JEFFERSON’S INSTRUCTIONS TO MERRIWETHER LEWIS

SELECTED EXCERPTS (All spelling and punctuation follows the original.)

To <Captain> Meriwether Lewis esq. Capt. of the 1st. regimt, of Infantry of the US. of A.

Your situation as Secretary of the President of the US. has made you acquainted with the objects of my confidential message of Jan. 18. 1803 to the legislature; you have seen the act they passed, which they expressed in general terms, was meant to sanction these objects, and you are appointed to carry them into execution.

Instruments for ascertaining by celestial observations, the geography of the country through which you will pass, have been already provided. Light articles for barter and presents among the Indians, arms for your attendants, say from 10. to 12. men, boats, tents, & other travelling apparatus with ammunition, medicine, surgical instruments and provisions you will have prepared with such aids as the Secretary at War can yield in his department; & from him also you will receive authority to engage among our troops, by voluntary agreement, the number of attendants above mentioned, over whom you, as their commanding officer, are invested with all the powers the laws give in such a case.

As your movements while within the limits of the US. will be better directed by occasional communications, adapted to circumstances as they arise, they will not be noticed here. What follows will respect your proceedings after your departure from the United States. …

And considering the interest which every nation has in extending & strengthening the authority of reason & justice among the people around them, it will be useful to acquire what knowledge you can of the state of morality, religion, & information among them; as it may better enable those who may endeavor to civilize & instruct them, to adapt their measures to the existing notions & practices of those on whom they are to operate. …

In all your intercourse with the natives, treat them in the most friendly & conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit; allay all jealousies as to the object of your journey, satisfy them of its innocence, make them acquainted with the position, extent character, peaceable & commercial dispositions of the US. of our wish to be neighborly, friendly, & useful to them, & of our dispositions to a commercial intercourse with them; confer with them on the points most convenient as mutual emporiums, and the articles of most desirable interchange for them & us. If a few of their influential chiefs within practicable distance, wish to visit us, arrange such a visit with them, and furnish them with authority to call on our officers, on their entering the US. to have them conveyed to this place at the public expense. If any of them should wish to have some of their young people brought up with us, & taught such arts as may be useful to them, we will receive, instruct & take care of them. Such a mission whether of influential chiefs or of young people would give some security to your own party. Carry with you some matter of the kinepox; inform those of them with whom you may be, of it's efficacy as a preservative from the smallpox; & instruct & encourage them in the use of it. This may be especially done wherever you winter. …


See original manuscript at http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/lewisandclark/lewis-landc.html#57.
ON the acquisition of Louisiana, in the year 1803, the attention of the government of the United States, was early directed towards exploring and improving the new territory. Accordingly in the summer of the same year, an expedition was planned by the president for the purpose of discovering the courses and sources of the Missouri, and the most convenient water communication thence to the Pacific ocean. His private secretary captain Meriwether Lewis, and captain William Clarke, both officers of the army of the United States, were associated in the command of this enterprise. After receiving the requisite instructions, captain Lewis left the seat of government, and being joined by captain Clarke at Louisville, in Kentucky, proceeded to St. Louis, where they arrived in the month of December. …

[May 22.] On the 22d we made about eighteen miles, passing several small farms on the bank of the river, a number of islands, and a large creek on the south side, called Bonhomme, or Goodman's river. A small number of emigrants from the United States have settled on the sides of this creek, which are very fertile. We also passed some high lands, and encamped, on the north side, near a small creek. Here we met with a camp of Kickapoo Indians who had left us at St. Charles, with a promise of procuring us some provisions by the time we overtook them. They now made us a present of four deer, and we gave them in return two quarts of whiskey. This tribe reside on the heads of the Kaskaskia and Illinois river, on the other side of the Mississippi, but occasionally hunt on the Missouri.

July 22. The next morning we set sail, and having found at the distance of ten miles from the Platte, a high and shaded situation on the north, we encamped there, intending to make the requisite observations, and to send for the neighbouring tribes, for the purpose of making known the recent change in the government, and the wish of the United States to cultivate their friendship.