Most criticism came in the form of post–war memoirs. While Bernstein agrees with the "Crossroads" text and laments its shelving, he, unlike Nobile, ends on a positive note:

> The very clash over the canceled NASM (National Air and Space Museum) exhibit may, ironically, spark a heightened interest in the issues of A–bomb history. Perhaps more Americans will become curious about the A–bomb event...[and] why it is being challenged in the mid–1990s.[9]

In 1945, had a bombing celebration taken place, the Enola Gay undoubtedly would have been ushered down Madison Avenue if possible. In the wake of the Vietnam debacle, there has been a clear change of emphasis. Bernstein believes that the decision to drop the bomb was, more or less, not a decision at all. With $2 billion spent on a project Truman inherited from the Roosevelt years, and a desire to end the war at all costs, it seemed almost inevitable.

Any change in the interpretation of history will not change history itself, only its perception by different generations. A lasting resolution to the debate over use of the bomb, like many other historical controversies—the slaughter of Native Americans and the nature of slavery leap to mind—may have to wait until those whose lives were directly touched by the event are no longer around to contest its morality.

9 Nobile, 240.

Graduate student Chris Sundheim reviews below a new book on the Lewis and Clark expedition during 1804–1806.

UNDAUNTED COURAGE: MERIWETHER LEWIS, THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE OPENING OF THE AMERICAN WEST.
By Stephen E. Ambrose. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Pp. 511, $27.50.

In a nation linked by interstate highways, fiber–optic cable, railroads, air traffic, radio waves, satellite signals, and the seemingly limitless Internet, most Americans today can scarcely picture a United States at the turn of the early 19th century, when St. Louis stood as the westernmost beacon of civilization. Few people then could say what lay beyond the Mississippi: scattered Indian communities, a largely uncharted mountain range and, somewhere still further west, the Pacific coast.

It was with barely more information than this that Meriwether Lewis and William Clark began their intrepid journey from St. Louis to the ocean and back. Stephen Ambrose, in this absorbing new volume on America's most celebrated explorers, takes readers along for what was surely the most important hike in U.S. history. The ride is exhilarating.

Ironically, Lewis's contemporaries could be forgiven for viewing the expedition as a failure. President Jefferson had sent the team with orders to follow the Missouri River in hopes of finding the elusive Northwest Passage, an all–water route across the continent. Jefferson hoped discovery of this new passage would help create a lucrative American trade network, which would end the British monopoly, help assimilate the Indians and prepare the area for eventual white settlement.

But ultimately, of course, it is what they saw and recorded, not what they didn't find, that endears Lewis and Clark to our national memory. Their story is epic. Exploring the newly purchased Louisiana Territory, they were the first Americans to realize the full reach of the North American continent. They were naturalists, diplomats, cartographers and outright adventurers. And they did more than any other frontiersmen to enhance knowledge of the trans–Mississippi West. This is never far from Ambrose's mind, so he is deeply enamored of these two, if occasionally overindulgent in his hero worship.

The center of this book is the expedition itself. Ambrose, after outlining Lewis' youth, sets about writing a month–by–month account of the journey. Over two–and–a–half years between 1804 and 1806, the 30–man Corps of Discovery paddled, walked and rode more than 4,000 miles. Ambrose's account is a painstaking recreation of all the attendant triumphs and hardships: witnessing the sprawling herds of buffalo and the immense, untouched Western landscape; negotiating through tense encounters with previously unknown tribes; surviving near–fatal meetings with grizzly bears; making the arduous push over the mountains in a late spring blizzard.

The author's masterful storytelling is this book's strongest asset. He is unsparing in details, most culled from Lewis and Clark's published journals. We hear of sleeping on a cold, wet river bank after a 20– or 30–mile hike and about the expedition's dreadfully monotonous all–meat diet, including meals of dog and horse. The enlisted men, Ambrose reminds us, were likely constant sufferers of venereal disease acquired from liaisons with Indian women. And the most valued item in the corps' reserves was surely the 120 gallons of whiskey considered essential for the men's endurance.

But there is also the thrill of discovery. Lewis and Clark recorded the first observation by Americans of the prairie dog, the pronghorn antelope and 120 other new species of animals, plus 178 new plants. They were the first white men to brave the rapids of the upper Missouri, the first to cross the Continental Divide. Ambrose describes the breathtaking sights with the senses of a novelist. Long fascinated by the Lewis and Clark cult, he has spent many family vacations retracing their steps through the Northern Plains states. The first–hand experience is reflected in vivid, evocative prose.

An important second theme lies in the figure of Jefferson himself. More than any other federal official, his unflagging interest in the West was the genesis of the Lewis and Clark expedition. It was Jefferson, Ambrose argues, who deserves the lion's share of credit for pursuing the Louisiana Purchase and promoting development of its vast acreage. One should recall that Louisiana was widely ridiculed by Federalists as a foolish purchase of ground thought to be mostly desert and untillable wasteland.

Jefferson and Lewis had a close relationship starting in Lewis's late teenage years. Both were loyal Virginians and hailed from the same planter–class social background. Lewis was Jefferson's personal secretary for several years prior to the expedition and lived with him in the President's House (it was not called the

White House until after the War of 1812). Under the president's tutelage, he received much of the scientific training needed to complete the expedition's natural history survey of flora and fauna. Jefferson's enthusiasm for such intellectual endeavors proved infectious. Much of it rubbed off on Lewis, who committed himself to learning the president's keen observation skills. His captivating journal entries are filled with the musings of an amateur botanist/zoologist schooled in the language of the Enlightenment.

Jefferson's orders were carefully worded to suggest an expedition to satisfy scientific curiosity. And yet implicit were other, more self–interested national goals. Jefferson wanted Lewis and his men to be the American advance team, informing Indians of their new White Father in Washington and promoting American trade prospects. They scouted for potential trading–post sites and told tribes that U.S. leaders had great wealth to share with Indians who cooperated and great power to deal harshly with those who did not. Ambrose sees in these tactics the seeds of American imperialism. Other thinly veiled material objectives were to lay some form of claim to the land, especially territory west of the Divide, and to sell the American public on the promise of an American empire that staddled the continent.

Ambrose's exceptional balance also is reflected in his assessment of Lewis and Jefferson's attitudes toward Indians. Both men admired most Indians and hoped someday they might be integrated into the American populace. Indian help, on more than one occassion, saved the expedition from ruin. Sacagawea, a 15–year–old Shoshone girl, was critical to the team's success as a guide and an interpreter. But aggressive tribes would be answered with aggression. While on the trail, Lewis lied to Indians and stole from them once. Late in the return trip, he and his men killed several warriors who tried (as many Indians did) to steal the troops' guns.

To many history students, Lewis and Clark are simple explorers with none of the character complexity afforded larger names such as Washington or Franklin. Americans, Ambrose notes, practically think the name is "Lewisandclark," a single entity with one face and one purpose. <u>Undaunted Courage</u> gives us a fully three–dimensional narrative of both the land and the men who crossed it. The high–school–text version of the expedition makes no mention of Lewis's manic–depression or his rocky political exploits as governor of Louisiana. Ambrose presents him as a genuinely tragic figure who was seemingly happy only when he was on the move. He never married, although he

desperately wanted to, and never adjusted to a life of heightened fame and new responsibilities after the expedition. Lewis was a national hero by age 30 and killed himself at 35.

Today an overland trip from the Mississippi to the Pacific coast requires little more than $100 in gasoline and about 35 highway hours. The enormity of Lewis and Clark's achievement is almost lost in a world where communication is instant and the only unexplored frontiers are the ocean floor or outer space. Lewis himself doubted whether he had contributed to mankind's progress, as he wrote in this oft–quoted journal entry made on his 31st birthday:

> I reflected that I had as yet done but little, very little indeed, to further the happiness of the human race, or to advance the information of the succeeding generation. I viewed with regret the many hours I have spent in indolence, and now soarly [sic] feel the want of that information which those hours would have given me had they been judiciously expended (280).

That, notes David Shribman in the Wall Street Journal, may have been one of Meriwether Lewis's few erroneous observations; "for in history's march, few advanced so far, learned so much, touched others so deeply—and transformed their nation so completely."