



The Louisiana Purchase

↳ The Land

The Louisiana territory extended from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and from the Gulf of Mexico to the Canadian border. It was an area of roughly 828,000 square miles (2,140,000 square km). The territory known as the Louisiana Purchase had been owned or claimed by France based on the explorations of men like René Robert Cavelier and Sieur de La Salle until 1763 when France gave these claims to Spain.

American citizens and leaders were especially interested in this land for two reasons. First, the western boundary of the United States at that time was the Mississippi River and some Americans already wanted to expand into the lands west of the Mississippi.

Secondly, western frontiersmen shipped farm goods for sale down the Mississippi River to New Orleans where they were exported to European markets without being taxed. These products included flour, whiskey, pork, salt, animal skins, tobacco, and cheese, among other goods. Permission to do this was known as the “right of deposit” which was negotiated between the United States and Spain in 1795. In 1798, Spain rescinded this right and made western farmers angry.

New Orleans, at the mouth of the Mississippi River on the Gulf of Mexico, was the only accessible port for western farmers. It was also the main administrative center for Spanish control of their territory. Much of the rest of the territory was largely unexplored and unknown.

↳ France Regains Control of Louisiana

In 1800, France, under the rule of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, negotiated a secret treaty with Spain and again took control of this territory. Spain retained its control of the area known as Spanish Florida, a narrow strip of land running from the Mississippi River to the Atlantic Ocean and including the Florida Peninsula. Bonaparte assigned an army to occupy the Louisiana territory, although Spanish authorities continued to govern the area. Spain even briefly allowed the “right of deposit” again.

↳ President Jefferson Tries to Acquire Louisiana

When Thomas Jefferson became the United States president in 1801, American representatives in Great Britain heard rumors that France was intending to rebuild its power and influence in North America. Jefferson and many other influential Americans were worried that a powerful European nation like France would interfere with the trade of its western settlers and with western expansion.

Jefferson told Robert Livingston, the new minister of the United States to France, to warn France that the United States was opposed to any transfer of Spanish colonies to any country other than the United States.

↳ Troubles for Napoleon

The French troops that Napoleon intended to send to occupy New Orleans and enforce French authority got diverted to Hispaniola, where the French had a colony. At the time, a rebellion against French rule was being led by the brilliant slave leader, Toussaint L’Ouverture. Although the French army put down the rebellion, they were severely weakened by diseases such as yellow fever and continuing battles with the rebels. They never got to New Orleans.



The Louisiana Purchase *(cont.)*

↳ Troubles for Napoleon *(cont.)*

Jefferson had Pierre du Pont de Nemours carry messages to Livingston and help him negotiate with the French government. The United States threatened to form an alliance with England against France if France took over Louisiana. Jefferson did this despite his strong pro-French and anti-British attitude during the American Revolution and the French Revolution of the 1790s.

↳ The Great Powers: Great Britain and France

The two great world powers of the time were Great Britain and France. Britain had a powerful navy, many colonies, a strong army, and wealth based on trade around the world. France had a very powerful and experienced army and was the strongest power in Europe. However, France had overthrown its monarchy, gone through a revolution, and was now led by a self-appointed dictator. Spain, a weaker country, was often allied with France.

On the other hand, the United States was struggling financially and had a very weak standing army and a small navy. The only advantage the United States had was that it bordered the territory in question.

Du Pont suggested offering to buy the Florida territory from Spain and feared that threats would make Napoleon even more stubborn about keeping the Louisiana territory. When the Spanish governor suspended the “right of deposit” again in 1802, western frontiersmen were ready to go to war. Secretary of State James Madison warned both Spain and France of possible war.

↳ Negotiating the Purchase

Jefferson sent James Monroe to join Livingston in efforts to buy the east bank of the Mississippi River, which would allow Americans access to the Gulf of Mexico. Congress had authorized two million dollars for this purpose. Jefferson suggested to the negotiators that they offer as much as nine million dollars for New Orleans and the Florida territory.

Napoleon was still interested in establishing a vast French empire in America to go along with his powerful European empire and strong French influence in other parts of the world. He even sent 15,000 more troops to Hispaniola. Nonetheless, another European war between Great Britain and France was clearly coming soon.

The American envoy warned Napoleon that the United States might form an alliance with Great Britain. The British navy could easily capture New Orleans and the American government was considering sending an army of 50,000 men to help in the capture of New Orleans.

Napoleon realized that holding the territory against an expanding United States might be both difficult and expensive. He was also aware that he needed funds to finance his upcoming war with England. Furthermore, he was not anxious to have the United States and Great Britain allied against him. His decision was opposed by both of his brothers whose advice he sometimes ignored and sometimes followed. He offered to sell the entire territory to the United States for 15 million dollars.



The Louisiana Purchase *(cont.)*

↳ **Completing the Deal**

The American negotiators, who knew they were exceeding their instructions, realized this was the deal of a century and accepted the offer. Jefferson knew the Constitution did not specifically authorize land purchases but it did permit treaties so he felt he could get it accepted in Congress.

Most congressmen knew this was a great deal even if they claimed to be upset over the way it was handled by the president. After a good deal of criticism in both houses of Congress over Jefferson's stretching of constitutional authority, they approved the treaty and agreed to spend the money. The government was so short of funds that they needed to borrow the money from European banks on 15-year loans.

The United States officially took possession of the Louisiana territory on December 20, 1803. Eventually, a few boundary adjustments were agreed upon and the United States acquired Spain's Florida territory as well in 1819.

↳ **The Legacies**

United States Doubles in Size

The consequences of the Louisiana Purchase were profound. In one single act, the United States doubled in size. A country that had been contained between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mississippi River now extended to the Rocky Mountains.

A Land Rich in Natural Resources

While much of the land had originally been considered a "great American desert," the explorations of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark clearly proved this was a rich and abundant land. Fifteen states were formed entirely or partly from this purchase. These include states such as Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, which form a large part of the "bread basket" of America. In these areas, rich soil produces important crops.

Access to the port of New Orleans gave western farmers an opportunity to export their products without being taxed by a foreign government. For much of the 19th century, the Mississippi River and its tributaries were the major routes for western commerce and travel.

Manifest Destiny

The purchase also strengthened American claims to the Oregon territory, which was previously claimed by several nations including Great Britain. This eventually put pressure on the British in the same way that the French were pressured to sell Louisiana. The Americans were physically close and a clear threat to settle the Oregon region. Britain had its Canadian colony but England was far removed from the action and keeping an army there would be expensive.

Spain felt the same pressure on its land in Florida and the Southwest. Eventually, these lands would also become part of the United States. Americans came to believe that they had a "Manifest Destiny" to extend from the Atlantic Coast to the Pacific Coast.



The Louisiana Purchase *(cont.)*

↳ The Principle People Involved

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson was the main author of the Declaration of Independence. He served as a governor of Virginia and as a legislator. He was ambassador to France for the government of the United States after the American Revolution. George Washington appointed Jefferson as his first secretary of state, a job that carried the responsibility of dealing with foreign nations. In 1796, Jefferson was elected vice president of the United States and in 1800, he became the third president.

Jefferson was interested in acquiring control of the western half of North America. He had even paid a man to walk east from Sweden across Siberia through North America. (The man was stopped in Russia.) As president, Jefferson was determined to explore this territory and began to plan an expedition well before any hope existed of the land being purchased from France. Jefferson was a brilliant scientist, inventor, and architect. He developed new farming techniques, experimented with new plants, became a successful landscape designer, and was a self-taught violinist. Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, on the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of the Declaration of Independence.

Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon Bonaparte was born on the French-controlled island of Corsica. He was trained as an artillery commander in a French military academy. He quickly rose to power by demonstrating great military skill against France's European enemies and by recognizing whom to support in the shifting power struggles during the French Revolution. Napoleon used his popularity with soldiers to seize control of the French government in 1799. He intended to defeat France's enemies, especially England and Austria, and to increase France's power around the world.

Although he wanted to control a French empire in North America, he realized the Louisiana territory was vulnerable to attack. He also needed the money for a looming war with England. Napoleon spent much of his 16 years in power at war with various nations. He was finally defeated at Waterloo, one of the most famous battles in history, and exiled to the island of St. Helena where he died in 1821.

Robert Livingston

Robert Livingston was a New York representative to the Continental Congress. He helped Jefferson draft the Declaration of Independence. He served as a New York legislator, a judge, and a minister of foreign affairs for the United States government. He was minister of affairs to France where he was very instrumental in convincing the French to sell the Louisiana territory to the United States.

Other Influential People

James Monroe helped negotiate the Louisiana Purchase. There was some friction between Livingston and Monroe. Livingston felt he had done the groundwork for the purchase and Monroe was suspicious of being excluded from the negotiations. Samuel du Pont de Nemours was a French economist who had immigrated to the United States. Charles de Talleyrand was the French minister of foreign affairs. Toussaint L'Ouverture led a slave rebellion against French authority in Haiti.



Name _____

The Louisiana Purchase Quiz

Directions: Read pages 5–8 about the Louisiana Purchase. Then, answer these questions based on the information in the selection. Circle the correct answer in each question below. Underline the sentence in the selection where the answer is found.

- Who was president of the United States when the Louisiana Purchase was completed?
 - James Monroe
 - Thomas Jefferson
 - George Washington
 - James Madison
- What did the “right of deposit” allow western farmers to do?
 - settle New Orleans
 - export goods from New Orleans
 - settle in Louisiana
 - trade with Native Americans
- Who led a slave revolt in Hispaniola?
 - Robert Livingston
 - Napoleon Bonaparte
 - Toussaint L’Ouverture
 - Thomas Jefferson
- How much money did Jefferson suggest that his negotiators offer for New Orleans and the Florida territory?
 - 15 million dollars
 - nothing
 - 9 million dollars
 - 2 million dollars
- What effect did the purchase of Louisiana have on the United States?
 - It immediately started a war.
 - It doubled the country’s size.
 - It made the Native Americans rich.
 - The country went bankrupt.
- Which man was sent by the president and Congress to help Robert Livingston in the negotiations?
 - Napoleon Bonaparte
 - James Madison
 - James Monroe
 - Robert Cavelier
- How many states were made entirely or partly from the Louisiana Purchase territory?
 - 15
 - 50
 - 13
 - 5
- Who suggested to President Jefferson that the United States try to buy the Florida territory rather than threaten war?
 - James Monroe
 - Robert Livingston
 - Spanish government
 - Pierre du Pont
- In what year was the Louisiana Purchase completed?
 - 1819
 - 1803
 - 1801
 - 1795
- What was the approximate size of the Louisiana Purchase territory?
 - 15,000,000 sq. miles (38,800,000 sq. km)
 - 8,000,000 sq. miles (20,700,000 sq. km)
 - 800,000 sq. miles (2,070,000 sq. km)
 - 828,000 sq. miles (2,140,000 sq. km)