
Sheldon Yeakley

Sheldon Yeakley is a junior History major and Phi Alpha Theta member from Searcy, AR. A participant in the Honors Program, he received the Honors Advisory Council Award this year. He served as a judge in the Oklahoma District Three National History Day Competition in April.

In *Undaunted Courage* Stephen Ambrose attempts to outline chronologically the life of Meriwether Lewis, while focusing primarily on his experiences in the Louisiana expedition and his relationships with Thomas Jefferson and William Clark. Alongside his biographic account of Lewis’s life, Ambrose gives a broader perspective to Lewis and Jefferson’s role in the opening of a new west.

Ambrose aspires to write “an updated biography of Lewis incorporating the new material”, which had been published recently at the time of this book’s release. (17) Noting the various surviving pieces of the journals and letters, citing maps and other primary sources, Ambrose attempts to paint a picture of Lewis’s life. Also citing multiple secondary accounts of Lewis, Ambrose develops the character and chronology of the narrative. The biography begins with three chapters dedicated to the developmental years of Lewis’s life through his experience as a boy growing up in the frontiers of Virginia and the south, to his time as a true Virginia planter, and finally his time in the army. In the next four chapters Ambrose moves on to the analysis of the relationship Lewis developed with Jefferson, his role as the secretary to the president, and the beginning of
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the Lewis and Clark expedition under Jefferson, who had mentored Lewis in anticipation of his role as leader. The following bulk of the work, chapters seven through thirty-two, is dedicated to following the Corps of Discovery through its adventures and perils up the Missouri river, down the Columbia River to the Pacific, and back again. Here Ambrose truly identifies the lifestyle this expedition experienced, often through the words of Lewis, Clark, and their men who all kept journals. The final nine chapters focus on the events after the return, Lewis’s life in office at St. Louis, his suicide, and the academic consequences of his failure to publish his findings. Ambrose includes eighteen pages of bibliographical notations, six maps throughout, and multiple paintings, portraits, and sketches depicting the characters and creatures found in the narrative.

Undaunted Courage provides a more than adequate biography of Meriwether Lewis, while simultaneously providing insight into the Lewis and Clark expedition, and Jeffersonian America. Ambrose writing style conveys a clear and concise narrative without repetition, and his conjectures are based on intensive research. This work provides a progression of thought about this era through Ambrose’s combination of multiple previous works, and the incorporation of an abundance of primary resources, some new to this study. Due to the thorough research and the interesting narrative, this work is recommendable to those searching for an in-depth introduction into the life of Lewis and his expedition