

THE GOOD WORD

A COUNCIL OF THE PEOPLE UPON THE OCCASION OF THE BICENTENARY OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION

"In our ways, spiritual consciousness is the highest form of politics. We must live in harmony with the natural world and recognize that excessive exploitation can only lead to our own destruction. We cannot trade the welfare of our future generations for profit... We are instructed to carry love for one another, and to show great respect for all beings of the earth. We must stand together, the four sacred colors of man, as the one family that we are, in the interest of peace... Our energy is the combined will of all people with the spirit of the natural world, to be of one body, one heart, and one mind."

Leon Shenandoah, Fire Keeper of the Central Fire for the Haudenosaunee Confederacy

Before the coming of the Europeans to North America a great Peacemaker arose who united the five tribes of the Iroquois Confederation by teaching a philosophy founded on the Three Words: Skennen (Peace), Kasastensera (Strength) and Kariwiio (the Good Word).

The meaning of the Kariwiio (the Good Word) is found in words of Unity and Respect. Unity is nurtured by the message that the people should "respect each other as though they are one". Therefore, all groups and factions of various nations must be known as relatives to each other and must respect one another, and thus violence would cease. The Peacemaker told the people that they could mend their mistakes to the Creator, and that then the ideals of Peace and Unity would be born.

Upon the occasion of the bicentenary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition we wish to follow the example of the great Peacemaker. The Pennsylvania State University announces an open forum, a gathering of the people, in which the Good Word may be spoken and heard. Native Americans, African Americans, European Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans are all invited to attend, to listen and to speak. We share a common destiny which is the dream of the future of America. That future can be made real by meeting together in public, speaking in Unity and in Truth.

The council will consist of a circle of events: an open symposium of major thinkers and speakers from each of the four sacred colors of mankind; panel discussions and papers addressing cultural, political and environmental consequences of the history which followed Lewis and Clark; the premiere of an original musical drama that tells the story of unity and respect against the background of racial division and mistrust; and an educational outreach program that will disseminate the Good Word through community centers and schools across the Commonwealth.

I) THE OPEN SYMPOSIUM

A three-day forum of historians, scholars, artists and environmentalists scheduled for November 14-16, 2002. The symposium will bring together major voices from the all races. They will conduct a public discussion of the history and the future of relations among the races of America. The legacy of Lewis and Clark will serve as a springboard to a larger discussion about the importance of unity among the American people, and the necessity of truthfully telling the stories of our past if that unity is to be achieved in the future. This symposium will be open to the entire University community, and hopefully carried by the State access television. Ideally, the Governor would be present to begin the Good Word with a formal declaration of repentance for the past treatment of Native peoples.

Sessions will be held throughout the three days for council attendees. These sessions will focus on three major concerns, three types of stories seldom told in the context of the Lewis and Clark Expedition:

1) The cultural impact of the Voyage:

How were Native American cultures shaken and often destroyed in the aftermath of the Expedition? How did Native cultures respond? And how has that history shaped perceptions of the majority culture regarding the American past?

Also, how were African-Americans affected through the impact of the opening of the West? This is a different story from that of Native Americans, as African-Americans found both new freedom and new servitude in the rapidly colonized West. The relations between Native Americans and African Americans is complex and deserving of general understanding.

2) The environmental impact of the Voyage.

How the land itself has changed with the arrival of the Euro-Americans? Or more precisely, how has the use pattern upon the land changed, as an attitude towards land as a "resource" began to determine the subsequent development of the West. Does the Expedition reveal a more complex, and perhaps conflicted, environmental heritage, a stance that falls between the act of discovery and industry as the experiential attitude of the first explorers meets the instrumental attitude of the progress of development? What happens to the earth when we view it as merely something to be controlled?

3.) The role of Federal Science.

How did politics shape the agenda of the scientific voyage, and how do those politics continue to shape our understanding of Lewis and Clark.? We think of them, after all, as the Voyage of Discovery, a Federal expeditionary force of scientific inquiry. The Expedition marks the

beginning of the large federally budgeted science projects that continue to the present day with NASA explorations. The Exploration brought back samples of new plant and animal species that broadened the development of biology. The notes on Native cultures prompted and resolved ethnological questions (such as the mysterious tribe of Welsh Indians long thought to inhabit the further West.)

These three points are not separate issues, but interrelated aspects of the same impact event: Lewis and Clark's "opening " of the West. Similarly, the sessions of the conference will bring these different perspective together at large. The conference will not ghettoize these concerns into separate program elements, as though one could be concerned about the environmental impact of the Expedition without also considering the lives of the peoples who lived upon those lands.

II) YORK - A MUSICAL DRAMA

An original, full-length musical drama will be premiered as a center piece of the conference. The musical drama tells the story of York, the slave of Capt William Clark. York accompanied the Voyage of Discovery all the way to the Pacific as an almost equal member of the troop, but he returned to the United States as a slave and had to struggle for 15 years to finally earn his freedom. Synopsis of the two-act music drama is attached.

III) A STATE-WIDE EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Lewis and Clark Project will develop an educational-outreach program designed to take the stories and findings of the conference out into high schools and community centers across Pennsylvania. The educational-outreach program will live long after the three day conference and work towards giving all the people of Pennsylvania a broader perspective on Lewis and Clark and American history in general, a perspective more fully grounded in the concerns of Native cultures and of the earth. A 45 minute extract from the York musical drama will be crafted that conveys the sentiments of the entire Lewis and Clark Project. This artistic outreach program can literally touch thousands of children and their parents, giving them a new perspective, not just on the Lewis and Clark adventure, but on their roles and responsibilities as Americans.

YORK

Of all the men who risked their lives in the Lewis and Clark expedition, there is one whose story has seldom been told. All of the other men were rewarded with money and land. But this one man received nothing at all. The others went on to live their lives. This one man returned to bondage. The others returned to a free America. This man returned from the most daring adventure of the age and resumed his life as a slave. This is his story, the story of York, the only African-American with the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

The performance will combine drama, music and dance in a full evening's entertainment. We will watch York grow from a mere slave to a free man and a leader of men. York is an actual historical character and the story which the show tells will combine historical accounts of York, gained from the journals and letters of the explorers, and legendary tales of York told in the years after his death.

York has been almost entirely forgotten. But the man ought to be well known to all Americans, and especially African-Americans. We intend this show to live on after its first performance and help establish for York the fame he deserves. This story would be particularly suitable for joint productions with companies in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and other cities.

This full-length musical theatre piece continues Trinkley and Charnesky's interest in Lewis and Clark which began with *The Last Voyage of Captain Meriwether Lewis*, a cantata premiered by the Penn State Glee Club in the Fall of 1999. The action of *York* follows the epic sweep of the daring Voyage of Discovery while focusing on a single hero: York, William Clark's boyhood slave who traveled with the Corps of Discovery.

YORK SYNOPSIS

Prologue.

In 1864, sixty years after the Expedition, two recruitment officers enter a town in West Virginia looking to enlist young men in the Civil War. Patrick Gass, the last living member of the Corps of Discovery, volunteers for service. The officers scoff at the 80 year old geezer. But Gass explains that he knows better than anyone what the War is being fought about. Gass tells them that long ago he was a member of the Lewis and Lark Expedition, and that he wrote the first published account of that mission. But there were many things he never committed to writing, things he never told anyone until now. Gass tells the enlistment officers that he once knew a man whose life was shaped by America's greatest virtues and darkest evils: York, the slave of William Clark. And York and he share a secret bond. Gass tells them this story of the slave:

Act One: The Journey.

Captain Meriwether Lewis has convinced William Clark to join him on the voyage West across the Louisiana Purchase. The scene opens at the home of William Clark as he makes final preparations for departure. Clark's slave, York, says good bye to his love Mary, a slave who is owned by a different master. Mary and York vow to marry once York returns from the West. Before the couple can actually say their final good byes, York is sent off on some final tasks for his master, William Clark. Mary is discovered by her own master and she is ordered to return home, accompanied by her master's wife to be sure she doesn't sneak away. York returns, but is ordered by his master to board the boat and depart. York and Mary never get to say their final good byes.

Captain Meriwether Lewis and William Clark arrive at Fort Kaskaskia looking for some last few men to take with him on the Expedition. The commanding officer refuses to let them take his most valuable man, Patrick Gass, a carpenter, soldier and experienced frontiersman. Gass approaches Lewis personally and asks to be taken on the Expedition. Gass is added to the rolls of the Expedition and he contemptuously tells York to fetch his things. The two men develop an instant animosity towards each other.

The Lewis and Clark Voyage, itself, is told through the journal entries of Meriwether Lewis, William Clark and Patrick Gass. The Voyage of Discovery sets off from St. Louis traveling to the Mandan Indian village far to the north, where Sacajawea joins the party. York proves to be an equal member of the crew, and is esteemed by the Indians above all the white men. The Expedition crosses the Rocky Mountains under terrifying winter conditions.

Interspersed with the written accounts, we see York (who cannot write) speaking to Mary about the Voyage, and Mary back home in Kentucky speaking to York. Though they cannot hear each other, there is a deep spiritual connection between the two lovers.

At a dangerous river passage York saves the life of Patrick Gass. No one else was around to witness the event, and neither man talks about it to the crew. Gass never mentions it in his journal, embarrassed to have been saved by this black man. But from that moment the attitudes of the two men begin to change.

Finally the crew reach the Pacific. Caught up in the wild sense of freedom that the endless ocean gives them, Patrick Gass and York forge a fragile friendship, and Gass vows to meet with York again back home in America when they are both free men. At the act's close, York has a vision of the power and equality that the continent promises.

Act Two: The Aftermath.

Patrick Gass goes on to tell the Civil War recruitment officers the rest of the story, the story that no one in America knows, the part of the story he never wrote but which explains why America is threatened with its present Civil War.

All of the men of the Expedition are given gifts of money and land except for York, who remains Clark's slave. Clark refuses to give York his freedom. Worse yet, Clark does not even let York travel from St. Louis to Louisville where his betrothed wife Mary lives, the slave of a different master.

York tries desperately to persuade his master Clark to give him his freedom. Far from freeing York, Clark actually rents York out to a harsher master further South, and even further away from Mary.

Patrick Gass finds York. He has been trying to track him down to make good the promise forged at the Pacific. Gass convinces Captain Clark to take York back, but Clark still refuses to grant York his freedom.

Gass goes off in search of Mary to deliver news of York. He finds her, still waiting for her love, still faithful to the vow she made ten years before to York.

In a series of vignettes we see York suffering under ten years of protest, and Captain Clark finally weakening under this constant onslaught. Finally, Clark grants York his freedom. York sets off to join Mary in triumphant joy.

But the wife that York finds is already deathly ill, a victim of the cholera epidemic. York arrives just in time to reaffirm his love for Mary, who lies dying in bed. The two embrace at last, after more than twenty years, and Mary dies.

Having lost all that he loved in America, an angry and bitter York sets off West again, alone.

Epilogue.

The recruitment officers think that this was a bitter tale to tell in time of War, and perhaps treasonable. But there is more to the story, Gass insists. Gass continues:

In 1833, in North-central Wyoming, Patrick Gass is still searching for York of whom he had heard vague reports. Gass is captured by Crow Indians, who hold the man until their chief can determine whether he will live or die. The tribe are in a state of war with a neighboring Native tribe and have had terrible relations with the Euro-Americans who have passed through only to steal or cheat them.

Gass prepares bravely to meet his end. But when the chief of the Crow people arrives, we find it is York, himself, now a chief among the native peoples. York finally enjoys perfect peace and satisfaction, and has everything that he desires in community with the Crow people. York has finally found his freedom and he urges Gass to return East and work for freedom there. York leads his tribe of warriors, the people who have adopted him as their own, out to battle against a warring tribe of Blackfeet.

Gass returns East to tell his story, finally, which he had held a secret for so long.