraced the relationship between explorations and territorial expansion. Lewis and Clark were to find a passage through the American garden for "the purposes of commerce." The president believed that unlimited western lands might secure future generations the blessings of rural life and republican virtue. But without an adequate transportation system to foreign markets, American farmers and settlers would never march beyond the Mississippi.

Jefferson expected the American nation to eventually stretch from Atlantic to Pacific. Although he sometimes talked about separate eastern and western republics, all of Jefferson's presidential actions pointed toward a single continental nation. Like Cook and Banks, Lewis and Clark aimed at being soldiers of empire.

MOVING THROUGH all of this was Jefferson's conception of his own role in exploration. After the first Cook voyage, Sir Joseph Banks emerged as Britain's most powerful advocate of scientific exploration. As president of the Royal Society and informal advisor to several branches of government, Banks was perfectly placed to encourage voyages of discovery. One young English explorer called Banks "the common Center of our Discoverers."37 J. C. Beaglehole, Cook's great twentieth-century biographer, has aptly characterized Banks as a "preindustrial genius of exploration." "In many ways Jefferson became an American Banks. The two men corresponded on matters of common scientific concern, and both shared an interest in botany. Both served as president of their respective scientific institutions, recognizing the need for organization in modern scholarly inquiry. Most important, Jefferson borrowed Banks's strategy of coordinated exploration. Banks believed that successful exploration involved the systematic efforts of several ships or parties. Cook was an early convert to this approach and used it on his second and third voyages. As a patron of exploration Jefferson pursued the same design. By 1804 the United States had developed a complex strategy for western exploration.

Jefferson's ambitious plan envisioned four distinct expeditions. Lewis and Clark would pursue the most ambitious assignment, the search for the Pacific Passage. A second party would push up the Mississippi and then explore onward toward the Missouri. A third expedition would conduct a reconnaissance of the Red River and Arkansas, while the fourth group would probe present-day Minnesota. Journeys by Zebulon Montgomery Pike, William Dunbar, and the Freeman-Custis party fulfilled at least some of these complex objectives.

Both Jefferson and Banks understood that the voyages of discovery had meaning beyond the drama and excitement of travel and adventure. As advocates of a new kind of exploration, both men expected voyages of discovery to yield empires of power and influence. The Corps of Discovery was sometimes called the Corps of Discovery. Actually, Jefferson's real Corps of Discovery was more than a single expedition. It made him so by becoming the American Banks and joining himself to the Cook tradition.

Early in March 1803, Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin wrote Jefferson telling the president that he was busy marking the routes of Cook and Vancouver on a large blank map. "Soon enough that map would have the lines of American explorers as well. Those American expeditions were shaped by a larger tradition, the voyages of the ships Endeavor, Resolution, Adventure, and Discovery. And Clark knew as much when they made places for themselves in what one of Cook's lieutenants called "the old trade of exploring.""

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

Few periods in exploration history have produced so rich a harvest of personal accounts, narratives, diaries, letters, maps, and graphic records as Lewis and Clark's years between the 1760s and the 1820s. That era saw the passion of the scientist for precise detail blend with the romantic curiosity of the traveler to see and describe what seemed strange, exotic. The result is a literature of discovery that is both scientifically accurate and deeply personal. In those documents of discovery modern readers can relive the encounters of peoples and cultures, encounters that continue to shape our world.

There is no better way to participate in the Age of Cook than to read the day-by-day journals kept by Cook and others during the three great Pacific expeditions. J. C. Beaglehole, ed., The Journal of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1955-69) is the keystone collection for the whole era. Cook's ablest successor was Captain George Vancouver. The documents for Vancouver's ambitious maritime exploring journey are in W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Voyage of George Vancouver 1791-1795, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1921) and explorers soon followed the Cook tradition. The two Mackenzie expeditions (1789 and 1792-93) are recounted in W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1970). Among the Canadian leaders who advanced the Cook tradition none was more important than David Thompson. Richard Glover, ed., David Thompson's Narrative, 1784-1812 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1992), prepared by the explorer late in life, is the best edition of recollections. Most of Thompson's original journals remain unpublished.
