



Acts of Discovery: Visions of America in the Lewis and Clark Journals

Albert Furtwangler

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Meriwether Lewis and William Clark wove science and raw adventure together in their journals as they blazed a trail from St. Louis to the Pacific. Now, with fresh information drawn from many fields, Albert Furtwangler mines those journals for valuable insights into western American history as well as the process of discovery. *Acts of Discovery* argues that Lewis and Clark surpassed the enlightened instructions given to them by President Thomas Jefferson. They made a literal, large-scale experiment, probing the interior of a continent and weighing information that eventually would supersede the science, the politics, and even the artistic ideals of Jefferson and his age. Drawing on a background of interdisciplinary learning, Furtwangler illuminates the achievements of Lewis and Clark as naturalists, navigators, and diplomats who faced ever-new surprises as they worked their way west. He shows that their journals trace two very different patterns at the same time - as records of modern scientific reasoning and as a narrative of epic deeds in an American epic setting. Furtwangler also attempts to define Lewis and Clark's place in American history. He examines some ironic outcomes of westward expansion and conquest and brings out the peculiar courage of explorers who were the first (and almost the last) to cross the continent by pulling their way up the Missouri. He also compares Lewis and Clark's discoveries to those of other generations (from George Washington's early years as a surveyor of the new American interior, to the Apollo moon landings), discussing them in light of questions about progress posed by Francis Bacon, Henry Adams, and modern experimental scientists.

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