

The Louisiana Purchase

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In **1492**, Christopher Columbus, representing Spain, sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in search of a water route to China. Thirty-six days later, Columbus and his crew discovered what is now the Bahamas. His discovery opened up the Americas to colonization.

By **1763**, Spain owned much of North America, including Florida and the land west of the Mississippi River. Great Britain owned the land east of the Mississippi River, and much of Canada. The original thirteen colonies were established and flourished fairly independently.

In **1764**, Great Britain started imposing taxes on the colonists to pay for the French and Indian War. Disagreements regarding taxation led to the American Revolution, which took place between **1775** and **1783**. The Treaty of Paris marked the end of the Revolution and officially established the former British colonies as states of the United States of America.

After the Revolutionary War, the colonists began moving further west into what was known as the frontier. At that time, there were no railroads or ways to transport goods quickly across land. Frontiersmen needed to be able to use the Mississippi River to transport goods to the Port of New Orleans, where those goods could then be placed on ships and sent to the eastern states or to foreign countries for trade. At the time, the Port of New Orleans was owned by Spain. In **1795**, Spain signed the Treaty of San Lorenzo, which gave the U.S. rights to use the Mississippi and the Port of New Orleans for trade.

In **1801**, Thomas Jefferson was elected the third president of the newly independent United States. A year later, in **1802**, Spain gave over the Louisiana Territory to France. Immediately upon possessing this land, France closed the Port of New Orleans to American trade. This would have devastating consequences for the American frontiersmen then living in Kentucky, Tennessee, and throughout the greater frontier.

The loss of the port created tension and unrest among the American people. Thomas Jefferson came up with a plan. In **1803**, he asked Robert R. Livingston to attempt to purchase the Port of New Orleans from France. To Jefferson's surprise, France offered to sell the United States the entire territory of Louisiana for the price of \$15 million.

The Louisiana Purchase has since been referred to as the greatest real estate deal in history. It more than doubled the size of the United States, and the Louisiana territory proved to be a highly valuable resource of minerals, land, forests, and wildlife. The Louisiana Purchase was both an economic and political victory for the United States. Eventually, this land deal added thirteen new states to the union and enabled the United States to avoid a possible war with France.

References:

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Timeline of the Louisiana Territory (1762–1804)

1762–1802 – Spain Owns the Louisiana Territory

1775 – Revolutionary War Between Great Britain and the Colonies Begins

1776 – Declaration of Independence

1783 – Treaty of Paris—Revolutionary War Ends

1789 – George Washington Elected President of the United States

1792 – Kentucky Becomes a State

1795 – Tennessee Becomes a State, Treaty of San Lorenzo (Spain gives the United States access to the Mississippi River and the Port of New Orleans for trade.), John Adams Elected President of the United States

1801 – Thomas Jefferson Elected President of the United States

1802 – Spain Gives Over Louisiana to France, Port of New Orleans Closes to the U.S.

1803 – France Sells Louisiana to the United States, Ohio Becomes a State.

1804 – Lewis and Clark Expedition Begins