

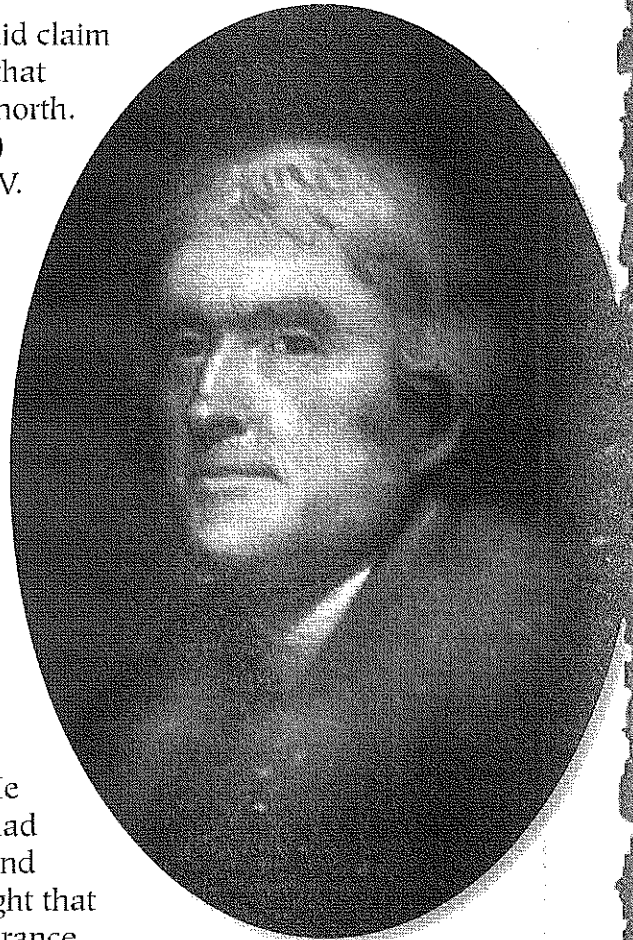
The Louisiana Purchase

In 1682, a group of French explorers laid claim to a huge area of land in the New World that started at the Gulf of Mexico and spread north. They named the territory (TAIR-uh-tor-ee) Louisiana in honor of their king, Louis XIV. The French did not think the land was valuable, and only a few French settlers lived there.

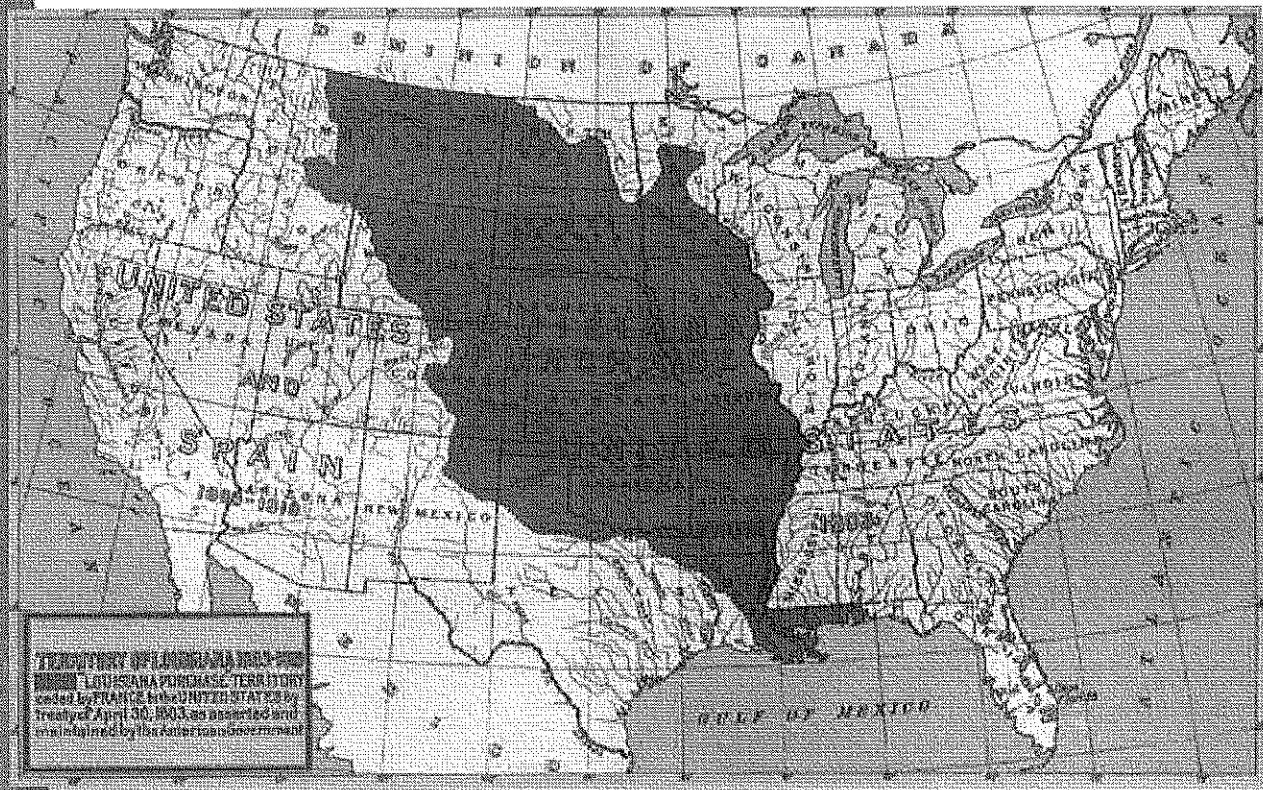
The king of France gave Louisiana to Spain in exchange for help in a war against Great Britain. But in 1800, Spain gave back the land. When the French took over Louisiana again, they refused to let the Americans store any goods in New Orleans. In addition, they told the Americans that they could not use the Mississippi River. Traders had long used this river to move goods.

Thomas Jefferson became the third president of the United States in 1801. He knew that the French leader, Napoleon, had a great army and would not hesitate to send soldiers to Louisiana. Some people thought that the United States should go to war with France, but Jefferson wanted to avoid a war. Instead, he sent two diplomats (DIP-luh-matz) to France to buy New Orleans.

The men were surprised when the French offered to sell not just New Orleans, but all of Louisiana. The Americans offered \$8 million for the territory. France demanded \$15 million. The men agreed and signed the Louisiana Purchase on April 30, 1803. They called the new land the Louisiana Territory.



Thomas Jefferson



President Jefferson was delighted. He had dreamed of enlarging America, and now it was twice as big! Some people complained that the territory was too expensive. But, Congress approved the sale.

The Spanish were furious. They said Napoleon had cheated them to gain control of Louisiana. They accused the United States of buying stolen land. Jefferson told them that this fight was between France and Spain. America would not get involved. So Spain backed down because it did not want to fight powerful France.

The United States took control of Louisiana on December 20, 1803. There were almost 828,000 square miles (about 2 million sq km) of land to be explored. America had purchased this land for only four cents an acre, making this the greatest real estate deal in history.

Comprehension Question

The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States. Why was that important?