



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

Lewis and Clark National  
Historic Trail  
Corps of Discovery II:  
200 Years to the Future

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## National Park Service Media Release

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### Not Semantics: Commemorate vs. Celebrate

(Omaha, NE) --- The Lewis and Clark Expedition is one of America's watershed events but the Bicentennial of the 1803-06 journey has ancient voices, rarely heard until now.

"Indian people are not celebrating the Bicentennial," said Roberta Conner, Vice-President of the National Council for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. Conner, an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Walla Walla, Cayuse and Umatilla said, "We want people to think about their choice of words. For us, the idea of *celebrating* the harbingers of what would become genocide is offensive and shameful."



Dwight Howe, a Ponca-Omaha Indian visits with students at Corps of Discovery II.

Steve Adams, Superintendent of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and the national touring exhibit "Corps of Discovery II: 200 Years to the Future," said commemoration is the appropriate message to carry to the public.

"During the Bicentennial period of the Corps of Discovery, it is certainly appropriate to *commemorate* the members of the expedition for their bravery, determination, and scientific achievements," Adams said. "We cannot, however, *celebrate* because of the profound and adverse social, economic, and political consequences of the expedition that impacted many peoples of color in the 200 years since the Corps first entered the lands of the First Nations.

"Let us not forget that what was a daring trek across the western wilderness for these European Americans was but a typical life for American Indians," Adams said, "Without the help of Sacagawea and without the generosity of many American Indians, the expedition would surely have failed. Federal policy and/or inaction led to the near extinction of the buffalo - part of a long, deliberate, and deadly campaign to forcibly

acculturate the native peoples. The adopted principle of manifest destiny would lead to the forced Americanization of many thousands of citizens of Mexico and resource extractors would encourage the immigration of Asians and poor whites but also treat them as unwanted and unworthy.”

“*Commemorate* means to 'honor the memory of,'" Conner said, “We are honoring the memory of our ancestors, their dignity, tenacity and foresight. As part of the commemoration and with the intention of honoring ancient and modern perspectives, and experiences, tribes across the country are planning bicentennial events to publicly affirm the fact that they've not only survived, but also are actively engaged in planning for the future. "In fact," said Conner, "many tribes are very busy protecting the species, the habitats and the land that Lewis and Clark traversed so that these resources will be here long after we are gone.”

Dr. Robert Archibald, President of the National Council and President of the Missouri Historical Society said, “The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial is an opportunity for *commemoration*, a chance to reflect on how radically our world, so vividly described by the sojourners, has changed in the years since the expedition ended. For humans of conscience, this occasion is no cause for celebration, for the intervening years are, like all history, a story of the capacity of our species for both good and evil. This bicentennial is an invitation to consider how we will build upon legacies and overcome burdens, leaving as our own legacy, a better world for the future's children.”

There is much left to do, Adams said. “Has America lived up to the promises of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and its guarantee of equal treatment under the law for *all* its citizens? Ask peoples of color, women, and the disabled.

“Imagine the torment and anguish of York, the expedition’s only African American, who tasted the blessings of acceptance and freedom on the trail only to be returned to the reality of enslavement upon William Clark’s return to St. Louis,” Adams said.

“We have come a long way, but the journey to true equality lies long before us. Part of the mission of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail is to encourage every American to practice the personal responsibilities of citizenship, including acceptance and inclusion in their daily lives, for *true* change will come only through them,” Adams said. “Pass it on!”

Use these sources to learn more about the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial:  
 The National Council of the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial at 1.888.999.1806.  
 The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and Corps of Discovery II 402-661-1804.

National Council of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial [www.lewisandclark200.org](http://www.lewisandclark200.org)  
 Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail [www.nps.gov/lecl](http://www.nps.gov/lecl)  
 Peter Kiewit Institute [www.lewisandclarkgnet.com](http://www.lewisandclarkgnet.com)  
 Discovery Expedition of St. Charles [www.lewisandclark.net](http://www.lewisandclark.net)  
 Jefferson National Expansion Memorial [www.nps.gov/jeff](http://www.nps.gov/jeff)  
 Federal Interagency Lewis and Clark Partnership [www.lewisandclark200.gov](http://www.lewisandclark200.gov)  
 Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation [www.lewisandclark.org](http://www.lewisandclark.org)

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