VIEW FROM THE SHORE

Transcript
(Running Time: 27 minutes)

Introduction

Narrator (Jim Croff): In the distance I hear them paddle their boats up river. They speak in a strange tongue, but I know them because a prophecy foretold of their coming. They come in peace and bring gifts, gifts offered as generosity couched in innocence; only they have come to take, not give. I watch from the shore helpless to stop them and they leave me in their wake little more than a shadow of myself.

Dick Little Bear: I am really ambiguous about this expedition.

Henrietta Mann: I don't like to call it the Corps of Discovery, I really abhor the word "discovery".

Darrell R. Kipp: And everything around them already had names, everything around them already had been identified for thousands of years.

Julie Cajune: It was an invasion into their homeland.

Raymond Cross: The Indians were the object and the problem.

Dick Little Bear: Impediments to our manifest destiny.

Henrietta Mann: The termination of language is the loss of lives.

Julie Cajune: We need to speak truth about what happened

Darrell R. Kipp: To include an honest and truthful version of what happened in native America as a result of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

View From The Shore: A Native American Perspective on the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial

Darrell R. Kipp: We are negotiating the reality of what has been presented in textbooks and history books and movies and television and even in the Lewis and Clark journals themselves over the years. And so I see the Lewis and Clark expedition commemorative as an opportunity, as an excellent opportunity, that Indian tribes are able take advantage of, should take advantage of, to present their renegotiation of reality and set the record straight.

Raymond Cross: And I think that Lewis and Clark can be seen, at least from my tribe's perspective, at a number of different levels. They can be seen as real flesh and blood people, an ill-equipped pair, and ill-equipped duo to really work with the Indian people. On the other hand, I think you see them as sort of symbol and icon, as sort of a collective memory of the American people that put so much stock in those journals as sort of the true story of how it was back then. So Lewis and Clark, I think the flesh and blood characters, are now overshadowed by this sort of bicentennial characterization of their

contribution. I don't think in that light one should blame Lewis and Clark too much. I think the battles engage when you have the Lewis and Clark heritage, when you think of all these thousands of Lewis and Clark books that sort of seek to reenact that conquest of the West. I think that is were the Indians are put at a disadvantage. It is forgotten how much the Indians helped Lewis and Clark, it is forgotten how the Indians made possible this expedition.

Julie Cajune: They could have never made it, they did not know where they were going, they did not know how to feed themselves, and so Indian people guided them. Shoshone women I think transported their baggage, you know, on mountain passes. So they didn't know where the passes were, where to go. And then horses – you weren't going to get one set of horses that are going to last you the whole way, you know, who had the horses? – the Indian people. The river routes, the best portages and everything, all of that information was really provided by Indian people.

Darrell R. Kipp: Where is the logic in calling it the Corps of Discovery? I think the whole expedition should have been called Sacajawea's Expedition instead of Lewis and Clark.

Dick Little Bear: I am really ambiguous about this expedition, because while it was a big place that they were coming through, it was kind of hostile to them, they called it wilderness and they called it discovery. It wasn't wilderness to Native Americans and it certainly was already discovered.

Henrietta Mann: Expedition. I don't like to call it the Corps of Discovery, I really abhor the word discovery. It is simply because - what did they discover that we already did not know? It is more than a matter of semantics, it could have called something else except the Corps of Discovery, because we were here, and if there was a discovery, we discovered them.

Julie Cajune: For some people it was an invasion into their homeland. The idea that the expedition didn't realize that they were entering a very old tribal world – it didn't seem to be in their thinking. They realized that they were encountering people, but there was still the belief that we are exploring our new purchase, you know, we are exploring our own country, was still paramount in their mind and looking for what benefit we can get from this new acquisition, you know, what are we going to get out of this, what resources can we exploit?

Raymond Cross: I think the stories have always been fairly one-sided, presented from the sort of coonskin cap brigade if you will. I think the stories really haven't allowed the Indian perspective, the Indian voices, to speak on these issues. And it ranges from the fined-grained to the large-scale. If you look at Blackhead's speaking at the expedition, he asked for a wide variety of goods, a wide variety of trading relationships. Meriwether Lewis said look, you know, we are going to set the tone, we want you to come back with us and visit Washington, D.C., we want to show you the majesty of what this new American world is like and you understand that you got to become part of it or you will be swept away. And Blackhead said, no, you know, I don't want to go down the river and visit your world, I like mine just fine. And I think that has always been this tension, is that as if there is two Americas, one Indian and one unIndian and as if there has never been a fairly reciprocal influence between the two. There has never been a willingness on part of non-Indians to come and experience that Indian world. It has always been the other way around, you come down and see the majesty, what we created, we don't really want to deal with your own issues and interests and values.

Henrietta Mann: Long ago when we were given our ways as a people, as Cheyenne people, grandfather, the Creator (Heammawehio) sent two prophets to us - each of them bringing a tribal symbol and an accompanying ceremonial. One of them, whom we called Sweet Medicine, was taught

in Bear Butte, which is the spiritual center of the Cheyenne universe, and he told us about this light-skinned, bear-haired, good-looking people that we would meet toward the sunrise by the big river. He described them as exceptionally numerous, he said there are going to be so many that you could not stand before them. They will keep coming and they will keep coming. He said they will never stop. He said then they will ask you for your children. He said, and you must say no, he said because those they take to educate, he said, will not know who they are in terms of their tribal identity. He said, and these people will tear up the earth with their hands. He said you will start this with them. He said that when you do that, he said, that you will forget all that I have been teaching you.

Dick Little Bear: I compared it to the same kind of impact that 9-11 had on the United States. A lot of things that happened after 9-11 were irreversible, you have a different relationship with the rest of the world at that time right here in the United States and with other people. But I am sure that over time, maybe not as abruptly, but more slow-motion fashion, that what happened with the coming of the Lewis and Clark expedition, was every bit as disastrous and catastrophic, eventually, for Northern Cheyenne people and other ethnic, indigenous ethnic groups at that time. It happened over a longer period of time and in some cases is still happening today, you know, intellectually and culturally. We are still being impacted by what this culture and this society that we now find ourselves in has brought to us. We can look at it on a very negative basis and say that it has destroyed the integrity of our spiritualism, of our cultures, of our languages, and has really made us suspicious of other people.

Raymond Cross: These guys were adventurers, certainly, pretty young men who still had all the means that young men have. And it was sort of a story about the encounter of the young brash Americans and cultures in each of them. And it seems to me that that's interesting, you have a very young, new political culture - the Americans - meeting these ancient cultures. Surprising to me that the encounters were in many cases fairly successful, other cases not. And I think that shows that at the edge of the frontier, at the edge of experience, at the edge of cultures, gives those kind of tensions in which you don't know much about the people you are encountering. You make assumptions, sometimes they are right, sometimes they are wrong. And I got to think that in some ways as Lewis and Clark went along they became more and more Indian and less and less American. They took on all the moccasins and they learned to eat what the Indian people ate, new approaches in languages. So I think in some ways that was in a sense the first truly American experience.

Henrietta Mann: The Louisiana Purchase occurred in 1803 and there came this massive migration across the interior of the continent and then there was this whole need to carry out, not just this concept of manifest destiny, but this whole idea of a melting pot from which everyone was to become American, whatever that means.

Dick Little Bear: And that seemed to set the tone for the way the United States government started dealing with indigenous people. And that was for awhile, we have some people who are going to be impediments to our manifest destiny, so let's kill them off, and that is what they went about doing. Now whether it was government policy to do that is beside the point - they actually did it. A lot of our people died, whether it was through disease or whether it was through actual bullets, they died. I mean that is an undeniable fact.

Raymond Cross: Sort of a celebration of nation building. And that celebration of nation building here or elsewhere forgets that really the nations that should be built are the Indian nations that were sacrificed to build the American nation. That is where we should be now is looking back to working with those tribes and those Indian people.

Dick Little Bear: Here they purchased land from another government that had no ownership of it. They didn't even consult with the tribes that were already here. Maybe they did not own the land in European terms where you have to have a piece of paper, but they had left artifacts; they had an experience here; their stories were here; their people that they loved and cherished were buried here; their sacred sites were here. If that isn't a sign of ownership, I don't know what is.

Darrell R. Kipp: One of the things that happened to Indian tribes within the Lewis and Clark journals is that you have an outside group coming along and seeing things and putting their own identity or their own nomenclature, their own labels on what they see, and those labels or those definitions reflect their definitions, their standards, and not of the subject itself. And so consequently when the journals indicate as they are identifying plants, as they are identifying rivers, they gave them names. For example, the Marias River, in the journals of Lewis and Clark that name is given, and yet amongst this tribe, my tribe, it is the Bear River. And everything around them already had names, everything around them already had been identified for thousands of years in longstanding oral tradition and identity. And yet we know then from the time of Lewis and Clark on we didn't lose our identity, we just simply overwhelmed by the identification and the labels that others placed upon us.

Narrator: Today their ghosts paddle their boats back up river. Again I watch from the shore. Only the time for forgetting is over. This is a time for remembering. I raise my voice, I raise my voice above the din of history that has tried to silence me and so my voice will join the course of others and we will sing the song of our past together.

Julie Cajune: It is like America does not want to have a memory; America chooses to have amnesia, you know, so what is a country without memory? And I think of how important memory is to my people because it says who we are. Who we are is, you know, our collective memory. And so then what happens when a country chooses to not remember or to hide that memory away somewhere and not talk about it. It is kind of a denial of identity.

Darrell R. Kipp: And I think the tribes today have come to the realization that in order to remain healthy and heal themselves and continue the good things that were granted to them thousands of years ago they have to remain within this framework of their tribal philosophies and avoid quote "the prophecy of destruction" which came from outside.

Julie Cajune: And I really believe that America has to do that, has to go back and say we need to speak truth about what happened. And always there is an opportunity and that is what Indian people are, I believe, extending their hand to this country to do, to say let's go back and lets speak the truth about this, and if we are able to do that maybe there can be some restoration and maybe there can be some healing.

Darrell R. Kipp: If a tribe, particularly tribal members, are responsible and that the tribe wants to stay strong, I believe they have to keep their language intact because their tribal language is what has the true identity factors, the true stories, the true histories, the true names of all these places we see of our homelands; that's where they're at. They're not in the journals of Lewis and Clark, that is not who we were. Not in the ongoing recording by the ethnologists, these musicologists, and the anthropologists who tried to define us, who tried to describe us. All well and good, but the true identity of the tribe is in its tribal language.

Henrietta Mann: Languages are critical to the ongoing continuity of tribal cultures. And, of course, that was exactly what Sweet Medicine meant when he said, "don't let them take your children and

educate them." I think that has been an exceptional, powerful impact upon native cultures and native identity in the respect that children were disseperated from all that was Indian, if I could use that term, whether it was Blackfeet, Cheyenne or any of the other 500 or so Indian tribes. And schools have not done a very good job at all in providing the kind of bi-lingual, bi-cultural education that is going to help build very positive self-esteems on the part of our young people.

Dick Little Bear: So you go to school and you read all about this really one-sided story and you think, well, this is what makes us as American, this is what makes us who we are in this country today. And then as you grow older you start thinking about, well, how come up until the 1960s and the 1970s there was still segregation in the South? How come there is still discrimination in South Dakota and in Montana and in Wyoming? How come when the Constitution says all men are created equal and then you immediately look at that, where are the women in that? It should say all men and women are created equal. You know, all of those things, the self-contradictory things that United States government says one thing and yet does another.

Raymond Cross: When I grew up, it was a very bad time for Indian peoples, it was a time of public …, a time of termination; Indians were required to bear burdens, not exercise self-determination. Indians, routinely in the little town I grew up in on the reservation, would be picked up in these sweeps for drunk and disorderly, you would see them out in the road gangs working. One thing that self-determination has actually changed on the ground is that doesn't happen anymore. You don't see those Indians out there working on the road gangs. You see more Indian people employed, you see more opportunity to get your education, to do some good. Whether you choose to do that or not is up to you. But those opportunities are there.

Henrietta Mann: So my challenge has been education in general, the education of a general public that knows little or nothing about Native Americans. The fact that we still exist, the fact that we did not vanish, the fact that we are a very diverse group of people, the fact that we have very highly educated individuals that can function among their own cultures as ceremonial people are keepers of our sacred knowledge and traditions as indigenous peoples and still hold degrees from Harvard University or other Ivy League institutions and be bi-cultural. And that has been a challenge, to educate the children of my brothers and sisters and at the same time provide opportunity for young native people to become highly educated in the non-Indian world at the same time through Native studies, continue to know their history, and their beginnings as a people.

Dick Little Bear: And I realize that I now drive a four-wheel drive pickup and I'm in love with my pickup, I tell that to my wife, but you know, it is those kinds of things that come up to me and I said how can I be so anti-American when a lot of things have come to me. And a lot of that has come to me because of my own personal efforts like getting educated, making sometimes the right choices, more often the wrong choices but learning from those wrong choices.

Darrell R. Kipp: I think it's paramount that for school programs to include this Lewis and Clark expedition, but also at this time it is a great opportunity for the schools also to begin to incorporate more Native American history, Native American language, Native American heritage programs that allow them, the student of tomorrow, to begin to have a fuller and much more vital picture of the history of the United States. The history of the United States includes Native Americans - period. And that we should not be relegated to something like Native American studies or American Indian Day once a year or occasionally in perfunctory types of introductions within the public school curriculums about Native Americans. I think that Native American history is incorporated into the full history of the

United States and has to be presented in the public schools, private schools, colleges across the board because these are the institutions that are educating the children of tomorrow. And it is the children of tomorrow who can bring a different assessment, can bring a different point of view, can bring a more honest perspective about the history of the United States that includes the Indian point of view.

Raymond Cross: I wouldn't say that the white people were the beginning of the end for anything. It is simply a new choice that Indian people have to regard in light of what they learned from that experience.

Dick Little Bear: It is better for us Native Americans to be minorities in this country simply because at least we have some recourse. But whether that recourse is instantaneous is another matter, but at least we have some recourse through laws and governments where nobody distrutes us now days. I think over the past hundred years the United States government has reached some sort of maturity.

Henrietta Mann: So it was probably inevitable, but I think the contact, and it could have been a little more respectful of the fact that native peoples were here, are still here today. And so I would say that if there has been anything that the Lewis and Clark expedition brought it has been a different form of education that has not equipped our young people to live with the kind of cultural dignity that is their right as indigenous children.

Raymond Cross: I don't think by any means it was the end of things for the Mandan-Hidatsa and Arikara people, it was a requirement to sort of readapt to new environments. They adapted over hundreds perhaps thousands of years to that very difficult environment, to North Dakota and river bottoms. They're sort of having that new change – adapting to a world that's half Indian and half not. Therefore, it requires a new type of attitude and type of value. But just like Sakakawea dealt with very difficult circumstances and lived a good life, you can deal with difficult circumstances and still be who you are. That is the lesson I think of a lot of young Indian men and women are learning.

Dick Little Bear: Sweet Medicine's words were meant to encourage us rather than to say that you guys are going to die off if you don't keep being Cheyenne. I think that we have the power within ourselves to postpone that. You know, maybe we can't completely eliminate it, and that we can do that through education; we can do that through informing ourselves of other people; we can do that with learning about the other sides of the history that was spoon-fed to us in our schools.

Henrietta Mann: I do not know that there has been the kind of concerted effort that there should be among youth to begin to look at, and have a voice in, the continuing history of this country.

Raymond Cross: So I think a hundred years from now the story is going to be far more balanced, far more nuanced, far more useful, far more insightful; I think we are sort of that last gasp of what you call that nationalism era in which the Indians were the object and the problem, Lewis and Clark were the good guys. I think a hundred years from now you will have a very different portrayal, a more realistic, honest reconciliation of those facts and issues.

Narrator (Jim Croff): The view from the shore has changed. Our days with the people from the east challenges us to honor our past and to look forward to the future. All things change, yet stay the same. The days and nights of our forever moon brings winter and summer back to us, as promised. We remain the same people gifted by the Creator. We remain Cheyenne, Nez Perce, Salish, Blackfeet, Shoshone, Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, Kootenai, Sioux.