

Louisiana Purchase: The acquisition by the United States of more than 800,000 square miles of territory from France in 1803. The young American republic was almost doubled in area, extending its territory westward from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The immediate gains were control of the Mississippi Valley and access to the Gulf of Mexico. The purchase determined the westward orientation of the United States in the 19th century and was basic to its rise as a world power.

Background Napoleon, who came to power in France in 1799, had planned a reconstituted and extended French colonial empire in the West Indies and the Mississippi Valley. The peace that France had established with Britain in 1801 made such an empire possible. Napoleon sought to restore France's former island possessions and to link them with a territory on the North American mainland. France would exchange manufactured goods for the sugar and coffee of the islands; the mainland would supply the islands with timber, flour, and salted meat.

The restoration of French rule faced varying conditions in the West Indian colonies. Two of the islands, Guadeloupe and Martinique, were being returned to France after occupation by Britain. However, St.-Domingue, modern Haiti, presented a major problem. There, rebellious slaves under Toussaint L'Ouverture had taken control. The recovery of this colony was vital because France had secured title to the rest of the island of Hispaniola from Spain in 1795.

France Acquires Louisiana For the mainland base of the reconstituted empire, Napoleon sought the retrocession of the portion of Louisiana that France had ceded to Spain in 1762. At the close of the Seven Years' War, France had relinquished to Britain all of the province of Louisiana east of the Mississippi, except for the city of New Orleans and the Isle of Orleans. The city, the Isle, and all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi had been ceded to Spain as a compensation for the losses it had suffered by supporting France. Napoleon's diplomacy succeeded, and by the Treaty of San Ildefonso, on Oct. 1, 1800, King Charles IV of Spain returned Louisiana to France in exchange for a promise to establish a kingdom in Italy for his brother-in-law, the Duke of Parma.

Napoleon took steps to constitute the empire that seemed within his grasp. His brother-in-law General Leclerc, with 20,000 troops, sailed for St.-Domingue on Nov. 22, 1801, and in three months received the surrender of Toussaint. Napoleon formulated plans for the administration of Louisiana, and an expedition for occupying the colony was assembled in Holland in the winter of 1802-1803.

Reaction in America. President Thomas Jefferson was well prepared to meet the problems of the impending French ownership of Louisiana. As the American minister in Paris from 1785 to 1789 and as a student of French institutions, he had acquaintances in Paris and a deep knowledge of France. He also understood and sympathized with the ambitions of the frontiersmen. He felt that under the weak rule of Spain the territory on the west bank of the Mississippi, in the course of time, would fall into American hands. The presence of France, however, would constitute a threat to the advance of the United States.

Although officially denied by France, the retrocession was rumored in Washington early in 1801, and in November the American minister in London sent Secretary of State James Madison a definitive copy of the Treaty of San Ildefonso. President Jefferson was hopeful that international rivalries would prevent the French from occupying New Orleans. Robert R. Livingston, the American minister in Paris, was less sanguine. Frustrated in his efforts to dissuade France, he wrote, "There never was a government in which less could be done by negotiation than here. There is no people, no legislature, no counsellors. One man is everything. He seldom asks advice, and never hears it unasked."

In October 1802, Jefferson was faced with a serious crisis. The freedom of navigation of the Mississippi which the United States had enjoyed since 1795 was suddenly imperiled. On October 16 the acting Spanish intendant of Louisiana suddenly revoked the right of American citizens to deposit goods at New Orleans, duty free, for reshipment in oceangoing vessels. It was first thought that the revocation had been instigated by France, but documents since discovered in Madrid show that the blundering action was taken by Spain alone.

Jefferson felt constrained to take immediate steps to pacify the fiery inhabitants of Kentucky and Tennessee, who were talking of war with Spain and the conquest of New Orleans before the French could take possession. He was also beset by political foes who welcomed an opportunity to embarrass his administration. The President quieted his critics by nominating James Monroe as minister plenipotentiary and extraordinary to France and Spain.

Napoleon Changes Plans By the time Monroe arrived in France, on April 10, 1803, Napoleon had relinquished his dream of an American empire. He had not been able to persuade Spain to cede East and West Florida, without which

Louisiana was difficult to defend. Furthermore, the Louisiana expedition in Holland had become ice-bound in February 1803, just as the ships were about to sail. And disaster had overtaken his forces in St.-Domingue. After initial successes, the army had been decimated by yellow fever and the ferocity of the blacks.

Increasingly disturbing to Napoleon was the danger of a rupture with the United States. Not until after the Spanish closing of New Orleans did he recognize the degree to which he was alienating the Americans and driving them toward an alliance with Britain. Under these circumstances, Napoleon abandoned his colonial ambitions. He decided to sell Louisiana to finance the impending war with Britain.

U.S. Terms The instructions from Jefferson that Monroe brought for himself and Livingston were modest compared with the terms of the treaty they were to conclude. They were authorized to offer \$10 million for the Isle of Orleans, the islands lying north and east of the channel of the Mississippi, and the Floridas, which the U.S. government thought Napoleon had secured. France was to have free navigation of the Mississippi and a duty-free right of deposit at New Orleans for 10 years. If the entire Isle of Orleans could not be secured, the ministers were to negotiate for space on the Mississippi to establish a new commercial town, and as a last resort they should accept an improvement of the right of deposit in New Orleans. There was no reference to territory west of the Mississippi.

French Terms Napoleon, however, was thinking in larger terms. He summoned François Barbé-Marbois, minister of the public treasury, on April 11, and directed him to handle the negotiations with Livingston. "I renounce Louisiana," he declared. "It is not only New Orleans that I cede; it is the whole colony without reserve. I renounce it with greatest regret; to attempt obstinately to retain it would be folly." The selection of Barbé-Marbois to handle the negotiations for France was very congenial to the Americans, for Barbé-Marbois had served in the French foreign service in the United States from 1779 to 1785 and had many American friends.

Disregarding their instructions Livingston and Monroe proceeded to bargain for all of Louisiana. A treaty and two financial conventions, all dated April 30, 1803, provided for the cession of the entire territory to the United States, the payment of \$11,250,000 to France, and the assumption by the United States of claims against France by U.S. citizens amounting to \$3,750,000.

Obstacles Despite the successful negotiations, there were serious obstacles that could have prevented the transfer of Louisiana. The French constitution required the approval of the legislature for the alienation of French territory. There was also a question of whether Spain, having been misled by France, would permit the transfer to take place. And in the United States there was a feeling, at first shared by Jefferson himself, that the acquisition of Louisiana would require a constitutional amendment.

But each obstacle was soon resolved. Napoleon ignored his legislature, and Spain did not halt the retrocession to France. Jefferson, heartened by the enthusiastic reception at home of the news of the purchase, decided that no amendment was necessary. When Congress met on Oct. 17, 1803, the Federalists could offer little effective opposition to the purchase of Louisiana. The Senate ratified the treaty and the conventions by a vote of 24 to 7, and ratifications were exchanged with France the next day.

The transfers took place in ceremonies at New Orleans. On Nov. 30, 1803, the Spanish commissioner formally delivered the colony to Pierre Clément Laussat, the French prefect, who had been sent the previous January to plan the civil administration and to await the arrival of the French military forces. On December 20, Laussat transferred the colony to the United States.

Administration The Louisiana Purchase presented new problems for the United States. Without their own consent and unaccustomed to self-government, an alien people was being brought into the republic. On President Jefferson's recommendation, Congress established the government on the basis of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, giving the executive and judiciary the status and authority accorded to the first grade of territorial government. William C. C. Claiborne, governor of Mississippi Territory, was appointed governor of the Louisiana Territory.