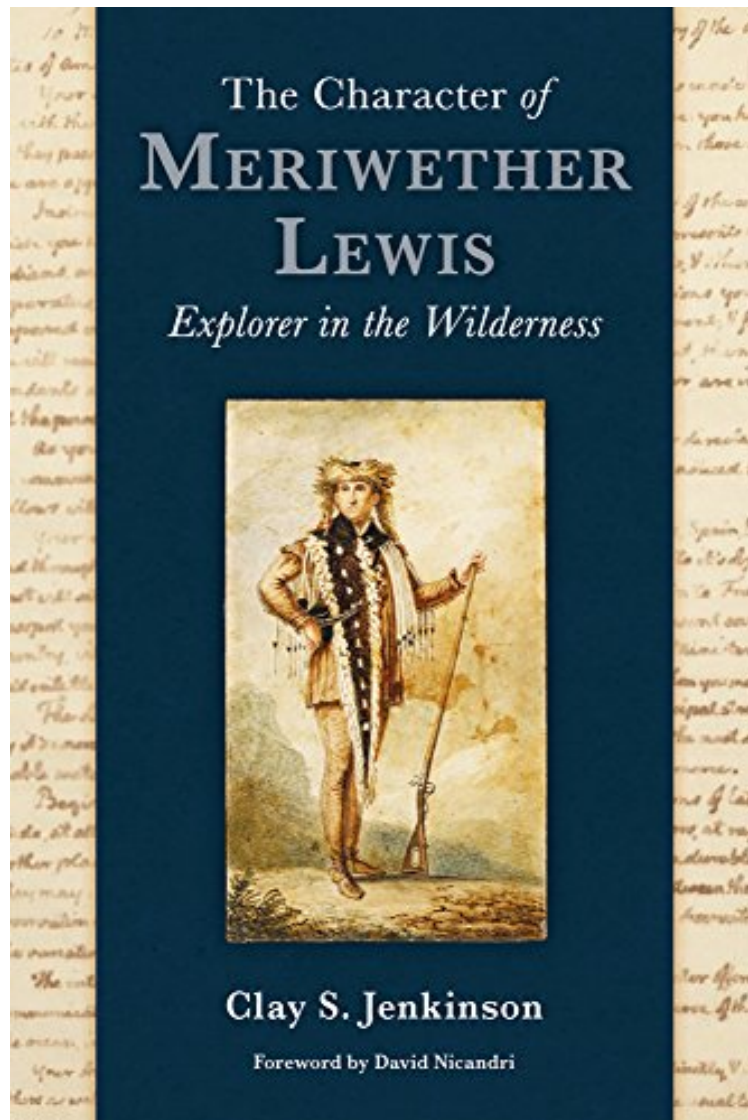


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# The Character of Meriwether Lewis: Explorer in the Wilderness

Clay S. Jenkinson

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#867814 in Books Jenkinson Clay S 2011-12-10Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.00 x 1.31 x 6.00l, 1.65  
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size: 43.Mb

**Clay S. Jenkinson : The Character of Meriwether Lewis: Explorer in the Wilderness** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Character of Meriwether Lewis: Explorer in the Wilderness:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great book, great read!By Linda BamberThere are many great books on the Lewis and Clark Expedition, but this must be the liveliest, most companionable, and most enjoyable to read. It combines totally trustworthy and extensive scholarship with a personal, idiosyncratic approach to its subject, a man

whom Jenkinson, as he himself says, loves thinking about. Here are a couple of things I loved about this book: 1. It avoids idealizing Lewis without falling into the all-too-familiar contemporary trap of relentlessly debunking a national hero, to the point where we forget there was anything interesting or admirable about him to begin with. Seriously: all the flaws and warts are there, but so are the things that make him worth thinking about in the first place. Because the author doesn't stay on message we never know what's coming next. That, in my opinion, is what makes things interesting. 2. Jenkinson takes liberties with his scholarly form, from time to time showing up in a personal and delightful way, breaking the fourth wall. For instance, late in the trip Lewis was shot in the ass by a fellow member of the expedition with whom he had gone hunting. Jenkinson dramatizes the event by leading up to it gradually, giving a thorough account of the previous day. At the end of the day he puts Lewis to bed and murmurs, Sleep well, Captain Lewis. Tomorrow will be another story altogether. There's something so confident about the direct address. It's not that Jenkinson doesn't know everything there is to know about his subject; but enough already, his writing sometimes seems to say, with the heaviness and solemnity of conventional scholarly writing. How about having some fun sometimes? Brilliant, wonderful book. I highly recommend it.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An absolutely spellbinding study of Meriwether Lewis. By Blackrock What a read! Insightful, thought provoking, thorough and just damned entertaining. If you are a fan of L C and have done a little homework, this will be one of the most gripping and memorable reads of your life. You may not agree with every one of the conclusions the author reaches (I didn't) or even the direction of some of his arguments, but isn't that what makes for great conversations! He structures his case (evidence) in such an orderly and lucid manner that you find yourself swept along (and thinking how glad you are that you don't have to refute it in writing). And he never falls into the trap of taking himself too seriously. I mean, how seriously should we argue and disagree about semantics from a distance of 200 years. Disagree if you will, but please do it pleasantly and then let's move on. Several times I became so engrossed while reading it that I was disappointed to wake up and return to the 21st century. Read some of the classic L C works first (Biddle, Thwaites, Bakeless, Ronda, et al. - and of course Ambrose time and again) so you will have a true appreciation and be up to speed before you pick up this seminal work. This is a must have book for all students of Lewis and Clark! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Prepare to be captivated.. By JNM Until recently I had not thought about Lewis Clark since public school, and I'm not sure I gave them much thought back then, other than just to mark the correct answers on a test. But I've been feeling compelled and inspired lately to take a closer look at our history, to better understand it, and the people who inhabited it. Nothing whets the appetite for learning more and sustaining interest than a complicated, complex and interesting character study. This is what Clay Jenkinson provides in *The Character of Meriwether Lewis*. I can confidently say that it is not necessary to have prior Lewis Clark knowledge in order to appreciate, understand, and enjoy this book. It is hardly possible to know less than I did before I picked it up. Which I did because I admire Clay Jenkinson's other work, such as his book *Becoming Jefferson's People* and memoir *Message on the Wind*, and because I am a huge fan of his weekly radio program/podcast, *The Thomas Jefferson Hour*. With this book, he has also won me over to Lewis Clark and especially to the complex, as he says fractured, character that is Meriwether Lewis. Clay Jenkinson approaches his subject not only from a humanities and historical perspective, but he clearly has an abiding affection for Meriwether Lewis. That comes through loud and clear. While he remains objective as he delves into and picks apart Lewis' strengths and misgivings, it is that affection and sincere intrigue that makes Jenkinson's account so compelling, so captivating, so mesmerizing. He is writing about something he loves, and it's hard not to pick up on and respond accordingly to that enthusiasm. For many of us, our brushes with figures such as Meriwether Lewis are limited to what happens in public school, and those encounters are often brief and oversimplified. We usually only ever skim the surface. It is a rare opportunity to get to know a historical icon as intimately as this portrayal affords. Our social studies teacher told us what Lewis did, what he achieved, what he contributed, Jenkinson invites us to know who Lewis was. Don't get me wrong I still learned loads about the expedition, its participants, the logistics, their struggles and triumphs and milestones. However, it is not a chronological consideration of the expedition. Through a series of essays, Jenkinson attempts to pry open Lewis' mind and enlighten us on the inner workings of his soul. He takes on the frustrating task of examining Lewis' journals and accounting for his long silences. When the switch was on, Jenkinson says, his writings were most revealing. But the switch was not always on. He challenges some traditionally held notions such as the one that Lewis and Clark represent the greatest American friendship. He postulates that they were not two men sharing a single soul, but quite different men. Men who made the same journey, but had different experiences, like seeing the same thing through a different lens. It is hard to see how the more stable Clark changed at all from the adventure as he carried on in quite a normal fashion upon his return. The more volatile Lewis would never be the same, his psyche forever impacted by his immersion into the wilderness. Jenkinson believes, as many scholars do, that this would result in Lewis taking his own life. To make his case, he also considers the affect of the loss of Lewis' dog, his early influences, his family dynamic, the premature death of his father, the anxiety of expectation, the frustrations of writer's block. But it is not necessary to list all the avenues of impact, influence, experience, and personality that Jenkinson explores in this book, my advice is just to read it, and prepare to be captivated. With *The Character of Meriwether Lewis*, Clay Jenkinson offers us the best of what history can do. We learn something not just about an historical person and not just about an important time in our nation's past,

but we learn something about the human condition, about relationship, and about the complexity of life. There has never been a better time to read this book, as it is one of the foundation texts for an HBO miniseries set to air in 2017. Who better to lead you down the Lewis Clark trail than someone who has spent decades examining and exploring the historic, literary, and physical landscapes traversed by the Corp of Discovery (every chapter includes hundreds of source notes) and who has spent such a great deal of time with Meriwether Lewis as to embody the man and bring him to life through live performances, all so that we may better understand this "fractured soul."

The human aspects of the famed explorer, in a revised and expanded biography Meriwether Lewis commanded the most important exploration mission in the early history of the United States. Clay S. Jenkinson takes a fresh look at Lewis, not to offer a paper cutout hero but to describe and explain a hyperserious young man of great complexity who found the wilderness of Upper Louisiana as exacting as it was exhilarating. Jenkinson sees Lewis as a troubled soul before he left St. Charles, Missouri, in May 1804. His experiences in lands "upon which the foot of civilized man had never trodden" further fractured his sense of himself. His hiring William Clark as his "partner in discovery" was, Jenkinson shows, the most intelligent decision he ever made. When Clark was nearby, Lewis's leadership was stable and productive. When Clark was absent and thus unable to provide a calming influence on his mercurial friend, Lewis tended to get into trouble. Jenkinson argues that if Clark had been with Lewis on the Natchez Trace, the governor of Upper Louisiana would not have killed himself. Jenkinson sees Lewis's 1809 suicide not as an inexplicable mystery, but the culmination of a series of pressures that extend back to the expedition and perhaps even earlier. *The Character of Meriwether Lewis: Explorer in the Wilderness* is a revision of an earlier book, greatly expanded with new scholarship and insights gained through Jenkinson's extensive participation in the Lewis and Clark Expedition Bicentennial. Jenkinson discusses Lewis's sense of humor, his oft-stated fear that the expedition he was leading might collapse, his self-conscious learnedness, and his inability to re-enter "polite society" after his return. The book attempts to reconstruct from Lewis's journal entries and letters his rich, troubled personality and his aspirations to heroism. When the American mythology surrounding him is removed and Lewis is allowed to reveal himself, he emerges as a fuller, more human, and endlessly fascinating explorer.

About the Author Clay S. Jenkinson, well known for his historical portrayals of Thomas Jefferson and Meriwether Lewis, is the editor of *A Vast and Open Plain: The Writings of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in North Dakota, 1804-1806* and author of *Becoming Jefferson's People: Re-inventing the American Republic in the Twenty-first Century*.