Telling Lewis and Clark Stories: Historical Novelists as Storytellers

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"We shall henceforth know Lewis and Clark as we never knew them before," a noted editor prophesied.[1] At the same time a reviewer asked, "Are we getting too much of Lewis and Clark?"[2] Contemporary as these statements may seem, they are not part of the bicentennial. Instead, they are the prediction of historian Reuben Gold Thwaites and part of a review examining the first volumes of his *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* during the Lewis and Clark centennial. In the midst of the celebration of the Corps of Discovery in 1904–1906, historians, editors, and journalists would have recognized the names of Nicholas Biddle, Elliott Coues, Thwaites, and perhaps James K. Hosmer. These men had been important agents in putting the famous Lewis and Clark journals before the public and in providing historical and biographical backgrounds for the explorers' writings.[3] But in another area at the opening of the twentieth century, the Lewis and Clark Expedition had not sparked much attention. Novelists had not discovered the corps as a rich, challenging subject for their fiction. This oversight reveals a good deal about the developments of literature and regionalism in the American West and the nation as a whole.

1. Reuben Gold Thwaites, quoted in *Voyages of Discovery: Essays on the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, ed. James P. Ronda (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1998), p. 320.

2. Quoted in *A History of the Lewis and Clark Journals*, by Paul Russell Cutright (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 222.

3. For the most comprehensive listing of books and essays about the Lewis and Clark Expedition, *see* Stephen Dow Beckham et al., *The Literature of the Lewis and Clark Expedition: A Bibliography and Essays* (Portland, Oreg.: Lewis & Clark College, 2003). In this essay, I do not treat children's or young adult novels, but many are listed in the Beckham bibliography.

On the eve of the Lewis and Clark centennial, American writers were in thrall to a cowboy Old West. Owen Wister's lively cowboy romance *The Virginian,* building on an earlier generation of dime novelists and other popular fictions about the cowboy, topped bestseller lists in 1902 and 1903. In that novel, Wister launched what later became known as the Western. In subsequent decades, Zane Grey, Max Brand, Ernest Haycox, Luke Short, and Louis L'Amour, among others, hardened that popular genre into familiar plot formulas, character types, and stylized, even ritual, actions. These stereotyped ingredients left little room for a Lewis and Clark story—or for any story of exploration—if not accompanied by romance, rising action, and strong conflicts between easily recognized white-and-black-hatted characters.

Another impediment to fictional treatments of the Lewis and Clark story was the slow literary development of much of the northern American West. True, by the early 1900s, Edgar Watson Howe (*The Story of a Country Town,* 1883), Joseph Kirkland (*Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County,* 1887), and Hamlin Garland (*Main-Travelled Roads,* 1891) had begun to depict the agricultural frontier in their novels and stories. But fiction on other nineteenth-century topics was late in coming from other Northern Plains writers. Before 1900, novelists were nonexistent in the Rockies, and writers of the Pacific Northwest were addicted to romances in the vein of Nathaniel Hawthorne, as distinguished from the more realistic fiction of Stephen Crane and William Dean Howells. Northwest suffragist and writer Abigail Scott Duniway had written several novels, most of which had been serialized in her feminist newspaper/magazine *New Northwest.* But the most popular novel of the region was Frederic Homer Balch's *The Bridge of the Gods* (1890), which, gaining considerable national attention at its appearance, has been in print for more than a century.

These twin strains of the domestic and feminist fiction of Duniway and the historical romance of Balch prepared the way for Eva Emery Dye's novel *The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark* (1902), the first well-known novel about the expedition.[4] Well-educated with a

4. Dye, *The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1902). Subsequent citations to this and other works discussed in this essay will be within the text.

master's degree in ancient studies, Dye was also an ardent suffragist. Moving to Oregon in 1890, she had become a devoted student of the area's early history, publishing in 1900 a historical romance entitled *McLoughlin and Old Oregon: A Chronicle.*[5] As Portland made plans to host the centennial of the Lewis and Clark journey, Dye's publisher encouraged her "to weave a story about that" subject.[6]

Working quickly and diligently, as her revealing papers on file at the Oregon Historical Society amply attest, Dye wrote to descendents of the Lewis and Clark families to gather unpublished stories about their ancestors. She also gained access, through the help of Thwaites, to the edited journals before his edition appeared in eight volumes in 1904–1905. From this prodigious research, Dye constructed a novel of roughly four hundred fifty pages, which she divided into three books. The first section, focusing on the valiant story of William Clark's older brother George Rogers Clark, treats the Appalachian frontier from the American Revolution to about 1800. The second and longest book deals with the expedition and events of 1803 to 1806. The final section describes Lewis's post-expedition life glancingly but traces Clark's life and his important role as a friend and negotiator with Indians through his death in 1838.

Dye's Lewis and Clark, George Rogers Clark, Daniel Boone, and Thomas Jefferson are all heroic characters. In the author's inflated prose, they are blood brothers to Achilles and Odysseus. Indeed, in an opening note, Dye writes, "A Homeric song, the epic of a nation, clusters around the names of Lewis and Clark and the border heroes of their time: their story is the Iliad of the West" (p. x). They also resemble other fictional frontier worthies in overcoming demanding, dangerous landscapes and defeating "savage" Indians.

In *The Conquest,* Dye also wobbles between the roles of historian and novelist. Trying to cover more than a century of complicated frontier history, she often steps aside—in authorial sidebars—to provide

5. The fullest account of Dye's life and writings is Sheri Bartlett-Browne, "Eva Emery Dye" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2002). *See also* Kimberly Swanson, "Eva Emery Dye and the Romance of Oregon History," *Pacific Historian* 29 (Winter 1985): 59–68.

6. Alfred Powers, *History of Oregon Literature* (Portland, Oreg.: Metropolitan Press, 1935), p. 410.

readers great globs of history that clot her narrative. To bring her protagonists into a new scene or involve them in stirring events like the Revolutionary War or the War of 1812, Dye becomes more historian than novelist. Similar problems arise in the author's other intrusions. For instance, after introducing Patrick Gass as an uneducated member of the Corps of Discovery, Dye quickly adds: "But what Pat lacked in books he made up in observation and shrewd reasoning; hence it fell out that Patrick Gass's journal was the first published account of the Lewis and Clark expedition. All honour to Patrick Gass. Of such are our heroes" (p. 168).

With one exception, Dye's Indians lack substance. They are portrayed as brutal, face-painted nonhumans. Bloody and barbarous, they are also "childlike," gullible, and fearful. If the author's Lewis and Clark figures belong in the pantheon of American heroes, their opponents are too often cardboard characters, without minds, hearts, or humanity. In this vein, Dye says of one Indian leader, "Black Partridge was a typical savage,—asking for civilisation [*sic*]" (p. 384).

Dye's Sacagawea, however, breaks dramatically from these portraits of Indians. This novel's "Indian princess" heroine helps one understand the myths that eventually surrounded and shaped Sacagawea. Dye, encouraged by her publisher to find a female lead for her novel, had "traced down every old book and scrap of paper, but still was without a real heroine. Finally," she adds, "I came upon the name of Sacajawea and I screamed, 'I have found my heroine.'"[7] Dye's treatment of the Indian teenage mother meshed smoothly with the contemporary interests of woman-suffrage leader Abigail Scott Duniway, an acquaintance of Dye's, and the planners of the Lewis and Clark centennial. One scholar, examining this conjunction of needs and outcomes, concludes that the "important point to the student of the Lewis and Clark expedition is that it was in Oregon that the Sacagawea myth found life and flourished."[8]

7. Ibid.

8. Ronald W. Taber, "Sacagawea and the Suffragettes: An Interpretation of a Myth," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 58 (Jan. 1967): 10. Paul Cutright is twice wrong in calling Dye's novel "a biography of Sacagawea" (Cutright, *History of the Lewis and Clark Journals*, p. 207n.9). It is not a biography, and the novel is not primarily about Sacagawea despite what readers have

Eva Emery Dye's novel provided an influential jumping-off place for fictional treatments of the Lewis and Clark narrative. Her white male protagonists are apotheosized into godlike characters, their American Indian opponents as demons, and Sacagawea as romantic heroine. Commenting on the latter ingredient, noted editor Donald Jackson wrote: "Sacagawea was never acclaimed as a real heroine by the American public until she was, in a sense, rediscovered by Eva Emery Dye in 1902."[9] Later, University of Wyoming professor Grace Raymond Hebard did much to conflate the Sacagawea myth,[10] but Dye established important precedents in her fictional depictions. Dye's background in ancient history, her involvement in the suffragette movement, and her location in Oregon at the time of the centennial clearly influenced the shape and content of her novel. From the confluence of these backgrounds and Dye's diligent research in the pertinent original sources came an initial, widely read historical romance about Lewis and Clark. In the next few decades, novelists gave individualistic turns to these ingredients, but much of their fiction included what Eva Emery Dye pioneered early in the twentieth century.

Like Dye, Emerson Hough also wrote historical romances. He was a popular magazine writer and sometime historian emphasizing the American West in his writings during the first three decades of the twentieth century. In his novel about Lewis and Clark, *The Magnificent Adventure* (1916), Hough produced fiction similar to that in his other historical novels.[11] What one authority writes of Hough's best-known novel, *The Covered Wagon* (1922), is true of his work on Lewis and Clark: "Though the novel is allegedly factual, its real concerns are sen-

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made of Dye's portrait of the young Indian woman. For a very useful study on these topics, *see* Donna J. Kessler, *The Making of Sacagawea: A Euro-American Legend* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996). Another, shorter study of much value is David Remley, "Sacajawea of Myth and History," in *Women and Western American Literature*, ed. Helen Winter Stauffer and Susan J. Rosowski (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston Publishing Co., 1982), pp. 70–89.

9. Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783–1854* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), p. 639.

10. Hebard, *Sacajawea, a Guide and Interpreter of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with an Account of the Travels of Toussaint Charbonneau, and of Jean Baptiste, the Expedition Papoose* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1932).

11. Hough, *The Magnificent Adventure: This being the Story of the World's Greatest Exploration, and the Romance of a very Gallant Gentleman* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1916).

timentally romantic. . . . Hough cannot be credited with originating the combination of love interest with he-man adventure, which is the hallmark of his fiction, [but] he certainly was one of the most successful practitioners of this kind of western writing."[12]

Unfortunately, Hough's mishmash of romance and novelized history fails. Attempting to graft a fictional story of Meriwether Lewis's love for Aaron Burr's married daughter, Theodosia Alston, onto the expedition's history, the author is forced to distort history and falsify the characters of Thomas Jefferson, Lewis, Clark, and Sacagawea to further his sentimental and romantic goals. Lewis becomes primarily a frustrated, misanthropic lover; Clark, a carefree captain; Sacagawea, *the* guide of the expedition; and Jefferson, a failed president save for the success of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Throughout his novel, Hough is also guilty of "managing" history, allowing events to serve more his contrived than his factual purposes. In the end, Hough's fiction illustrates how much the Lewis and Clark story can be manipulated.[13] In his hands, *The Magnificent Adventure* proves unsatisfactory as a historical novel because history is prostituted, sold off to the demands of popular fiction. Quite simply, Hough traveled the wrong trail; he took along a cast of distorted characters; and thus he missed his goal of producing sound historical fiction.

The best of the early fictional works about Lewis and Clark is Ethel Hueston's *Star of the West* (1935).[14] Author of several historical and domestic romances, Hueston extensively utilized firsthand accounts of the expedition and paid close attention to actual physical settings.

12. James K. Folsom, "Hough, Emerson," in *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*, ed. Howard R. Lamar (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 499. The fullest treatment of Hough can be found in Delbert E. Wylder, *Emerson Hough* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981).

13. Two years later, James Willard Schultz published *Bird Woman (Sacajawea), the Guide of Lewis and Clark: Her Own Story Now First Given to the World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), which juxtaposes history and fiction under the guise of history. Ostensibly a biography, *Bird Woman* fictionalizes most of Sacagawea's life. In today's terms, the work might be called a book of "creative nonfiction."

14. Hueston, *Star of the West: The Romance of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1935). Hueston also authored *The Man of the Storm: A Romance of Colter Who Discovered Yellowstone* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1936) and *Calamity Jane of Deadwood Gulch* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1937).

Drawn by Arthur I. Keller, the frontispiece of Emerson Hough's *The Magnificent Adventure* (1916) shows Lewis and Clark taking directions from Sacagawea.

Better than other novels on this subject, her story judiciously balances the westward and eastward legs of the journey and focuses entirely on characters known to be members of the expedition or residents in the towns, villages, or Indian encampments they visited. The author's smooth, flowing style and her clear storytelling talents also add much to her novel.

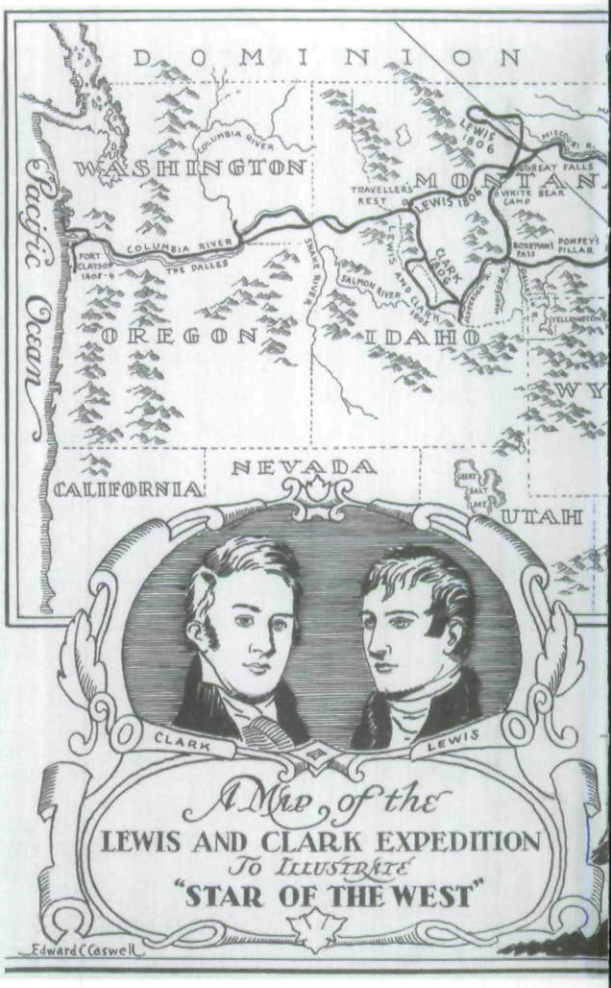
Hueston states in her novel's Foreword that she follows history exactly, save for the conversations she has created. Nearly all these dialogues are, she adds, based on the expedition's journals. The "only

outright liberty taken with authentic history," Hueston writes, is in the opening chapter dealing with Charbonneau's obtaining Sacagawea (p. 8). The author is surely right in this confession since no extant evidence tells us exactly how the mixed-race interpreter secured his "squaw." Other readers demanding historical authenticity might blanch at how much Hueston elaborates on brief references in the journals. Also, the author falls victim to the Sacagawea myth, making the Indian woman a central, participating figure in nearly all of the expedition's activities and allowing her more responsibility for guiding the men than historical sources attest.

Nevertheless, the balance, persuasiveness, and other strengths of *Star of the West* outweigh these limitations. Rather than overemphasize the expedition's brief stay with Sacagawea's Shoshone people, for example, Hueston places emphases where they should be: on the extended stopovers with the Mandan, Clatsop, and Nez Perce. Following the journal accounts, the author likewise makes clear, correct distinctions between the friendly Mandans, Shoshone, Nez Perce, and Clatsop and the animosities or difficulties with the Teton, Chinook and other Columbia River tribes, Crow, and Blackfeet. The extensive sections of the novel dealing with native groups, although seen primarily through white eyes, are nonetheless more discerning than those in the other early Lewis and Clark novels.

Overall, Hueston tells an engrossing, moving story. She persuades the reader that these were the daily difficulties facing these heroic men. These were the dilemmas that the leaders Lewis and Clark faced and overcame. These were the deeds and thoughts of Sacagawea and Charbonneau. These were the reactions of Indian peoples along the trek into the wilderness. Even if later novelists such as Vardis Fisher, James Alexander Thom, and Brian Hall moved beyond Hueston in the cultural complexities their probing novels address, she produced the best of the novels about Lewis and Clark in the first half of the twentieth century.[15]

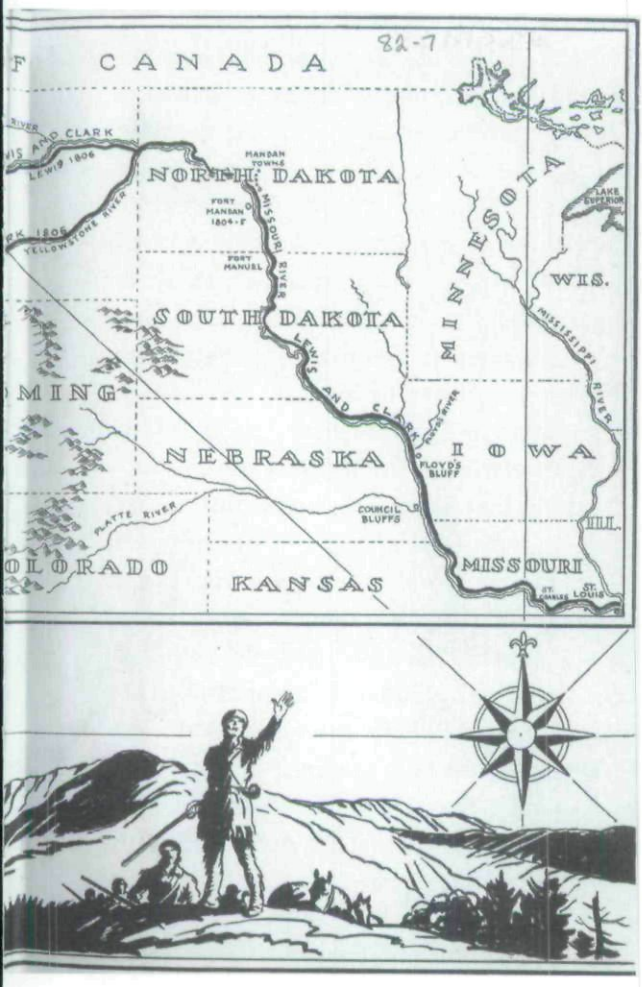
15. Novels written about Lewis and Clark in the first half of the twentieth century are discussed in Larry Godfrey, "A Survey of 20th Century Novels Based on the Lewis and Clark Expedition" (Master's thesis, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo., 1962).



The endpapers of Ethel Hueston's *Star of the West* (1935), drawn by Edward C. Caswell, center on Lewis and Clark and promise a tale of heroic actions from the Corps of Discovery.

Although Donald Culross Peattie promises in the Foreword of his novel *Forward the Nation* (1942) "that the events . . . are all true," he embroiders considerably on those facts. He disavows the title of historian, but nowhere, he adds, has he "distorted fact." Speaking in the third person, Peattie claims, "Whatever he has recounted here that is not stated in the records he believes can be discovered there between the lines."[16] These claims notwithstanding, Peattie, a well-known nat-

16. Peattie, *Forward the Nation* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), p. v.



uralist and author, adds much not told in the documents, considerably dramatizes events he considers central, and elides whole months of the journey. He opens with an imagined account of Sacagawea's capture and then quickly switches to President Thomas Jefferson for two or three paragraphs. A second chapter traces the Jefferson-Meriwether Lewis friendship, and the following chapter provides nearly a dozen pages on Napoleon and his consort Josephine before recrossing the Atlantic to describe plans for the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Peattie likewise embraces the Sacagawea myth. His brief novel plays up her role and in doing so undercuts the important contributions of several other white and Indian leaders. When Sacagawea is deathly sick near the Rockies, the author intrudes with the thought, "Do you [Lewis] understand that the whole success of your venture hangs on that girl's living through this hour" (p. 91)? A bit later the author adds that in the history of the United States, "no other woman ever served it [the country] better" (p. 109). For Peattie, Sacagawea is the guide for much of the expedition. He also distorts the journals in suggesting that Lewis is more attracted to her than Clark and that George Shannon is in love with her. When in his note on sources, Peattie "acknowledges a large debt" to Grace Hebard (pp. 280–81), one better understands his interpretation of the Indian woman. Peattie also follows Hebard in arguing that Sacagawea lived to be an old woman who died in Wyoming on 9 April 1884.

These fascinations with Sacagawea skew Peattie's story. He all but omits the expedition's earlier contact with other Indians on their way up the Missouri to visit the Mandans. We also get little after the contact with Sacagawea's people, the Shoshone. Worst of all, the return trip is telescoped into a few pages. Finally, although Peattie is a skilled, smooth stylist, his experimental plot misfires. He uses the story of the Louisiana Purchase and Napoleon's difficulties as a parallel narrative to the saga of the corps's months spent descending the Columbia and returning. Flashing quickly from the wilderness West to Washington, D.C., to speak of Jefferson and then on to Paris to depict Napoleon's failures, the author undermines his plot, making it hard to follow and more difficult to accept. Even though Peattie's story is invitingly written, he has overemphasized the importance of Sacagawea and truncated the story of Lewis and Clark in his "reading between the lines."

Of other novels written about Lewis and Clark before the mid-twentieth century, Della Gould Emmons's *Sacajawea of the Shoshones* (1943) most resembles Eva Emery Dye's *The Conquest*. Like Dye, Emmons follows closely Grace Hebard's interpretation of Sacagawea as a notable guide and interpreter for the explorers. Emmons also accepts Hebard's questionable view that the Indian woman lived until 1884.

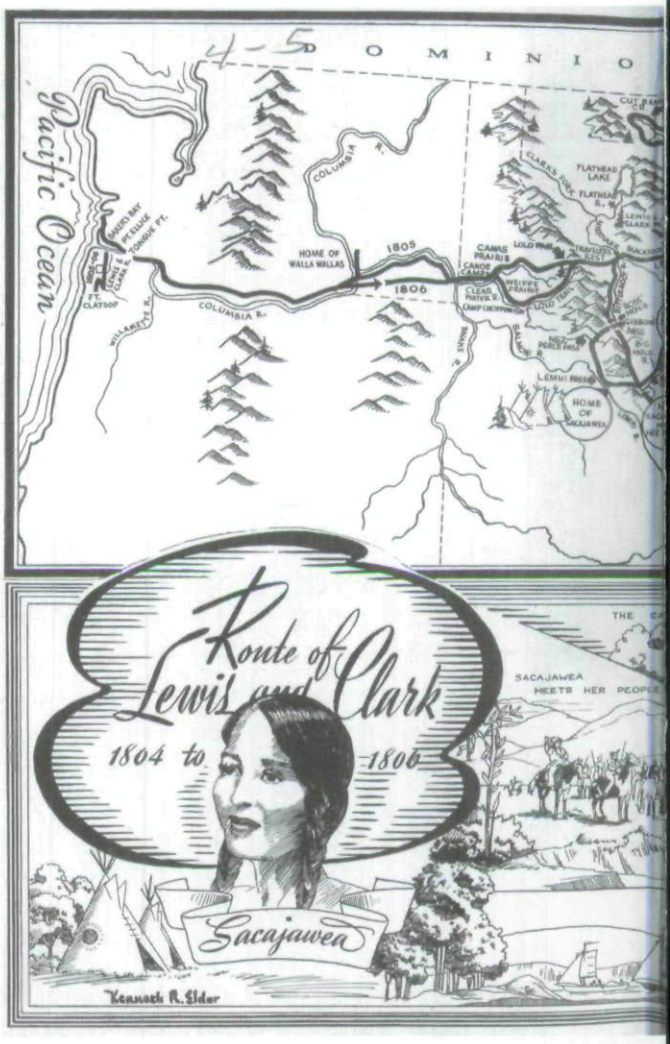
Similar to other female novelists who have written about the Shoshone woman, the author of *Sacajawea of the Shoshones* portrays the Bird Woman as romantically drawn to William Clark, and he somewhat to her.[17]

In tone, Emmons's novel reminds one of Hueston's *Star of the West*. Both works of fiction are sentimental romances, overflowing with emotional descriptions of human thoughts and actions. When the young and very pregnant Sacagawea first encounters Clark, she is immediately transformed by his helpful actions. As he lifts a heavy load of furs she is carrying, his "look of understanding and sympathy . . . turned Little Bird Woman's starved heart over and over and upset her world then and there so completely that it changed the remainder of her long life" (p. 100). Alienated from her beastly and lascivious husband Charbonneau, Emmons's Sacagawea dreams of what her life might be with a handsome, kindly, and heroic man like Clark.

Although Emmons appends a brief section of historical sources to each chapter, her book is driven more by imagination than facts. Repeatedly, she enters Sacagawea's consciousness, explaining the young Shoshone woman's inmost desires. For Emmons, Sacagawea is not only a guide and interpreter for the expedition, she virtually saves Clark's life and sometimes seems to be as important as the captains in determining the success of their journey. This novel demonstrates how strongly the myth of Sacagawea as guide had fastened on fictional interpretations of the expedition by 1950.

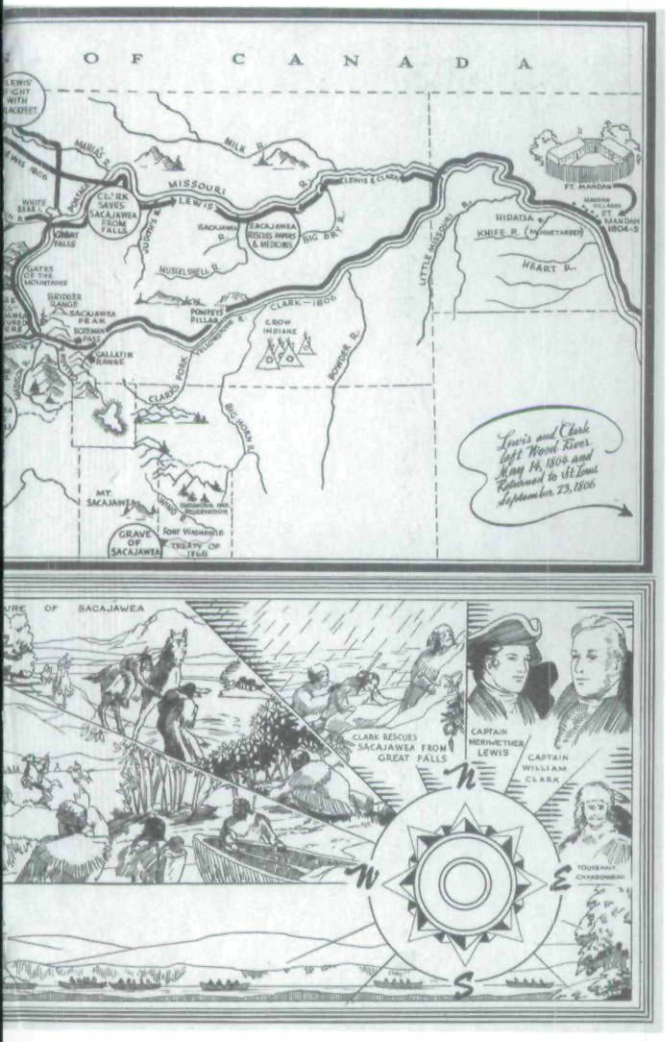
By mid-century, a few patterns had emerged in fiction about Lewis and Clark. Most novelists had made use of the Thwaites edition of the expedition's journals to provide a strong historical sense in their works, but they nearly always added to or subverted these sources for their fictional purposes. Some created new characters for their novels;

17. Emmons, *Sacajawea of the Shoshones* (Portland, Oreg.: Binfords & Mort, 1943). Emmons's novel became a primary source for the only well-known film of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, *The Far Horizon* (1955). Starring Donna Reed as Sacagawea and Charlton Heston as William Clark, the film emphasized their attractions to one another. The film's producers conveniently omitted Sacagawea's child "Pomp" with Charbonneau, evidently thinking that moviegoers of the 1950s would not accept a mother's attentions for another man. A disappointing effort, the film was widely panned.



Drawn by Kenneth R. Elder, the endpapers of Della Gould Emmons's *Sacajawea of the Shoshones* (1943) suggest a central role for the young Indian woman on the expedition.

others omitted occurrences so as to stress competing actions; and all created conversations missing from the historical sources. Even more obvious, novelists had fallen in love with Sacagawea. By the middle of the twentieth century, fiction writers had distorted her role in the expedition. They had helped create a Sacagawea myth that transformed her into a central figure in the journey, often making her the chief guide for the explorers. Several of these emphases continued in nov-



els published in the next decades, but others appeared to become notable parts of the later fiction written about Lewis and Clark.

Idaho author Vardis Fisher was an American author of considerable repute by time he wrote his story of Lewis and Clark in *Tale of Valor* (1958).[18] The recipient of a Ph.D. with high honors from the Univer-

18. Vardis Fisher, *Tale of Valor: A Novel of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1958).

sity of Chicago, Fisher had already published more than twenty novels, including his Harper Prize-winning *Children of God* (1939) about the Mormons. Driven, highly individualistic, iconoclastic, and an advocate of a harsh realism in one's personal life and writings, Fisher wanted to tell his story factually—and dramatically.[19]

Fisher moves well beyond previous novelists in plumbing the characters of Lewis and Clark. Fisher's melancholy but whimsical Meriwether Lewis is witty, dry-humored, shrewd, mischievous, and a superb leader. Fisher uses a variety of terms to describe Lewis: a romantic man of "insatiable curiosity" (p. 221) and "sly mirth" (p. 349), but also "irrepressible" (p. 427). From Fisher's perspective, Clark is a wonderful balance to Lewis. The red-headed frontiersman knows Indians, is stern and disciplined, and always dependable. Clark "had no taste for . . . jests" (p. 211), Fisher writes. He might be "exhausted but [also] undaunted" (p. 290), "a determined man" (p. 344) of "indomitable" (p. 351) spirit. Both Lewis and Clark are self-disciplined, drive themselves, and care about their men. No previous novelist had so fully developed the warm, mutual relationship between the two captains, their complementary leadership, and their inner lives.

Fisher is also much intrigued with the Shoshone, or Snake, Indian woman Sacagawea. Although he avoids overemphasizing her role as a guide, he nonetheless develops fully her usefulness as an interpreter, her knowledge of roots and berries, her attachment to the red-headed captain (Clark), her indefatigable buoyancy and optimism, and her positive impact on the corps. Fisher expands the historical record to make Sacagawea an intriguing, persuasive character.

One limitation undercuts Fisher's otherwise superb novel, however. From the beginning to the end, he strains to sustain a high-pitched level of tension, stress, and threat. Opening his work with the expedition's traumatic confrontations with the Teton, or Brulé, Sioux on their way up the Missouri, Fisher then keeps his story revved up

19. Fisher's historical research for his fiction is treated in George Frederick Day, *The Uses of History in the Novels of Vardis Fisher* (New York: Revisionist Press, 1976), and Joseph M. Flora, *Vardis Fisher* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965). Other useful comments on Fisher, his treatment of Indians, and Lewis and Clark appear in several essays in *Rediscovering Vardis Fisher: Centennial Essays*, ed. Joseph M. Flora (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 2000).

through the corps's nearly nonstop difficulties with hunger, terrain and climate, flagging morale, and their need for horses. Even though the journals reveal days of less-than-deadly strain, Fisher passes quickly over these mundane times to load up his narrative with drama. In keeping his focus on action, he devotes only fifty pages to the return trip but four hundred pages to the journey from the Sioux conflicts to the Pacific Coast in 1804–1805. Occasionally, the author makes good use of humor, including the scatological comments of the men about their sexual appetites. But this novel is deadly serious, full of the harsh realism Fisher advocated for all fiction writing.[20]

In his novel on the Lewis and Clark journey, *The Gates of the Mountains* (1963), Will Henry (Henry Wilson Allen) adopts a narrative technique he and other historical novelists often utilize.[21] Henry's fiction about Wyatt Earp, General Custer, Chief Joseph, the James brothers, and his Civil War novels employ an imaginary or tangential character through which to tell the larger story. In *Gates of the Mountains*, the shadowy character of François ("Frank") Rivet becomes a participant in and mouthpiece for the Lewis and Clark Expedition. In addition, Rivet grows up, transitioning from an idealistic, unreliable, romantic boy into a diligent, observant, and thoughtful man.

Through Rivet, Henry narrates three tales in one. First, Frank provides much of the novel's historical framework by helping Clark prepare his journal accounts and by commenting on Lewis's diary entries. Second, like so many other heroes of Lewis and Clark novels, Frank immediately and wholly falls in love with Sacagawea. Third, Frank's search for his father, who has disappeared years ago and is rumored to live among the Shoshone, provides a quest motif for the novel. On several occasions, unfortunately, Frank carries too much authorial freight, with Henry the novelist asking him to know and do things beyond his temporal ken. And his first-moment infatuation with Sacagawea is too much. At their initial meeting, Frank says:

20. Fisher makes a case for the harsh realism in his frontier fiction in John R. Milton, *Three West: Conversations with Vardis Fisher, Max Evans, Michael Straight* (Vermillion, S.Dak.: Dakota Press, 1970), pp. 12–14.

21. Will Henry [Henry Wilson Allen], *The Gates of the Mountains* (New York: Random House, 1963).

"When she raised her eyes and looked at me, my heart stopped beating. . . . I loved Sacajawea beyond time, beyond place, beyond reason. It was that way in the beginning, that way in the end; it was the *all*, the final thing" (p. 118).

Readers might dismiss, with good reason, Henry's novel as too emotional, too laden with chance and circumstance, too contrived—until they realize that the first chapters are portrayed through Frank's adolescent consciousness. Not until the idealistic boy achieves manhood in the latter sections of the novel do we see a more realistic, probing portrait of the corps, its participants, and their experiences. William Clark tries to teach Frank, but the young half-French, half-Pawnee has to learn the world's complexities through his own adventures. One of the most revealing scenes in this regard takes place when Clark takes Frank along to visit Sacagawea, the "savage" Indian, and her husband Charbonneau. When Frank sees the Indian "squaw" kill a puppy, throw it immediately, ungutted and unskinned, into a pot, and spit tobacco juice, some of which dribbles into the stew pot, he quickly realizes that he views Sacagawea through love-blinded eyes (pp. 286–87). Still, by the end of the novel, Frank chooses to remain with Charbonneau, Sacagawea, and other Indians on the Northern Plains. He has accepted his mixed-race backgrounds, grasped more of the world's complexities, and taken on growing responsibilities as a newly matured man.

Will Henry's biographer astutely argues that *Gates of the Mountain* was not intended "to introduce historical characters, but to present aesthetically pleasing historomance."[22] Indeed. By judiciously combining quotations from the Lewis and Clark journals with the imagined details of Frank Rivet's life and mind, Henry produces a hybrid historical novel, part fact and part fiction. In this juxtaposition of history and imagination, the author furnishes one of the more valuable novels about Lewis and Clark.

The lengthy historical romance *Sacajawea* (1979) by Anna Lee Waldo remains the most unusual fictional work about the expedi-

22. Robert L. Gale, *Will Henry/Clay Fisher (Henry W. Allen)* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), p. 36.

tion.[23] Selling well more than a million copies—more, perhaps, than all the other Lewis and Clark novels together—and remaining on the *New York Times* bestseller list for several months, Waldo's enormous work is two or three times longer than most other novels about the expedition. One scholar has estimated that the Lewis and Clark journals contain about one hundred ten references to Sacagawea and, if condensed, these references would fill no more than thirty to forty pages in an average-sized book.[24] But Waldo's huge novel runs to more than fourteen hundred pages. Imagination—sheer invention—dominates this fat work.

Sections of Waldo's novel suggest extensive historical research on her part. Her bibliography, extending to eighteen pages, includes citations to major manuscript collections. Even more extensive are the sixty pages of thorough endnotes. Additionally, each of the fifty-seven chapters opens with a quotation from a pertinent historical, biographical, or ethnographic source. An Epilogue augments the historical component of the novel by reviewing the controversies concerning Sacagawea's death in 1812 or in 1884. Judged from these evidences alone, the novel seems based primarily on thorough and discerning historical research. Such is not the case, unfortunately. Most of the excessively long novel comes directly from the author's fertile imagination. For example, Sacagawea's thoughts about her parents, sexual experiences, religious convictions, and her feelings about Clark, Lewis, and other members of the corps are unrecorded, yet Waldo includes chapter after chapter on these topics. Perhaps one scholar put it best in stating that the novel is "loosely based on the life of Sacagawea."[25]

Why, then, has this work attracted so many enthusiastic and devoted readers? First of all, Waldo understands apt storytelling. Her story moves; it seldom drags. Her major characters, Sacagawea, Lewis, Clark, and Charbonneau, are provocatively drawn. The author also comprehends what many general readers of fiction enjoy. After accepting Grace Hebard's case for the "long-life" version of Sacagawea's

23. Waldo, *Sacajawea* (New York: Avon, 1979).

24. William Jeffrey Patten, "Sacagawea: The History of a Myth" (Master's thesis, Portland State University, Oreg., 1998), p. 17.

25. Beckham, *Literature of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, p. 250.

days, Waldo writes in her Acknowledgments, "I hope that my readers will be thankful for a story that begins with a child wondering about the origin of the ancient medicine circle and ends with an old woman sensing the termination of a free, nomadic culture" (p. viii). Even though historians and other academics have roundly criticized—even scorned—what they consider the inadequacies and superficialities of Waldo's romance novel, general readers have bought it by the millions—and continue to do so. It is by far the most popular of novels written about Lewis and Clark and Sacagawea.

James Alexander Thom's *From Sea to Shining Sea* (1984), a stirringly written novel, devotes the final three hundred of nearly nine hundred pages to the Lewis and Clark Expedition.[26] The long book opens with the Clark family during the American Revolution and closes with William Clark's return to his home in 1806. Throughout this expansive novel, the author keeps his attention on the personalities of his major characters. The relationships between Clark and Lewis, among the men of the corps, between the captains and their men, between the corps and native leaders, between Clark and Sacagawea, and between Clark and York—these human relationships dominate the novel. Clark, Lewis, Charbonneau, Sacagawea, York, and several of the expedition's men emerge as full, well-rounded characters in this very human story.

Thom also moves beyond other novelists in foreshadowing dramatic incidents. His descriptions of Sacagawea's entry into Shoshone country and the hours before her fortuitous meeting with her brother Cameahwait are particularly well done. Likewise, he avoids the authorial intrusions that mar so many of the other Lewis and Clark novels. On the other hand, the author's telescoping of some events is surprising considering the length of his narrative. Thom treats the nearly eleven months from the corps's arrival at Fort Clatsop until the end of 1806 in less than ten pages. That means we get almost nothing about the return trip, the difficulties with the Blackfeet, Lewis's wounding,

26. Thom, *From Sea to Shining Sea* (New York: Villard Books, 1984). Thom has written another novel about an important member of the expedition: *Sign-Talker: The Adventure of George Drouillard on the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000).

the leave-taking of Sacagawea and Charbonneau, and the arrival in Saint Louis. The elision of all these important events and further illustrations of character development flattens out the novel's conclusion and leaves one dissatisfied with the story's ending.

Still, *From Sea to Shining Sea* remains one of the two or three most rewarding fictions about Lewis and Clark. Thom's clear literary talents, his probing depictions of personality, his adroit use of humor, his ability to suit appropriate language to individual characters greatly enlarge the literary worth of this memorable novel. Grand in conception, panoramic in organization, and probing in its treatment of character, Thom's story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition is an important contribution to the fictional treatment of this magnificent historical event.

Brian Hall's *I Should Be Extremely Happy in Your Company* (2002), a recent novel about Lewis and Clark, is, by far, the most experimental in form and content.[27] Hall's work is minimalistic in style, explicitly realistic in the treatment of sexuality, sometimes elliptical in conversations, and it frequently employs stream of consciousness in its interior monologues. But the most notable feature is the author's apt employment of several viewpoints to tell his story. We get, as expected, extensive sections from Lewis and Clark's perspectives; these sections are contrapuntally placed alongside those from Sacagawea and Charbonneau—and briefer ones from Jefferson and York. Hall takes native thoughts and actions seriously, and on most occasions, these alternating sections seem well suited to the varied narrators.

Hall's novel exudes darkness. His Meriwether Lewis, beset by his isolationist tendencies and his self doubts, leads his men but seldom befriends them. His depression and illness lead to his suicide. Even

27. Hall, *I Should Be Extremely Happy in Your Company: A Novel of Lewis and Clark* (New York: Viking, 2003). The newest novel on Lewis and Clark, more spoof and parody than traditional historical fiction, is Howard Frank Mosher's, *The True Account Concerning a Vermont Gentleman's Race to the Pacific Against and Exploration of the Western American Continent Coincident to the Expedition of Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003). Mosher's novel follows in the western tall-tale tradition stretching from Mark Twain to Larry McMurtry. I have been unable to obtain two other Lewis and Clark novels: Louis Charbonneau, *Trail: The Story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), and Rita Cleary, *River Walk: A Frontier Story* (Unity, Maine: Five Star Western, 2000).

William Clark, so often treated by historians and other novelists as warm, friendly, and approachable, wonders in this novel about his achievements in his later years. Sacagawea dies in an epidemic, and York and Charbonneau wander despairingly at the end of their lives. Only Seaman's thumping tail seems to sound positive notes in Hall's novel.

Those unacquainted with the chronology and major events of the Lewis and Clark Expedition will find this novel difficult going. In fact, Hall's innovative organization and style lead to considerable confusion. Chronology, specific incidents, and sequence get lost in the conflicting perspectives. The author's tendency to overwrite—his diction and syntax often calling attention to themselves—will put off other readers. In short, Hall's novel remains a curiously mixed effort. The author's multiple viewpoints provide appealing complexity, and his innovative style reflects trends in contemporary, postmodern American literature. But his self-absorption, indeed his excessive self-reflexivity, will alienate some readers. They will also find sections of the novel, especially from Sacagawea and Charbonneau's viewpoints, irritatingly obscure. For each clear strength, the novel betrays a limiting weakness.

On more than a few occasions, historians, biographers, ethnologists, and historical editors imply that they travel the high road of discernment in studying the past while novelists, dramatists, and other creative artists traverse a lower level of understanding. Paul Russell Cutright, distinguished scholar and author of well-received books on Lewis and Clark, represents this point of view in arguing, "Generally speaking, historians look down their noses at historical novels." Fictional accounts of the expedition, he continues, reinforce this negative reaction among historians because novelists have imagined conversations and distorted actual happenings.[28] Wallace Stegner, our original Wise Man of the American West, points out some of this distaste for historical fiction from a different angle. "It is my impression," Stegner writes, "that too many trained professionals consider narra-

28. Cutright, *History of the Lewis and Clark Journals*, p. 210.

tive history, history rendered as story, to be something faintly disreputable, the proper playground of lady novelists."[29]

I want to argue for another viewpoint, one that posits convergences between historians and novelists. As Stegner further points out, "Calliope and Clio are not identical twins, but they *are* sisters."[30] I believe their close family connections, their sisterhood, become clear in the concept of "story." Historians and novelists are both committed storytellers; both want readers to follow easily and well what they say about events, people, and concepts. Among those writing about Lewis and Clark, there is a long, clear line of storytelling historians from Bernard DeVoto and John Bakeless, through Donald Jackson, up to James Ronda. These historians, like novelists, create narrative peaks and valleys. Superb narrative historians like these also look for ways to hook readers with appealing characterizations, dramatic scenes, attention-catching descriptions, and poetic language.

Undoubtedly, two generations of excessive allegiances to social history, cliometrics, and cultural theory have blinded many historians to the links that connect them with novelists. But, to reiterate, narrative historians and fiction writers are tellers of tales, attempting to narrate the past through interest-whetting stories. The sooner historians re-perceive their similarities with novelists the less likely they are to scorn historical novelists, and, perhaps, the more likely to re-learn helpful storytelling techniques from those fictionists.

Conversely, novelists writing about the Lewis and Clark Expedition might attract more positive responses from historians if they re-think how they produce their fiction about the Corps of Discovery. First, novelists do not need to create fictional characters or to distort the historical record in their fiction. There is sufficient drama and human interest in the expedition's story to draw readers. The journals are replete with moments of high adventure, superb natural and human descriptions, and engrossing clashes among cultures and peoples.

29. Stegner, *The Sound of Mountain Water* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1969), p. 202.

30. Ibid., p. 205.

Second, Brian Hall's recent novel on Lewis and Clark proves that novelists may—and should—utilize multiple voices in telling their stories. We must have the viewpoints of the white leaders—President Jefferson, Captains Lewis and Clark; but we should get the perspectives of the other officers and recruits, too, the nonelite. Mixing in the reactions of Sacagawea and other American Indians involved in the trek will also thicken fictional descriptions. Think, too, of how much the views of York, Charbonneau, and mixed-blood participants provide rich sociocultural complexities for skilled fictionists.

Third, in addition to utilizing these varied voices, novelists need to find ways to tell stories that illustrate cultural conversations and combinations as often as events of clash and conflict. Narratives that focus only on contention and controversy oversimplify and falsify the ways that Lewis and Clark found to communicate across racial, ethnic, and class barriers. Sacagawea, Cameahwait, Twisted Hair, and Coboway, for instance, hurdled racial and cultural differences to befriend and aid members of the corps. Concurrently, Lewis and Clark and their men established links of amity and alliance with native groups. Complex, even messy, fiction based on these cohering tendencies will help us to understand better the fragmented unities of our own times.

In rediscovering these large possibilities of complex storytelling, historical novelists may avoid pitfalls some have encountered in fictionalizing Lewis and Clark. They need not misrepresent or exaggerate the historical account; material aplenty for stirring fiction is available in firsthand sources about the expedition. And if novelists incorporate the varied voices and complex sociocultural relationships involved in the journey, they will produce provocative, probing narratives about one of our country's most significant stories.

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