



# The WILD WEST

People and Events That Shaped  
the American West

## *The Louisiana Purchase*

The **Louisiana Purchase** was a land deal that took place in 1803, where France gave the United States over 800,000 square miles of new land. The land that the Louisiana Purchase included is now home to 14 states.

Louisiana had gone through many hands before the deal took place, having been passed back and forth between Spain and France many times. The land was in Spain's possession (who had it mainly to keep the British from taking it) when it began to be settled by nearby Americans.

New Orleans had proved to be the most important port on the Mississippi River, which was a major thoroughfare for trade in the United States as more and more people began to move west. In 1800, a secret agreement was made between Spain and France, and the land was given back to France. Napoleon sent troops to the port and their presence began to worry citizens, who feared they may soon take over the West and later the entire United States.

When President Jefferson heard about this, he sent James Monroe and Robert Livingston to Paris to talk to Napoleon, the Emperor of France, about buying Louisiana as a way to have access to New Orleans and the river. Jefferson didn't like the idea of buying the entire territory for many reasons: he thought it implied that France deserved to be in the United States in the first place, and he also didn't think it was his place as a president to make such a large transaction, since it was not explicitly written in the Constitution. However, he knew that not doing anything could result in a war to drive the French off American land. On April 30, 1803, the United States and France signed the Louisiana Purchase Treaty. Jefferson then began preparing to send explorers to map the new land, eventually sending Lewis and Clark.

**What do you think the United States would be like if Jefferson had not bought the Louisiana Territory? Write a detailed paragraph below.**

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