

TAHPDX: GREAT DECISIONS IN U.S. HISTORY

(Teaching American History Project)

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HISTORICAL TOPIC: The Louisiana Purchase (19th Century)

Thomas Jefferson faced an unexpected dilemma in 1803. He had campaigned for the Presidency under a program of limiting federal power; as a strict constructionist, he asserted that the federal government should not assume any powers not explicitly granted to it by the Constitution. Then France unexpectedly offered to sell the entire Louisiana Territory, an extensive tract of land with ill-defined borders that would double the nation's size with the stroke of a pen. Jefferson desperately wanted this land for the new nation. But the Constitution evidently did not grant presidents such power. Jefferson overcame his reservations and made the purchase. His decision showed both a capacity for compartmentalizing his beliefs and actions and the importance he placed on national expansion. Jefferson believed that the United States must remain a rural and agricultural society, that it required geographic expansion to remain a virtuous republic. Those who believed that republics could not function if they became too large, or who simply found Jefferson's act to be hypocritical, of course disagreed. Right or wrong, constitutional or not, Jefferson's decision to purchase the Louisiana Territory was a decisive step in the nation's expansion and set the stage for the settlement and acquisition of the Southwest and the Oregon Country.

*The Louisiana Purchase topic contains the subtopics listed below. Each subtopic includes a narrative with highlighted text [**resources**] and notations indicating that additional support material is available for viewing and/or downloading including primary documents, maps, spreadsheet data and websites. To access the material go to the TAHPDX: Great Decisions in U.S. History Website and use the links available on the **TOPIC AREAS [Louisiana Purchase]** page or the **QUICK NAVIGATION** pages.*

Search TAHPDX on the internet or access the website via the link on the Community Geography page at <http://www.pdx.edu/ims/comgeo.html>.

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Curriculum Units developed for this topic (download using the TAHPDX website):

[in process 2009]

1. Introduction

The boundaries of the United States now seem, to most of us, inviolate and inevitable. It is easy to forget that the nation began as a small collection of states strung along the Atlantic seaboard occupying only a small fraction of the land it now encompasses. For a nation that has depended so heavily on its natural resources for agriculture and ranching, mining and logging, the acquisition of more land has been crucial.

Expansion came in several steps or stages, but none was more important than the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The acquisition of the lands drained by rivers that emptied into the western side of the Mississippi River doubled the size of the United States for a few pennies an acre without having to fire a shot.

This unexpected boon owed much to chance, but it also reflected the hopes and plans of powerful U.S. leaders, particularly President Thomas Jefferson. It also raised troubling

questions, then and now, about how a republic that aspired to be a model of morality for the world could or should go about transforming itself into a world power.

2. Context

The American Revolution and Constitution

The process of seeking independence threw together thirteen diverse colonies or states that had not cooperated much in the past. Indeed, both during and for several years after the Revolution, the United States of America more closely resembled a confederation of independent-minded states than a coherent nation. This was as much by design as by default, as the thirteen young states and most of their citizens viewed political centralization through the lens of what they believed to have been Great Britain's abuse of power and stifling of liberties.

The creation of a much more powerful central government through the adoption of a new constitution in the late 1780s was, then, a surprising development. Federalists—those who favored a stronger federal government—succeeded in convincing a substantial number of citizens that a weak central government had left the nation unable to grapple with economic and political difficulties.

Nonetheless, most Americans—particularly in the South—remained wary of centralized political power, and a substantial minority was convinced that the new Constitution had usurped their liberties.

Much of the resistance to a shift of power from states to nation lay in the belief that republics—nations in which political power ultimately resided in the people rather than in royalty—had to be small to function. Educated people of the late eighteenth century spent many hours reading classic and enlightenment authors such as Montesquieu who argued that large imperial states would inevitably become despotic. Only small republics, such as Athens of ancient Greece, could succeed in nurturing the sort of full political involvement and public virtue that republican government required.

PDF Resource: Democracy vs. Republic (from *The American Ideal of 1776: The Twelve Basic American Principles* at <http://www.lexrex.com/enlightened/AmericanIdeal/index.html>).

Expansion before the Louisiana Purchase

The treaty which ended the American Revolution gave the United States rights to lands between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River (the Old Northwest Territory), a large territory that the British had attempted—with indifferent success—to keep its colonists out of.

The *Ordinance of 1787* [**pdf resource**] established that these new lands would not simply be partitioned and tacked onto one of the existing states that claimed them. It detailed a clear set of steps that would mark a territory's passage into full statehood, with the same rights and

responsibilities as existing states. This legislation served both to encourage settlement (those who went West expected to retain their full rights of citizenship) and codified a predilection for westward expansion.

Relations with Indians

The Ordinance of 1787 articulated another goal of the young nation: to treat Indians in a humane and orderly fashion: “The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress; but laws founded in justice and humanity, shall from time to time be made for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them.”

Friction and brutal warfare with Native Americans had long characterized the colonial backcountry. The leaders of the young nation—sensitive to European perceptions—believed both that westward expansion was necessary and that such expansion could be achieved without warfare or gross intimidation and cheating. Indeed, one aspect of the Constitution of 1789 was moving Indian affairs from states to the federal level in order to achieve a more uniform policy with regards to native populations. George Washington, the nation’s first president, believed that the United States should deal fairly and consistently with Indian nations and recognized, as did other leaders, that the laws of the nation and civilization did not allow the United States to seize Indian land. Indian nations were essentially states within a state (the United States), and acquiring land from them was a distinct step, different than acquiring land from European claims.

PDF Resource: *Indigenous Sovereignty: A Brief History in the Context of Indian Law* (<http://www.umass.edu/legal/derrico/sovereignty.html>).

A pair of obdurate realities thwarted the expectations of Washington and other leaders. First, the federal government remained relatively weak along the western frontier. Traders, including many whiskey peddlers, and thousands of settlers streamed onto Indian land long before the federal government attempted, let alone succeeded, in gaining title to that land. The federal government rarely deterred or punished these citizens. Second, Indians proved to be much more reluctant than anticipated to sign away their land. Hence the young nation’s backcountry remained as bloody as ever as land-hungry settlers repeatedly clashed with angry Indians while the federal government usually did nothing or sided with the citizens who had disobeyed its laws.

Map Resource: *Indian Battles (1521-1890)*. A map series showing points of conflict with native tribes from the colonial settlement period through westward expansion to the Pacific. The maps show a steady progression of conflicts westward in conjunction with Euro-American migration.

Party Feeling

Nothing alarmed the founding fathers more than the prospect of divisive political parties. A virtuous republic required that citizens and particularly leaders rise above narrow interests to embrace the common good. And enlightened men would surely agree, after due debate and reflection, on what was right for the young nation [see *Democracy vs. Republic pdf resource*].

But factions and then official “parties” arose before the first president, George Washington, was even out of office. The divisions were geographic, economic, and political. Many southerners such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison feared further expansion of federal power, particularly federal power calculated to bring more economic and political influence to the urbanizing and industrializing north. Northerners like Alexander Hamilton looked to Great Britain as a template of a strong and effective nation state and argued that the federal government should establish banks and otherwise encourage manufacturing. In the main, the Jeffersonian Republicans (the progenitors of the Democratic Party) favored curbs on federal power and stressed liberty (for the white male franchise, not for people of color or women). The Federalists (mostly in the North) favored a stronger federal government, often wished to end slavery, and favored trade and especially industry.

Web Resources:

The Federalist Party (from PBS American Experience at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/duel/peopleevents/pande05.html>). A short description of the Federalist Party and Jeffersonian Republicans.

Constitutional Topic: The Federalists and Anti-Federalists. From U.S. Constitution Online (http://www.usconstitution.net/consttop_faf.html). This site provides a more indepth analysis of the federalist/anti-federalist debate particularly from the point of view of the Constitution.

Thomas Jefferson: Establishing a Federal Republic. From the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/jefffed.html>). This site contains a narrative of the framing of the republic and links to many primary documents.

Jeffersonian Republicans (1801-1825). From History Texts Archives (<http://historicaltextarchive.com/sections.php?op=viewarticle&artid=665>) this is an extensive narrative describing the formation and philosophy of the Jeffersonian Republicans.

But party feeling arose from less rational or material differences as described above. Democratic Republicans and Federalists, as they grappled for power, accused each other of betraying the principles upon which the nation had been founded. George Washington, who had tended to side with Federalists, found himself something of a pariah among his social and economic peers in Virginia upon his retirement to Mount Vernon in 1797. Shortly after his move to Virginia, Federalists in 1798 passed a *Sedition Act* [pdf resource] that made it possible to imprison those who criticized the federal government.

Democratic Republicans and Federalists alike could agree that the development of divisive political parties constituted a horrible tragedy, but each side placed all the blame for this calamity on each other.

Relations with Europe

Foreign policy was one of the most divisive issues between Democratic Republicans (Jeffersonians) and Federalists. Most Jeffersonians saw in the French Revolution (1789-1799) the spread of American ideals; most Federalists saw bloody anarchy, the logical end of too much liberty and not enough English discipline and structure.

But reactions to European developments hinged on matters practical as well as emotional and philosophical. Certainly Great Britain, France, Spain, and other European powers largely viewed their relations with the young nation through the prism of self interest and power politics. Great Britain hoped that the young nation would falter and fragment, and not until the U.S. military victory at the conclusion of the War of 1812 (between Great Britain and the U.S.) did it truly withdraw from the Old Northwest or stop encouraging Indian nations to attack settlers from the United States. France, who had made common cause with the United States during the American Revolution, had less reason to resent it and had fewer material interests on the continent. But it had no compunctions about manipulating its commerce to further its ends. Spain, long in decline as a colonial power, feared the expansion of the young nation into its underpopulated northern colonies. Astute statesmen in the young nation realized that a wise foreign policy was based more on a realistic assessment of European power and how it bore upon the self interest of the United States.

In sum, when Thomas Jefferson took office in 1801 he led a nation that had already established a reputation for moving westward but also one that was plagued by divisive politics, particularly around the extent and nature of federal power. One of the great ironies of the Louisiana Purchase is that a president who had campaigned on limiting the power of federal government would use that very government to double the nation's size.

3. Thomas Jefferson

Strict Construction

Like many founding fathers who had favored a strong Constitution, particularly in the South, Jefferson was a strict constructionist, meaning that he placed special emphasis on the **Tenth Amendment** [pdf resource with commentary] to the Constitution, adopted in 1791 as part of the Bill of Rights: "The Powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." For Jefferson, this meant that Hamiltonian plans to involve the federal government in such endeavors as banking were unconstitutional, as the Constitution did not stipulate that the federal government had such powers.

Web Resource: *Alexander Hamilton: Establishing a National Bank.* A PBS American Experience program, this site provides a good narrative of the debates about the Federal Bank with links to short video segments from the program (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/hamilton/peopleevents/e_bank.html).

When Jefferson took office after the “Revolution of 1800,” as he styled his victory over Federalist John Adams, he therefore set about shrinking the size of the federal government and the federal debt.

The Chosen People of God

Jefferson believed that an agricultural republic would be more virtuous than an urban, industrial one. As with many of the founders, Jefferson attached a great deal of importance to “virtue,” a term then defined as a strong attachment to the public good as opposed to narrow self interest. The young nation’s future as a republic rested on the virtue of its citizenry, so Jefferson spent a great deal of time considering how to cultivate that trait.

Jefferson believed that formal education fostered virtue, but he also believed that farming did so as well. The growth of cities and manufacturing would, he feared, push citizens into class-stratified societies that fostered economic dependence and class divisions. Yeoman farmers—small, independent land owners—were independent businessmen, and the business of farming prompted them to think for themselves and to become industrious and wise—to become precisely the sort of informed, virtuous citizenry who could be entrusted to run the young republic. It was therefore essential that the republic, whose population was increasing very quickly, have at its disposal sufficient land for each new generation to farm.

From Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Query XIX):

Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phaenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers. Dependance begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. This, the natural progress and consequence of the arts, has sometimes perhaps been retarded by accidental circumstances: but, generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff.

Web Resource: A full text transcription of Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* can be found on the University of Virginia Library’s Electronic Text Center at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefVirg.html>

The Economics of Expansion

Jefferson was not a harbinger of rural communes or a man nostalgic for medieval agriculture. His own substantial assets consisted of slaves and land, and he believed passionately in the creation of wealth through agricultural experimentation and prosperity. His curiosity about the natural world meshed with and was strongly informed by a desire to see nature better serve the needs of humans.

In his view, the creation of new, productive farms would guarantee the new nation's prosperity and enable it to import necessary manufactured goods from Europe. A prosperous, agricultural republic, therefore, would be both virtuous and powerful.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition

Larger geopolitical and economic concerns informed Jefferson's interests in westward exploration. Long interested in the interior of North America, he asked Meriwether Lewis, his former secretary, to begin planning an overland expedition to the Pacific Ocean even before entering into negotiations for the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson focused the expedition on economic matters. He instructed Lewis to find a convenient route across the continent that could be used for trade and to keep a close record of land, plants, animals, minerals, and other geographic features that might prove profitable.

Jefferson emphasized the expedition's relations with Indians because economic and political success hinged on such relations. With nations such as Great Britain and France trading in the interior, the United States needed to channel trade away from its rivals and to itself. Jefferson believed, moreover, that the nation's farms would move westward slowly, that Indians would therefore remain on their ancestral lands for generations to come. Hence the successful propagation of the fur trade and other economic activities would depend on close ties with many Indian nations for the foreseeable future.

PDF Resource: *Jefferson's Letter with Instructions to Meriwether Lewis* (includes graphic of original document).

Possible Field Trip: Columbia River Maritime Museum (Astoria, OR). For information see the CRMM website at <http://www.cmmm.org>.

Indians

Like virtually all Euro-Americans of his time, Jefferson was a self-professed racist who believed in the superiority of whites. Though troubled by the immorality of slavery, he professed himself certain that people of African descent were his intellectual and moral inferiors.

His view of Native Americans was more nuanced. Here Jefferson focused more on culture than biology. Like his educated peers across the western world, he believed that western civilization was on a steady march of progress that all enlightened people would be eager to join, once given

the chance. Indians, he believed, were like children; given sufficient opportunity and maturation, they would set aside their inferior pastimes and beliefs for the comforts and blessings of civilized life. He therefore believed that Indians would willingly—nay, gladly—surrender the great majority of their land for the benefits of joining white society and that Indians would inevitably be absorbed economically and subsumed biologically into white society. “As to the fear” Indians felt, he wrote the governor of Indiana Territory, “we presume our strength and their weakness is now so visible that they must see we have only to shut our hand to crush them, and that all our liberalities to them proceed from motives of pure humanity only.”

Jefferson and Power

Jefferson was an idealist and much more of a thinker than a fighter; he was not military hero like George Washington. But Jefferson nonetheless believed in the exercise of power. Though expressing great respect for and interest in Indians, he believed that their cultures and very identities would and should be ultimately swept away and that those perverse enough to stand in the way of progress should be tossed aside. Though emotionally and philosophically attached to France, he realized that Europeans were not especially sentimental when it came to the exercise of power. Highly critical of what he regarded as the underhanded politics of the Federalists, he had few compunctions about wielding the power of the presidency once he gained it.

The man who affected the Louisiana Purchase was and remains paradoxical. Though a proponent of strict construction and limited government, he believed strongly that the young nation must expand and was unapologetic about wielding governmental power to do so. A leader of the American enlightenment, a man of great curiosity and learning, he believed that science and exploration should serve the national interest and had little patience with those who opposed him—Federalists or Indians. An avowed racist who favored sending African-Americans out of the United States, he nevertheless fathered several children by a slave woman.

Web Resources for Thomas Jefferson:

Thomas Jefferson (Library of Congress). This exhibition focuses on the extraordinary legacy of Thomas Jefferson—founding father, farmer, architect, inventor, slaveholder, book collector, scholar, diplomat, and the third president of the United States (<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/>).

Thomas Jefferson Digital Archive (University of Virginia Electronic Library). Digital texts, scholarship, quotations, bibliographies. The University of Virginia’s Miller Center for Public Affairs also has an online reference source on Thomas Jefferson with links to Jefferson’s speeches, and other scholarship, essays and lectures (<http://millercenter.org/academic/americanpresident/jefferson>).

Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello (www.monticello.org). An indepth exploration of Jefferson’s plantation.

Thomas Jefferson (a film by Ken Burns). From PBS, this site includes many classroom activities (<http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/>).

4. The Purchase

Spain Sells to France

Spain had gained the Louisiana country (the borders of which were ill defined at the time) after the French and Indian War ended in 1763. By the 1790s Spain had concluded that Louisiana was costing it much more money than it earned and that the United States or England was apt to take it by force anyway. Louisiana in French hands would likely provide a strong buffer against the expansionistic United States, and the ambitious Bonaparte was eager to acquire the vast territory, which might prove to be a thorn in his rival England's side.

The sale to France was supposed to be secret. When news of it leaked, Jefferson was alarmed, for he much preferred to have the interior of North America claimed by a weak European nation (such as Spain) than a strong one. The nation that possessed New Orleans was necessarily "our natural and habitual enemy," for through that port "the produce of three-eighths of our territory must pass to market. . . . France, placing herself in that door, assumes to us the attitude of defiance." Hence Jefferson told Robert Livingston, the nation's ambassador to France, and then James Monroe, Virginia's governor, to negotiate with France. Jefferson badly wanted New Orleans, the crucial port at the head of the Mississippi River, and West Florida, the coastal country between New Orleans and East Florida. "On the event of this mission, depends the future destinies of this republic," he asserted.

Negotiations

War with France seemed inevitable to many Americans early in the new century, for the free navigation of the Mississippi River could not be risked. The closure of port at New Orleans to U.S. goods confirmed their worst fears—though in fact a Spanish rather than a French official turned out to be responsible for the act. Secretary of State James Madison warned that the Mississippi River was "everything" to western settlers. "It is the Hudson, the Delaware, the Potomac, and all the navigable rivers of the Atlantic states, formed into one stream." Farmers floated their goods to market down the river. Many merchants and shippers in eastern states added their voices to this chorus, as their own businesses and prosperity hinged on western commerce.

Jefferson believed that to try to acquire New Orleans by force, as some Federalists and others were urging, would be risky. He hoped that another war between France and England would prompt the former to sell New Orleans, particularly if France feared that the United States might ally itself with England, a point he advised his diplomats to emphasize.

Deal

An impending war with England certainly played a strong role in Bonaparte's decision to sell Louisiana. So did France's loss of the profitable colony of San Dominique (now Haiti in the Caribbean), which had supplied more than two-thirds of the raw material for France's lucrative sugar industry. The best soldiers in Europe succumbed to a slave rebellion and disease in St. Dominique and Bonaparte eventually realized that his American possessions were ruining

France's treasury and prospects: "Damn sugar, damn coffee, damn colonies!" Bonaparte had planned for Louisiana to provision his sugar plantations. With those plantations going up in smoke and an expensive invasion of England in the works, it now made sense to Bonaparte to sell Louisiana and to use the proceeds to invade England.

Ambassador Livingston, who had been the chief negotiator in France, and James Monroe were surprised when the French, who had only recently denied that Louisiana was theirs to sell, reversed direction and offered to sell all of the Louisiana territory for 15 million dollars. This was more than the negotiators had been authorized to spend (being asked to secure New Orleans and West Florida), but it was so obviously a bargain that they snapped it up. Indeed, when Livingston asked Charles-Maurice Talleyrand (Bonaparte's Minister of Foreign Affairs) to specify the extent of their purchase, the foreign minister replied, in what amounted to a nice bit of prophecy: "You have made a noble bargain for yourselves, and I suppose you will make the most of it."

PDF Resource: *Thomas Jefferson's letter to James Monroe*, special envoy to France, justifying the Louisiana Purchase.

Historic Map Resource: *The Louisiana Purchase, 1804* (from the Library of Congress: European Exploration and the Louisiana Purchase at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/maps/lapurchase/index.html>).

Web Resources:

The Louisiana Purchase consists of three separate agreements between the United States and France: a treaty of cession and two agreements providing for the exchange of monies in the transaction. The Louisiana Purchase has been described as the greatest real estate deal in history—approximately 828,000 square miles of land west of the Mississippi River stretching from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains and from the Gulf of Mexico to the Canadian border. Thirteen states were eventually carved from the newly acquired Louisiana Territory.

Louisiana Secretary of State's Office: *The Louisiana Purchase* <http://www.sos.louisiana.gov/Home/Museums/LouisianasOldStateCapitol/Exhibits/LouisianaPurchase/tabid/588/Default.aspx>. Provides a comprehensive history of the Louisiana Purchase with images and maps.

The National Archives (Ourdocuments.gov): *The Louisiana Purchase Treaty* (images and text) <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=18>. Image of the Treaty of Cession with France and transcription of all 3 documents (the treaty and 2 documents detailing the monetary transaction). There is also a link to download hi-res images of the Cession document.

Library of Congress/American Memory: *The Louisiana Purchase* <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/louisianapurchase.html>. Provides a legislative timeline (1802-1807) with links and images (including maps).

Reaction

Many leaders of the Federalist Party argued that this was too much money for remote stretches of land populated by Indians and a motley, "half savage" population. They claimed that if Louisiana did develop, it would likely follow the lead of "imperial Virginia" and further weaken

the Federalists and the North. Hamilton, who had urged war to keep Louisiana out of French hands, cheered the acquisition of New Orleans but worried that doubling the size of the republic would lead to “the dismemberment of a large portion of our country, or a dissolution of the Government,” that the acquired territory would either end up forming its own nation or rendering the existing one inoperable by disturbing the balance between North and South. “Our Republican government derives its authority & momentum from the frequent meetings of the mass of people in towns & county assemblies,” remarked a New England Senator. “An extension of the body politic will enfeeble the circulation of its powers & energies in the extreme.”

But most of the nation cheered the purchase. It opened commerce on the Mississippi River and removed a powerful nation, a great threat, from the middle of the continent without shedding a single soldier’s blood. General Horatio Gates termed it “the greatest and most beneficial event that has taken place since the Declaration of Independence.” It was the most important measure fostering “peace and harmony among ourselves,” according to an Ohio politician, “since the establishment of the constitution.”

The Senate approved the cession treaty by a vote of 24-7—with a lone Federalist crossing party lines to vote with all 23 Republicans—and hoped that Bonaparte would not change his mind. Events in Europe soon precluded that and kept the dictator’s attention focused there until his final defeat in 1815. Jefferson easily won re-election in 1804, scoring a victory of 162-14 in the electoral college, and the peaceful and relatively inexpensive acquisition of Louisiana played a large role in his victory.

5. Consequences for the Peoples of Louisiana

New Orleans and Louisiana

The non-Indians who had lived in Louisiana were, in the main, disappointed by the arrival of the United States. The Spanish and French residents had not desired or sought incorporation into the United States, and they often found it difficult to get along with officials who might not speak their language and seldom shared their predominantly Catholic faith. They particularly resented the lack of representative government due to their status as a territory. “Are truths, then, so well founded, so universally acknowledged, inapplicable only to us?” they wondered in the sharply worded “***Remonstrance of the People of Louisiana against the Political system Adopted by Congress for Them.***” [[pdf resource](#)] “Do political axioms on the Atlantic become problems when transferred to the shores of the Mississippi?”

Jefferson indeed had serious doubts as to whether the polyglot population of Louisiana was prepared to govern itself. Another observer wondered: “Are two Spaniards from New Orleans to have the same influence in the Senate with two Senators from Virginia, Pennsylvania, or Massachusetts?”

But Louisiana quickly became integrated into the new nation. Its non-Indian population numbered about 8,000 in 1803, including about 2,800 slaves and 1,300 free people of color along

with 3,300 people of French descent. Over the next decade they were joined by some 10,000 refugees from the French Caribbean, black and white, free and slave. Some 13,000 immigrants from the United States also came to Louisiana in these years.

The southern portion of the Louisiana country soon gained the political rights it craved. Congress voted that they should have an elected legislative body in 1805 and a non-voting delegate to Congress. It became a state just seven years later, though it retained much of its distinctiveness. Laws were at first written in French and English, and by 1812 there were just three public schools, as so many residents favored private Catholic schools.

Historic Map Resources: *New Orleans 1798* (Perry Castenada Map Collection at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/new_orleans_1798.jpg). and *Louisiana State 1814* (Historic Map Works at <http://www.historicmapworks.com>).

Web Resource: *New Orleans*. From PBS: American Experience, this program highlights the geographic, political and cultural history of New Orleans (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/neworleans/>). Includes a flash show that highlights a map of New Orleans and its growth from 1800 to present day.

Slavery

Just as New England Federalists had feared, the lower part of the purchase soon became a bastion of Jeffersonian Republicanism and slavery. The proportion of blacks who were free in Louisiana declined with the arrival of the United States, and the color line—though still more blurred than in the rest of the nation—became much more distinct.

The Missouri Compromise of 1820 [map resource] constituted an attempt to draw a definite line across the area of the Louisiana Purchase to distinguish free from slave territories and states. But the question of whether the West would be slave or free, to what extent slavery would be allowed to expand, remained a vexing and divisive one in the United States through the Civil War.

Exploration

The Louisiana Purchase eased the diplomatic difficulties confronted by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Jefferson had been disingenuously trying to convince both Spain and the United States Congress that the expedition was an innocuous scientific, “literary” endeavor unrelated to the nation’s territorial and economic aspirations. Spain in fact protested the sale and tried to intercept the expedition, but the rest of the western world acknowledged the sale. Hence the expedition spent most of its time in territory officially belonging to the United States and could make a much better case to Indian leaders that their “white father” was President Jefferson, the face on most of the peace medals they distributed. Jefferson sent several expeditions into the Southwest as well, along the disputed border of the purchase. The most successful by far was by Zebulon Pike who pushed into the Rocky Mountains from 1806 to 1807, though when he reached the Upper Rio Grande Spaniards from Santa Fe detained him for questioning before returning him to the United States. The Spanish had confiscated his notes and maps, but Pike wrote a detailed report from memory on the resources of the southwest.

Web Resources:

National Park Service: *Who was Zebulon Pike...Hard Luck Explorer or Successful Spy?* (<http://www.nps.gov/archive/jeff/lewisclark2/circa1804/westwardexpansion/earlyexplorers/zebulonpike.htm>).

The Pike Page: A Commemorative Project of the Zebulon Pike Bicentennial (<http://zebulonpike.org>). A comprehensive page devoted to the expeditions of Pike including narrative and maps.

Map Resource: *The Expeditions of Zebulon Pike* (from Pike: Hardluck Explorer at <http://zebulonpike.org/pike-hardluck-explorer.htm>).

Spain and Mexico

The Spanish resented and resisted the purchase because they predicted accurately its consequences for their empire. The *Adams-Onis Treaty* [pdf/map resource] with Spain in 1819 transferred all of Florida to the United States, relinquished U.S. claims to Texas, and fixed the mid-continental boundary between the two nations. But thousands of settlers from the United States continued to pour into the Lower Mississippi River Valley in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and traders and farmers from the young nation pressed more and more closely against Spanish settlements in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona as the century unfolded.

Article Resource: Brooks, Phillip C. 1940. Spain's farewell to Louisiana. *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27(1): 29-42. Available in electronic form at JSTOR (www.jstor.com).

Web Resource: A good synopsis of the Spanish reaction to the Louisiana Purchase can be found on the "Discovering Lewis & Clark" website at (<http://www.lewis-clark.org/content/content-article.asp?ArticleID=752>).

Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, and the new nation of Mexico grappled with the same difficulties with the United States that Spain had encountered. Anglo-American settlers in Texas won independence in 1836. In 1846 the United States took by force of arms the northern half of Mexico.

Web Resource: *The Myth and Meaning of Texas Independence* (Texian Legacy Association at <http://www.texianlegacy.com/march2.html>).

Web Resource: *The U.S.-Mexican War* (PBS online program that provides a comprehensive narrative of the people, places and events surrounding the U.S.-Mexican War at http://www.pbs.org/keramexicanwar/index_flash.html).

The Purchase and Indian Removal

The Louisiana Purchase did not immediately affect most Native Americans living within on the western fringes of its fuzzy boundaries. Groups that had lived near Euro-American settlements, such as the Choctaw and Caddo, had already been grappling with those newcomers for many

years. White settlement was decades away in most areas, where traders from France, England, and Spain continued to work in the continental interior.

Indeed, one could argue that the Louisiana Purchase had a more immediate impact on Indian nations living east of the Mississippi River than west of it. Congress promptly empowered the President to trade land in the Louisiana Purchase for land to the east which settlers hungered for. Earlier treaties had offered money or goods. Now they were essentially land swaps. The federal government engaged in ten such exchanges between 1817 and 1821 alone. The most notorious movement entailed the forced march of thousands of Cherokee to Oklahoma in the 1830s. Other resettlements were less horrible. But the Indian leaders who participated in these bargains realized, and were reminded by white negotiators, that the status quo was not a viable option, that whites would dispossess them of their land one way or another. Their removal thrust them onto unfamiliar lands that were often claimed by other Indians.

Book Resource: Perdue, Theda and Michael D. Green (eds). 1995. *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents*. Boston: St. Martin's Press. Documents the Indian side of the treaty process.

Web Resources:

Indian Removal. An excellent website from the Library of Congress that provides narrative about Indian Removal and many links to key documents, letters, debates, maps and photographs from the LOC collection (<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html>).

The Trail of Tears. Told from a Native American perspective, this website provides narrative, photos and numerous web links to information about the Trail of Tears, the forced march of the Cherokee people from their lands east of the Mississippi to "Indian Territory" (<http://www.nativeamericans.com/TrailofTears2.htm>).

Furthermore, the same forces that had driven them from their ancestral lands would reappear much more quickly than most leaders on either side of the cultural divide had anticipated. When settlement proceeded more rapidly than expected on the lands along the west bank of the Mississippi, another round of treaties moved native groups further west, to arid country deemed to be a "Permanent Indian Frontier." Hence the Choctaw and Cherokee surrendered their recently acquired lands in Arkansas and moved west again.

The Purchase and Indian Reservations

Jefferson had anticipated that substantial white settlement would not cross the Mississippi River for at least fifty years, that the Indian nations that had moved there would be largely undisturbed for at least two generations. Indeed, he hoped to ban white settlement of the territory outside the boundaries of what would become the state of Louisiana. He miscalculated. By the 1840s settlement had spread into much of what was to become Missouri, Arkansas, and Iowa, and thousands of United States citizens emigrated to the recently acquired Oregon Country and California—and had to cross Indian country to get there. Later in the 19th century, settlement of the Great Plains and other arid portions of the Louisiana Purchase boomed.

The nation was fast running out of large tracts of land to locate Native Americans as pressure for farms, ranches, and mines grew. Confining Indians to reservations struck most non-Indians as the best solution to this competition. Reservations would provide stability and insulation and would constitute a sort of laboratory in which Indians could be gradually acculturated, as Jefferson had anticipated.

As usual, whites and Indians alike failed to meet these expectations. Whites continued to invade Indian land before treaties had been signed, and the government radically reduced the size of reservations well into the twentieth century. Many Indian nations resisted fiercely being placed on reservations, particularly when those lands did not include their traditional homes or placed them alongside traditional enemies. One of the most notorious examples of failed treaty making occurred in the Black Hills of the Dakotas, when just six years after the Sioux Reservation had been established some fifteen thousand white gold seekers trespassed on it. The Sioux refused to sell, the United States refused to honor the treaty it had made, and a bloody war broke out. Not until 1871, with all other options exhausted, would Sitting Bull and his remnant of resisters move to the new, much smaller, reservation.

The Louisiana Purchase had promised to solve the problem of Indian-white relations in the new nation. Though it brought some new solutions, it did not change the overriding story of dispossession and death.

Map Resources: *Indian Land Cessions from 1750-1890 and Oregon Reservations Map Series.*

Historic Map Resource: *Oklahoma Indian Territory, 1884* (from the Perry Castenada Map Collection at http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/ok_indian_territory_1884.jpg).

GIS/Data Resources: Native American Displacement in the Aftermath of the Louisiana Purchase [in process].

PDF Resource: *The Indian Removal Act of 1830.*

Web Resources:

The West: Sitting Bull (from PBS, this site provides a short narrative about Sitting Bull and the battles waged in the Black Hills at http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/s_z/sittingbull.htm).

Sitting Bull Memorial at Center of Controversy. An interesting article that highlights the history and controversy surrounding the Sitting Bull memorial in South Dakota and attempts to repair and revive the site (http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-06-16-sittingbull_N.htm).

6. Consequences for Newcomers and the United States

Early Settlement

Settlers from the United States were not averse to settling places outside the boundaries of the nation. But the Louisiana Purchase greatly encouraged the movement of people across the Mississippi River. Plantations and smaller farms soon proliferated along the Lower Mississippi

River, Red and Arkansas Rivers. Farms and a string of towns grew along the Missouri River in Missouri, settlement aided by treaties with the Osage and Quapaw in 1808 and 1817, respectively. By 1840, settlement had consumed much of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri. All three were states.

Later Settlement

The rest of the Louisiana Purchase was settled in roughly two stages. In the two decades preceding the Civil War farms pushed into much of what is now Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, and Nebraska, and Mormons arrived in Utah. But the rest of the arid West, assumed to be a “Great American Desert” unfit for agriculture, drew few settlers. After the Civil War, though, ranchers and homesteaders made their way to western Kansas and Nebraska, as well as to the Dakotas, Montana, Wyoming, and Oklahoma. This part of the West was in fact more difficult to farm and more apt to be dominated by larger concerns. In all, thirteen states would be carved out of the Louisiana Purchase (Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana).

Nationalism

The doubling of the nation’s size together with rapid settlement emboldened more and more citizens of the United States to see their nation as one favored by God and destined to expand across the continent [**pdf resource: *O’Sullivan’s Manifest Destiny, 1839***].

Jefferson, much like ***Frederick Jackson Turner*** [**web resource: *The Frontier Thesis***] a century later, believed that continual settlement of the West constituted, in the words of biographer Joseph Ellis, “a self-renewing engine that drove the American republic forward . . . It was America’s fountain of youth.” The farming frontier, in effect, “was actually integrating the older United States into a newer and ever-changing version of America.”

The Federal Government

This rapid geographic expansion was accompanied by a stronger and stronger federal government. It fought decisive Indian wars in the South and West into the 1880s to clear the way for settlement and then established extensive reservations on which to house the Indians who survived. It also encouraged settlement by selling land at low prices or essentially giving it away to speculators and settlers alike. It subsidized railroad expansion to an extent not seen in any other nation during the nineteenth century.

Map Resource: *Indian Battles (1521-1890)*. A map series showing points of conflict with native tribes from the colonial settlement period through westward expansion.

PDF Resources (land claims): The *Donation Land Act* of 1850 and The *Homestead Act* of 1862.

The Constitution

It was with great regret that Jefferson backed away from his plans to alter the Constitution so that the federal government was specifically empowered to make the Louisiana Purchase, as he feared that any sign of hesitation on his part might provide Bonaparte with a pretext for backing out of the deal. He realized what many Federalists were only too glad to point out: the Louisiana Purchase was an act “beyond the Constitution,” and it set a precedent that would make it more difficult for subsequent leaders to confine the power of the federal government, to interpret the Constitution in narrow, conservative terms.

Indeed, leaders who followed Jefferson tended to interpret the Constitution more loosely. This trend in many ways culminated with Abraham Lincoln, who argued that although the Constitution did not explicitly condemn slavery, the founders clearly believed that the institution was immoral and that it would eventually wither and die. Jefferson’s loose interpretation of the Constitution and his broad use of federal power laid the groundwork for interpretations and uses that he probably would have found repugnant.

PDF Resource: Thomas Jefferson’s proposed amendment to the Constitution regarding the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 (transcript with graphic of original document).

The Civil War

Federalists feared that the Louisiana Purchase would permanently tilt the United States toward the Jeffersonian Republicans, and as Louisiana and Missouri became slave states it seemed that their fears were justified. The *Missouri Compromise of 1820* [map resource] established what was to be a permanent line between slave and free state in the West. But both sections remained very suspicious of each other, and both came to believe that the future of slavery depended on whether or not it would continue to expand as the nation expanded. Indeed, one could make a good argument that the Civil War began not at South Carolina’s Fort Sumter, but in Kansas, where proponents of slavery and abolition gathered to kill each other (as well as to vote over whether the new state would be slave or free) during the mid-1850s.

Web Resource: *Bleeding Kansas* (from the PBS Africans in America Program at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2952.html>).

Historic Map Resource: *Reynold’s Political Map of the United States, The Comparative Area of the Free and Slave States*, 1856 (from the Library of Congress at <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/archive/03/0320001r.jpg>). This map compares statistics on free and slave states. Issued during the presidential election campaign of 1856, it pictures famous Western explorer John C. Fremont (1813-1890), the first presidential candidate of the Republican Party, and his running mate, William L. Dayton (1807-1864). The Republican Party had been created in 1854 by opponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which allowed for extension of slavery into free territory in the West. Despite gaining thirty-three percent of the popular vote, Frémont lost the election to James Buchanan (1791-1868). Four years later, however, the Republican Party succeeded in electing Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865).

7. Enduring Questions

How can a virtuous republic acquire and settle land claimed and held by others?

The United States acquired Louisiana from France over the objections of Spain. But Spain had a difficult time arguing that France could not dispose of the land as it saw fit.

Acquiring land from Indian nations, as we have seen, was a much bloodier and sordid process. It is one of the central ironies of our history that westward expansion offered so much opportunity, hope, and pride to the United States and so much loss and pain to Native Americans. It is an irony that most of us have not resolved.

Under what circumstances, if any, should presidents violate their principles?

For Jefferson, the end of acquiring so much land from what could potentially be a strong enemy justified the means of using ends that he believed were extra-Constitutional. The Louisiana Purchase was a tremendous boon for the United States. But it has often been observed that people in the United States have thought of themselves as idealistic Jeffersonians while living and acting as cynical Hamiltonians who have simply pursued power without acknowledging as much. One could level the same charge against Jefferson the president.

What role did chance and contingency play in the Louisiana Purchase?

The Louisiana Purchase likely would not have happened when it did if Bonaparte and France had not run into unanticipated difficulties in St. Dominique. The peaceful doubling of the United States owed as much to the rebellious slaves and malaria-bearing mosquitoes that devastated the French army as to the skillful diplomacy and steady hand of Jefferson and Livingston.

But it is also important to identify durable variables that underlay these historical accidents and contingencies. The United States possessed what no other western power did at the dawn of the nineteenth century: a rapidly growing population that was willing and eager to move onto Indian land. It was this demographic fact that lay behind Jefferson's relative patience with Spanish ownership of so much of what would eventually become the United States. Spain was a declining power that could only lightly populate its northern frontier. Time was therefore on the side of the United States. Only when faced with French occupation of the territory did Jefferson feel the need to act.

How did the Louisiana Purchase impact the Acquisition of the Oregon Country?

It is difficult to trace a direct cause-and-affect relationship between the Louisiana Purchase and the settlement of the boundary dispute in the Oregon Country more than four decades later. A great deal of time transpired between the two events, and the events were much different from each other. England and the United States had jointly occupied the Oregon Country since the treaty that ended the War of 1812. England's willingness to withdraw to the 49th parallel owed much to a pragmatic assessment of political and economic realities—not to mention the rapid

growth of settlers from the United States that were flooding into the Willamette Valley around 1840. The Lewis and Clark Expedition strengthened the claim of the United States to the Oregon Country, but that expedition was planned before the Louisiana Purchase and likely would have proceeded without it.

The Louisiana Purchase did, however, contribute to a strong sense of national confidence and set the table for subsequent expansion. The term “manifest destiny” would not be termed until the 1840s, but four decades earlier the Louisiana Purchase strengthened the nation’s sense of destiny, and its successful aftermath quieted fears that expansion would prove to be the republic’s undoing.

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