

Warrior Codes

Unit: Warriors/Soldiers (High School)

Lewis and Clark: Across the Divide excerpt
By Carolyn Gilman (chapter 6)

Men who go to war together share a bond of brotherhood, and both Plains Indian tribes and Euro-Americans sought ways to formalize such bonds in social organizations. Agricultural and hunting tribes had elaborate systems of societies, each with its own ceremonies, regalia, and duties. In Mandan and Hidatsa villages, every man who reached a particular age was expected to join his generation in purchasing the appropriate society's rites and songs from the older men above them. In Lakota bands, societies were more independent; the members might choose new men to induct, or a man might earn the right to join through visions or deeds.

One famous Lakota society of the nineteenth century was the *tokala*, or Kit Fox Society. Its members were "Brave young men of good repute." They were named for the kit fox because they emulated that animal in activity and cunning. Symbolic objects (a pipe, lances, whips, and drum) and ceremonial regalia (fox skins, feathers, and a fox jaw on otter skin) were the signs of membership. According to Thomas Tyon and John Blunt Horn, who had been society members in their youth, the Kit Fox initiation rite "taught that one should be brave before friends and foes alike and undergo hardship and punishment with fortitude. . . . That one should search for the poor, weak, or friendless and give such all the aid one could. They inculcated that a Fox should not steal, except from the enemy, should not lie, except to the enemy, and should set an example by complying with the recognized rules of the hunt and camp. That if a fellow Fox were in trouble of any kind he should help him." In short, the principles of the Kit Fox Society were "bravery, generosity, chivalry, morality, and fraternity."

Both Lewis and Clark belonged to a society as well—the Freemasons. This was not specifically a warrior society, but it was widespread among the officer corps of the U.S. Army, and membership was practically a prerequisite for anyone holding public office between 1780 and 1820. Masonry functioned like an Ivy League college degree today—a network among the powerful and prominent. Lewis was the more committed Mason; he joined the Door of Virtue Lodge in Albemarle County in 1797 and received

the Royal Arch degree in Staunton, Virginia, two years later. After the expedition, he founded a lodge in Missouri and persuaded Clark to join. Like the Kit Fox, the Freemasons performed rites and rituals using ceremonial regalia such as painted aprons and certificates of initiation. Masonry inculcated spiritual values and high ideals. A Masonic text from the 1770s listed the central tenets as brotherly love, relief of the distressed, and truth. Their cardinal virtues were temperance (“to govern our passions and to check our unruly desires”), fortitude (“to resist temptations and to encounter dangers with spirit and resolution”), prudence (“to regulate our conduct by the dictates of reason”), and justice (“the principles of equity”). Their symbolic objects were the gauge, gavel, plumb, square, compass, level, and trowel. There were many levels of initiation, all of which Lewis achieved. The masculine ideals of Masonry remained important to him until the end. When he died, he was still carrying his Masonic apron, which was found “soiled only by the life-blood of its owner.”