

A Mighty Purchase & a Long Trek

The transfer of Louisiana to France unsettled Americans. They thought they might lose access to the Mississippi River and New Orleans. President Thomas Jefferson immediately sent James Monroe to France to strike a deal. The Americans got more than they imagined when Napoleon offered to sell them the entire 828,000 square mile Louisiana Territory. The Treaty of Cession of April 30, 1803, gave the United States the entire tract for 15 million dollars, approximately 4 cents an acre.

The people of Upper Louisiana barely had time to realize that they were under French rule before learning of the U.S. purchase. Shortly after the purchase, Jefferson created the Army's "Corps of Discovery," also known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Their journey across the continent helped open the American West to white settlers. They blazed new trails, mapped and named rivers, streams, lakes and mountains, and recorded native flora and fauna. They also developed both positive and negative relationships with American Indians, which would have ramifications for decades to come.

The purchase also brought an influx of European settlers and displaced American Indians from the east. Members of the Shawnee and Delaware tribes resettled in Osage territory. Conflicts emerged as the Osage saw their control over hunting ground weaken. In 1808, William Clark met with Osage leaders at Fort Osage in present-day Jackson County. There, the Osage signed a treaty giving up their lands, power and influence in Missouri in return for trade goods and access to a blacksmith and mill. With this treaty they lost much of their power and influence in the region.



The Louisiana Purchase opened up the west to American settlement, displacing American Indians and bringing more enslaved people to the territory, including the Missouri area.

Images courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery; Smithsonian Institute, "Thomas Jefferson by Mather Brown, circa. 1801-1809, (left).



Images courtesy of the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis. "Treaty between the United States and the Great and Little Osage Nation of Indians, concluded and signed at Fort Clark, circa 1808-1809, (above); The National Archives. "Agreement to pay France for the Louisiana Purchase," (left).

