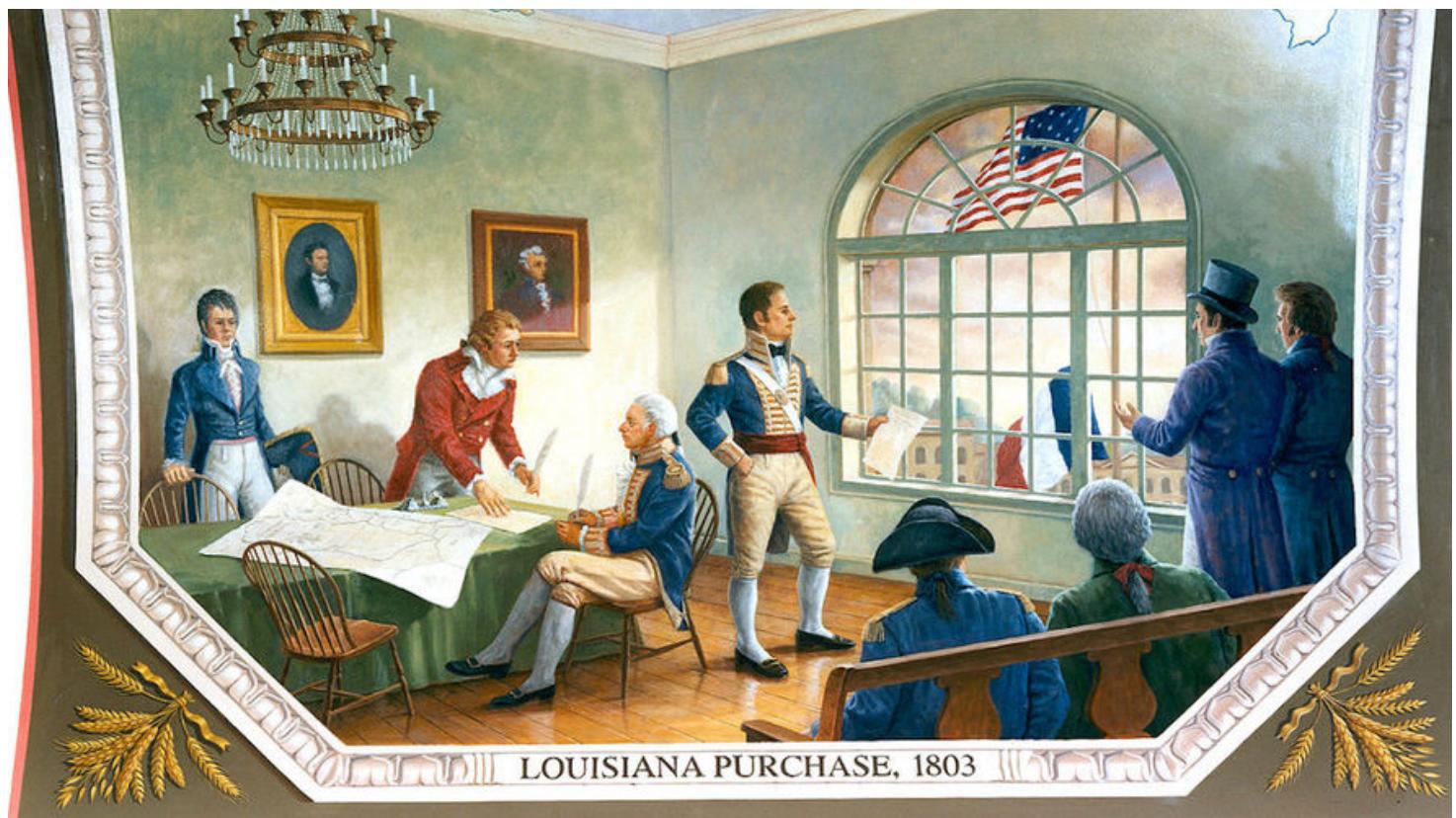


# Westward Expansion: The Louisiana Purchase

By USHistory.org, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.21.17

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TOP: The third signing of the Louisiana Treaty, which occurred in New Orleans, is depicted. MIDDLE: Official White House portrait of Thomas Jefferson. BOTTOM: Map showing the extent of the Louisiana Purchase. Photos from: Wikimedia Commons.

Thomas Jefferson was president of the United States from 1801 to 1809. The United States had just become its own country after declaring independence from Britain and defeating the British in the Revolutionary War. Jefferson was the newly formed nation's third president.

Jefferson had strong ideas about what type of society America should be. He believed the country should make its money from farming. Across the ocean in Britain, industry was growing. People were moving away from farming to work in factories.

Jefferson worried that the growth of factories would make American society less equal. As England's industry began to grow, workers in factories worked in terrible conditions. They made very little money. Factory owners were making much more, and suffering less. Jefferson saw this as a terrible example of what could happen at home.

## Jefferson pushes western growth

Jefferson believed the best idea was for America to grow to the west. This would free up more land for farmers. It would keep the new country grounded in farming, and would prevent inequality from growing.

France had regained control of Louisiana in the south. This put Jefferson's idea at risk. French leader Napoleon Bonaparte had risen to power in France, and now threatened to block America's use of New Orleans as trading port. New Orleans, a city in Louisiana, sits on the Mississippi River. American towns to the north of New Orleans depended upon the river. They used it to ship goods and make their living.

Blocking America from using New Orleans to trade would harm the U.S. So President Jefferson sent a U.S. official to France to bargain for continued trade along the Mississippi River. James Monroe was the top American negotiating in Paris. He wanted to buy New Orleans and West Florida. The U.S. was willing to pay between \$2 million and \$10 million.

### **French leader sold land to the U.S. for \$15 million**

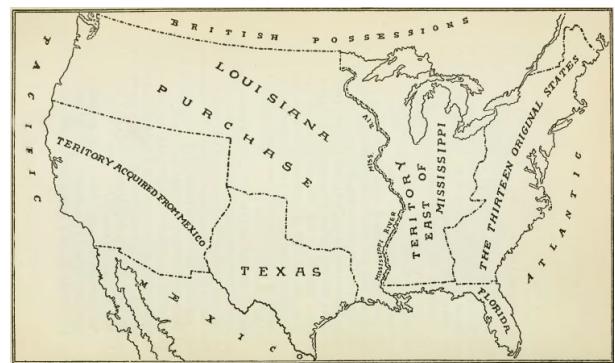
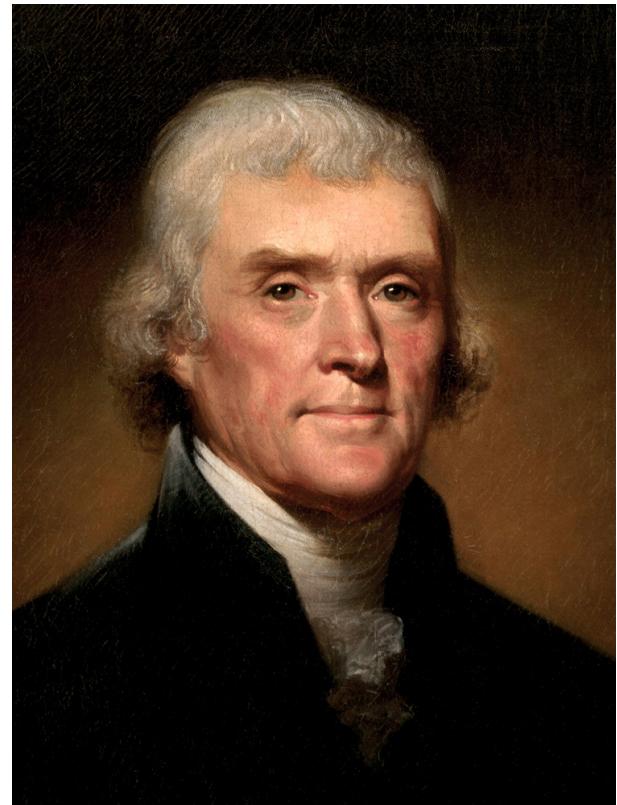
Surprisingly, Napoleon offered the U.S. even more land. His army was at war with Britain, and needed money to continue. Napoleon also knew that he could not force Americans out of the land France owned in North America.

Napoleon offered to sell all of Louisiana to the U.S. for \$15 million. The amount of land was huge. It stretched from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. This more than doubled the size of the United States. Napoleon's asking price was low for such a large piece of land. It came out to about 4 cents for each acre of land.

For Jefferson, the decision was not easy. He believed that governments should stay small. He did not think they should spend a lot of money. As president, he made the government smaller by ending taxes on people's property and the goods they bought. His wish to limit the government came from his strict reading of the Constitution. Spending an enormous amount of money to buy land was against Jefferson's principles.

### **Everyone didn't like the land deal**

Still, the deal was struck in April 1803. Jefferson knew America needed to grow west to become a stronger country. He felt it was worth it.



Not everyone liked the deal. Some people complained that Jefferson was not following the U.S. Constitution, which he helped write. They argued that the Constitution didn't allow the government to buy new land. In the end, Jefferson decided that the Constitution did allow the president to buy the land. That's because it allows treaties, or agreements, with other countries. Most of the country's lawmakers agreed. They voted in favor of the deal with France.

### **Major achievement for Jefferson**

The deal also went against Jefferson's wish to quickly lower the amount of money the country owed. Fifteen million dollars was a small price for so much land. Still, it was a lot of money for the country back then.

The Louisiana Purchase is a good example of Jefferson's willingness to make sensible decisions. It went against some of what he had long believed, but it guaranteed America would expand westward. This was Jefferson's biggest hope for the country.

The new land would in time add 13 new states to the country. Louisiana would be the first. It became a state in 1812.

## Quiz

- 1 What is the MAIN idea of the section "Jefferson pushes western growth"?
- (A) France controlled Louisiana before the United States bought it.  
(B) The leaders of the United States wanted the country to get more land.  
(C) New Orleans was an important trade city on the Mississippi River.  
(D) James Monroe was the leader who negotiated buying land from France.
- 2 Which sentence from the section "French leader sold land to the U.S. for \$15 million" describes the MAIN idea of the article?
- (A) Napoleon also knew that he could not force Americans out of the land France owned in North America.  
(B) Napoleon offered to sell all of Louisiana to the U.S. for \$15 million.  
(C) Napoleon's asking price was low for such a large piece of land.  
(D) Spending an enormous amount of money to buy land was against Jefferson's principles.
- 3 Select the paragraph from the section "Major achievement for Jefferson" that BEST explains the long-term impact of the Louisiana Purchase.
- (A) Still, the deal was struck in April 1803. Jefferson knew America needed to grow west to become a stronger country. He felt it was worth it.  
(B) The deal also went against Jefferson's wish to quickly lower the amount of money the country owed. Fifteen million dollars was a small price for so much land. Still, it was a lot of money for the country back then.  
(C) The Louisiana Purchase is a good example of Jefferson's willingness to make sensible decisions. It went against some of what he had long believed, but it guaranteed America would expand westward. This was Jefferson's biggest hope for the country.  
(D) The new land would in time add 13 new states to the country. Louisiana would be the first. It became a state in 1812.
- 4 Which sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-3] explains WHY Jefferson wanted to buy more land for the United States to farm.
- (A) Thomas Jefferson was president of the United States from 1801 to 1809.  
(B) Jefferson had strong ideas about what type of society America should be.  
(C) Jefferson worried that the growth of factories would make American society less equal.  
(D) Jefferson saw this as a terrible example of what could happen at home.