

Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson and the Opening of the American West. By Stephen Ambrose. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996. Pp. 511. \$27.50.)

University of New Orleans professor Stephen Ambrose, noted Nixon and Eisenhower historian, examines the Lewis and Clark expedition in his latest book. This volume is plagued by a series of factual errors, assumptions, and speculations--especially in the introductory and concluding chapters.

Ambrose's lack of factual knowledge of the Federal Period is exposed several times in the book's opening chapters. In all, the background chapters add nothing to the work's thesis and display shoddy research. Ambrose's folksy prose is best used to describe the expedition to the Pacific Ocean. However, this portion of the book is littered with examples of Ambrose leading the reader to believe that he can recall Meriwether Lewis's unrecorded thoughts and words. Ambrose tries to obscure his statements by writing that he is only playing out the scene in his mind. As an historian, Ambrose should know better, but he states that he is "writing as a biographer rather than an archivist or an historian," (167). While one can not question the journey's timeline, fault can be found in a history volume that teeters on the brink of fiction.

A second error made by Ambrose is that he utilizes one source too many times. He continually overlooks references by other historians and contemporaries, favoring Donald Jackson's Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents: 1783-1854. There is nothing wrong with these volumes; in fact Jackson's work serves as one of, if not the best, source on the expedition. However, an historian's motivation should be to add something to the discipline, not rephrase another interpretation. Jackson's study is cited 237 times compared to 15 footnotes for the most recent edition of the journals, completed in 1989 by Gary Moulton.

A third mistake made by Ambrose is his overt hero worship of Meriwether Lewis. The title shows the first hint of this. If the two explorers were co-leaders, why is William Clark's name missing? Ambrose consistently minimizes Clark's role throughout the book. While there are many examples of this problem, one illustrates the point. He writes that "He (Lewis) had been first," (395) in reference to reaching the Pacific. What about Clark and the Corps of Discovery? He even goes so far as to compare Lewis to Christopher Columbus (400). Later, Ambrose diverts attention from Lewis's suicide by writing two pages on his unrecorded last thoughts.

The best part of this volume is the amount of attention given to the biological, botanical, astrological, and diplomatic aspects of this last attempt to find the long-sought Northwest Passage. These areas, often

overlooked by historians of the expedition, proved more productive than the land surveys. Including these subjects in a single-volume work deserves praise. Ambrose's emphasis on the scientific discoveries adds to the book's value to the study of the voyage.

In conclusion, this book provides an interesting history of the expedition's scientific contributions and the life of Meriwether Lewis. However, if Ambrose's study proves one thing it is that historians should not sign book contracts because they want to elaborate on an "obsession" with a subject, as Ambrose admits in the "Introduction."

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