

Westward Expansion

Jefferson believed that for the nation to thrive, it needed to expand westward. He also believed they needed to expand their markets internationally to export their agricultural products. When Napoleon rose to power in France through the French Revolution, he threatened to block access to the Mississippi river through the port of New Orleans. The Mississippi was important to new western settlements. They used the river to transport their goods to market. To travel by land was expensive and dangerous. The port at New Orleans was so important to Americans that Jefferson sent diplomats to France to bargain. He also sent men to Britain to create an anti-France alliance in the case France refused. James Monroe was sent to negotiate in Paris. He was authorized to purchase New Orleans and west Florida for between 2 to ten million dollars. Napoleon needed the money for his military campaigns in Europe and offered more. Napoleon could not afford to keep a military in America to stop them from using the port so he offered all of his territory of Louisiana to the U.S. for 15 million dollars. The Louisiana territory stretched from the Mississippi River all the way to the Rocky Mountains which nearly doubled the size of the United States.

Napoleon's price for the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 ended up being around 4 cents per acre. The deal did bring on a bit of controversy. Americans in the 19th century believed America depended on westward expansion but many states felt the purchase reduced their political power. New England Federalists even began talk of succession or separation from the union. Contrary to one of Jefferson's central beliefs that small government was best, The Louisiana Purchase was so important to Jefferson's vision he boldly made the political decision without state support. The gains were so major and the territory so large, it would eventually add 13 new states to the union. In 1812, Louisiana was the first purchased state to join the union. Louisiana even today retains some of its French foundations such as legal traditions.

By 1803 many Americans were already migrating westward. The Louisiana Purchase intensified this. In the 16-1700's most Americans had settled along the eastern seaboard. Most were along rivers to allow easy transportation. Because of this, the major population areas of North America were gathered along the coast of major river systems. By the late 18th century the population had grown to nearly 3.9 million however only 5% of Americans lived west of the Appalachian Mountains. Only 30 years later, the U.S. population had reached 9.6 million and nearly 25% were living west in nine new states and three territories.

As more and more people were expanding westward conflict with the Native Americans was created. The Native Americans in the west fought wars to resist the American intrusion. Another issue of conflict was the expansion of the plantation system. Many were moving large numbers of slaves into the new territories. As there were major human costs involved in westward expansion, most white Americans saw opportunity. Many felt those who risked enduring the hardship of frontier life would benefit from land, prosperity and independence. Western expansion brought with it a change to the American way of life. Those in the west needed improved transportation to get goods to the east. The states granted charters to companies for building roads, bridges, canals and ferry services. These companies were offered special legal privileges because they were in such demand.

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These special privileges were opposed by many. Some people felt these privileges violated republican values of equal opportunity for all.. America was transformed with the new transportation projects. The major economic prospect, however lay new the large inland rivers of Ohio, Tennessee, and Mississippi which all flowed south to New Orleans. Americans were moving west
