

THE FORMING OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



INTRODUCTION

The population of the US grew quickly in the 100 years after the American Revolution. Cities and farms in the northeast continued to grow and expand, and after explorers ventured into the west, large numbers of people seeking new land, homes, and opportunities began to move across the continent. However, even as the new nation was taking shape, tensions

rooted in the past began to erupt in conflicts:

- The expansion of settlers into the west increasingly affected Native Americans who inhabited the land.
- The American Revolution did not permanently solve the problems between Britain and the US.
- Within the US itself, people disagreed strongly about a number of ideas, such

as who had rights and how the country should be governed.

This section discusses three events that were connected with these conflicts and contributed to the forming of the US:

- westward expansion
- the War of 1812
- the American Civil War

Note to the teacher

This section focuses on general westward expansion of pioneers and settlers, not on the history of individual US states. More information about that topic can be found in a later section of the manual.

This section also uses terms relating to government. Before presenting activities in this and the following sections, the teacher may wish to introduce or review information about the responsibilities of the various levels of government in the US. Information and activities about government, politics, and citizenship can be found in the last section of this manual.



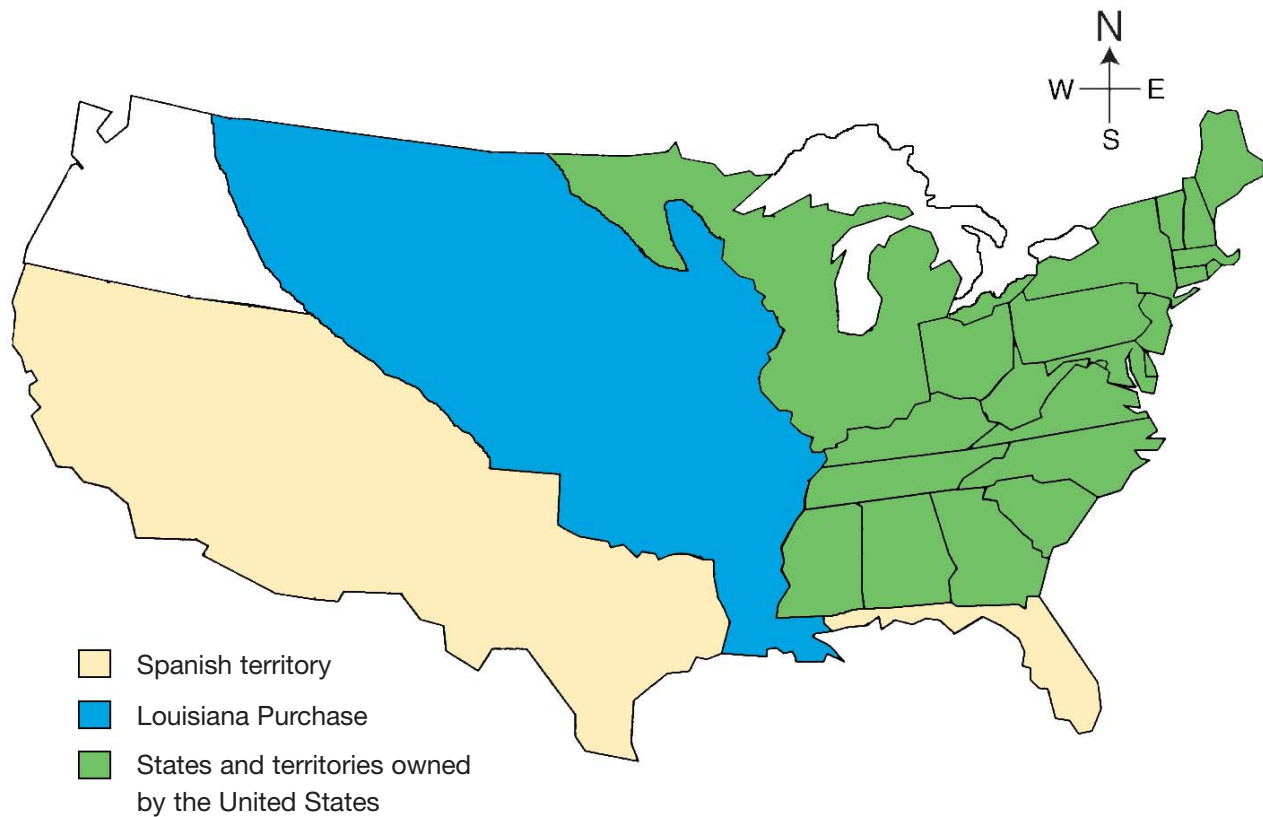
WESTWARD EXPANSION

Background Information

By the late 1700s, the US had established itself along the east coast and as far west as the banks of the Mississippi River. Spain had laid claim to the west coast in present-day California and built over 20 missions in the area. Although large numbers of Native Americans lived in the land that lay between the two coasts, it had not been explored to any great extent by Europeans or American colonists. This area was called the West.

The expansion of the US into the West is a story that involves many significant people and events. This section focuses on eight:

- Louisiana Purchase
- Corps of Discovery
- pioneers
- Trail of Tears
- Texas rebellion



The US doubled in size after the Louisiana Purchase

- Mexican American War
- California Gold Rush
- reservations and resistance

Louisiana Purchase

Some Europeans and colonists considered the West to be a wild, mythical place, while others felt that it offered exciting opportunities for freedom as well as wealth. Governments of the US and several European countries were intrigued by the West because they hoped it contained a waterway that linked the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The nation that found a route through the vast North and South American continents rather than around them would gain great wealth and trading power.

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson increased US strength in the West by negotiating the **Louisiana Purchase**, territory making up the western part of the Mississippi Valley that was purchased by the US from France. The US paid France \$15 million for 500 million acres (200 million ha) of the land France had claimed between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. With the purchase, the US doubled in size, extending from the Gulf of Mexico in the south to the border with Canada in the north, then west from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The US also gained control of New Orleans, an important port for trading with Europe. New Orleans' location in the center of the Gulf of Mexico gave ships access not only east to the Atlantic Ocean, but also north into the center of the continent.

Corps of Discovery

While he was negotiating the Louisiana Purchase, President Jefferson was also working on another way for the US to expand west. In 1804, Jefferson formed the **Corps of Discovery**, an expedition party created to explore the West for scientific and commercial reasons and led by US army officers Meriwether Lewis (1774–1809) and William Clark (1770–1838). Important goals for the expedition involved learning about the land's geography and climate, the Native Americans living there, and the plants and animals. However, the most important goal was to find a waterway that linked the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.



A US stamp honoring the Corps of Discovery

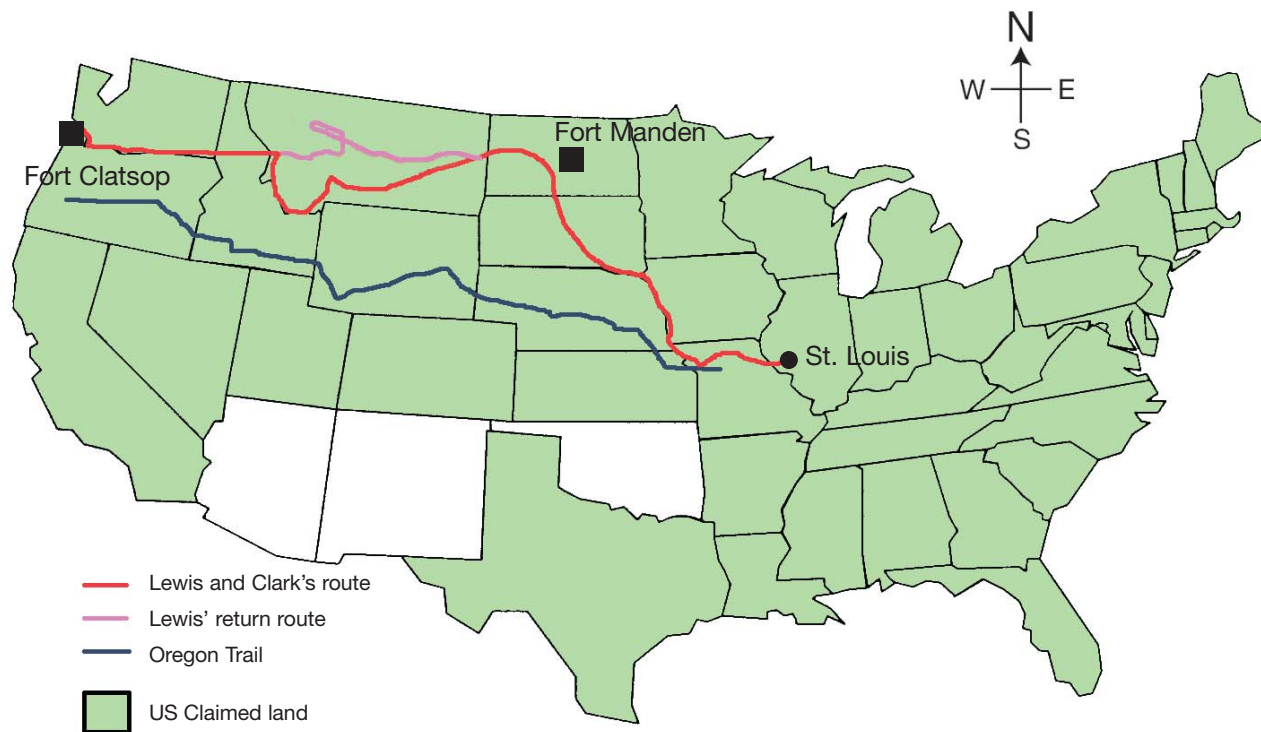
Like many people of the time, Jefferson and the expedition leaders hoped that if they explored north and west, they might even find the fabled **Northwest Passage**, the route said to connect the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Until the mid-1800s, many explorers searched for this route, but did not go far enough north or met with some mishap on the way. Today, the Northwest Passage refers to an ocean passage along the northernmost coast of North America, through the Canadian Arctic.

Did you know?

While each crew member of the Corps of Discovery contributed to the extraordinary journey, two members, York and Sacagawea, gave the expedition added historical significance:

- York (c. 1770–1831), who came on the journey as the slave of William Clark, was the only African-American crew member. He is documented as the first African American to cross continental North America.
- Native American Sacagawea (c. 1787–1812) was the expedition's only female member. A member of the Shoshone nation, she made the journey with her baby, who was only 55 days old when the expedition began. Sacagawea was a valuable member of the Corps, acting as both interpreter and guide.

For over two years, the Corps journeyed over 8,000 miles (about 13,000 km) by boat, foot, and horse, across land never before seen by Europeans. The expedition members formed their route by following the waterways. They sailed the Missouri, Snake, Columbia, and Yellowstone Rivers. They explored areas of what are now known as Missouri, North Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Montana, Idaho, then crossed the Rocky Mountains into Oregon and Washington.



The US by 1900

As the expedition members traveled, they met approximately 50 different Native American tribes, most of whom had never seen non-native people before. The Corps soon learned that the indigenous peoples had different cultures, ways of living, and languages. Often, the Native Americans helped the Corps on their journey by providing food, shelter, supplies, and directions. It is likely that the Corps would not have completed the expedition if it were not for the assistance of Native American nations such as the Mandan, Hidatsa, Nez Perce, Clatsop, and Shoshone.

The journey was hard and took much longer than Lewis and Clark had predicted, but President Jefferson and the people of the US considered the expedition to be an overwhelming success. From the Corps' reports and samples, people in the east learned about many previously unknown plants, animals, and minerals from across

America. Although Lewis and Clark did not find the waterway to the Pacific they had hoped for, they did chart a trail across land and water. In the process, they named many of the geographic landmarks across the continent and mapped a large portion of America. Some people in the east did not wait long to investigate the newly explored land for themselves. In fact, on their return journey along the Missouri River, the Corps met many fur traders who were heading to the first section of the areas mapped by the Corps.

Pioneers

Using the charted routes of Lewis and Clark as starting points, fur traders further expanded knowledge of the US West, providing more detailed reports and maps. Fur trapper Jedediah Smith (1799–1831) is credited with exploring more area than any other trapper. He traveled and mapped



most of southwestern America, and also charted the South Pass, a passage through the Rocky Mountains that wagons could safely travel. Smith's maps provided the information settlers needed to safely cross America.

After the fur trade declined, many trappers became guides for the next group of Americans moving west. People from the eastern US and Europe were beginning to think of the West as a place they could settle and create communities. The majority of those who went west were farmers looking for fertile land. Others were merchants, craftsmen, doctors, lawyers, and teachers who moved west to own property and to find a better way of life. These people were usually referred to as **pioneers**, people who traveled into unknown or unclaimed territory for the purpose of settling the area. The US government encouraged the idea of western settlement by selling **public land**, land claimed by the government in the

name of the US, to individuals who settled and cultivated the land for a year.

For many pioneers, finding a better way of life meant making more money, but for others it meant gaining freedom. Many African Americans went west because they had few rights in the US. Often, though, their journey was just as difficult as the lives they had left. They were banned from joining many of the wagon trains, and some territories closed their borders to African Americans. Even so, thousands of African-American people found new homes in the West, mainly in California and Kansas.

Pioneers also went west to gain religious freedom. Members of the newly formed Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, also known as Mormons, left the eastern US for the West because they were being persecuted for their religious beliefs. In 1847, they followed church leader Brigham Young (1801–1877) for 1,000 miles (1,600 km) to Great Salt Lake. Within five years, over 20,000 Mormons had settled in the successful, new community of Great Salt Lake City in the Utah territory.

Pioneers gave up much when they moved west, leaving behind their families and friends, their jobs, their homes, and most of their possessions. Because they often had to carry their belongings, pioneers took as little as possible with them. Many of the first pioneers walked the entire journey as there were no trails and a lot of the land was not passable for wagons or horses. In addition to having to walk long distances each day, the pioneers had to carry out certain daily tasks just to survive — gathering or hunting food and preparing it, finding water, constructing temporary shelter, and

collecting wood for fires. Everyone was expected to work, even the children. Children helped with chores like carrying belongings, fetching water, gathering firewood, and cooking.

Many pioneers moved west in **wagon trains**, a group of two or more animal-drawn wagons that traveled across the country transporting people and supplies. Pioneers usually chose to travel in wagon trains because the journey was difficult and dangerous to undertake alone. By traveling together, people could share the work load and protect each other. Most pioneers traveled west by following the **Oregon Trail**, a route of approximately 2,000 mi (3,200 km) from Missouri to the Columbia River in Oregon. It is estimated that over 50,000 pioneers journeyed along the Oregon Trail over 25 years. So many wagons followed the route that their wheels made ruts in the ground that can still be seen today.

Did you know?

In the 1840s, as settlers crossed the Oregon Trail to colonize the coast, they asked the US government to make a definite agreement with Britain about what would form the border between the US and British-controlled lands to the north. One result was that in 1846, the 49th parallel became the dividing line between the US and Canada.

Trail of Tears

While pioneers traveled the Oregon Trail, Native Americans were forced to create another trail. In 1838 and 1839, a route from Georgia to what is now known as

Oklahoma became known as the **Trail of Tears**. This name referred to the many hardships and deaths suffered by the Cherokee during a forced march from their land to government-designated land in Oklahoma. President Andrew Jackson (1767–1845) had ordered 15,000 Cherokee to be removed from their homes in Georgia so that pioneers could have the land. It was good farming land and, more importantly, gold had been found there. The Cherokee were forced to leave their homes and travel a great distance to present-day Oklahoma. Over 4,000 Cherokee died along the way from exhaustion, hunger, and illness.

The forced removal of Native Americans to the West was the result of conflict not only between pioneers and indigenous peoples, but between two levels of government: federal and state. After the American Revolution, a federal government, headed by a president, had been formed to make decisions about issues that were considered to affect the nation as a whole. Each state had its own government, headed by a governor, which made decisions considered to be in the state's best interests. Sometimes the leaders of the federal government made decisions that the people of a state did not like or overrode the decisions made by a state government, and sometimes state governments rebelled against the federal government.

In the early 1800s, Native Americans in the south found their land being eroded more and more. The federal government responded by persuading some tribes to sell their land, usually for very little money. In return, the federal government said that it would keep pioneers from settling in the areas remaining to the Native Americans.

Not all tribes agreed to sell their land, and they remained where they were. These tribes were joined by some northeastern tribes who had already been driven out of their homes.

In defiance of the federal government, state governments that wanted to increase the number of settlers and generate sources of income continued to allow pioneers to move into lands inhabited by Native Americans. By 1824, there was so much conflict between Native Americans and pioneers that President James Monroe (1758–1831) proposed that all Native Americans remaining in the southeast be moved west, to the other side of the Mississippi River.

In 1825, the governor of Georgia, George Troup (1780–1856), set up a lottery with the winners acquiring the right to settle in lands designated by the federal government as Native American. The Cherokee and Creek living in Georgia tried to protect their rights and their land in two ways:

- In 1827, they reorganized themselves, moving from a loosely knit collection of tribes with chiefs to self-governing nations with their own leaders, courts, and laws. They then declared themselves to be a **republic**, a type of government made up of people elected to make decisions that represent to the best of their ability the interests of those who elected them.
- In 1832, the Cherokee nation took their case to the nation's Supreme Court, arguing that the state should not be sending settlers into Cherokee land. The judge ruled in the Cherokee nation's

favor, saying that the state's actions had been unconstitutional — that is, against the Constitution of the United States.

When the Cherokee won their court case, they expected the federal government to force the state government to respect the agreements protecting Native American lands. However, President Andrew Jackson refused to enforce the court's order, and the state of Georgia continued allowing settlers to move into Native American lands. In 1830, with the passing of the **Indian Removal Act**, the federal government adopted former President Monroe's proposal to move the Native Americans to the other side of the Mississippi River, into an area designated by the federal government.



The federal government argued that this move was in the best interests of the Native Americans because once they were in the new land, they could be protected by the federal government without interference from the states. Many Native Americans moved voluntarily, but many refused. In 1838, the new president, Martin van Buren, sent the federal army to force the remaining Native Americans out of their homes and onto the route to Oklahoma that would become known as the Trail of Tears.

Texas Rebellion

After the removal of Native Americans from Georgia into a defined area of Oklahoma, pioneers began moving west in ever greater numbers. In 1845, the US gained more territory when Texas was made a state. Until 1835, Texas had been a part of Mexico. After gaining independence from Spain in 1821, Mexico formed a government and started to build an economy.

In its efforts to exercise control over its territory, the Mexican government passed laws forcing its regions to trade only with those the government approved. However, the northern regions of Mexico found it easier to trade with their neighbors in the south-central US. Many in the northern regions also felt more allied with the US than with Mexico, preferring a less authoritative form of government and more choice in religion. In Mexico, the Roman Catholic church was the predominant religion.

In 1835 and 1836, in what is known as the **Texas Rebellion**, the inhabitants of Texas rebelled against the Mexican government and established themselves as an independent republic. Texas remained independent of both Mexico and the US until 1845, eventually becoming known as the Lone Star Republic. In 1845, with the cooperation of most Texans, the US government **annexed** Texas, taking it over and incorporating it as a state. Mexico had refused to recognize Texas as independent, but had not been successful in re-securing Texas as part of Mexico. Because Mexico still considered Texas to be one of its regions, Mexico treated the annexing of Texas by the US as an act of aggression, and war ensued.

Mexican-American War

The **Mexican-American War**, as it was called, continued for two years, 1846–1848. After many battles and much loss of life on both sides, the war ended with Mexico giving up about half its territory and the US acquiring what is now known as California and most of the states of the Southwest.

In 1848, the **Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo** was signed by both parties. In the treaty, Mexico released its claim on Texas, agreed on the Rio Grande River as the boundary between Texas and Mexico, and gave up its claim on California and New Mexico, which became part of the US. California became a state in 1850. New Mexico remained a territory of the US for 64 years, not becoming a state until 1912.

California Gold Rush

In 1848, a week before the US gained the territory from Mexico, gold was found in California's American River, in what is now known as the Sacramento Valley. Throughout the following year, as more and more people heard about the find, they headed for California to look for gold, producing what is now called the **California Gold Rush**.



Thousands of people traveled to California, hoping to find gold

Did you know?

- One of the most famous battles of the Texas Rebellion took place at the Alamo. Located in what is now known as San Antonio, Texas, the Alamo was built in 1722 as a Roman Catholic mission.
- Although historians have studied the event in detail, many different versions of this battle remain. One reason is that the battle involved strong feelings on both sides, and these feelings were not resolved by one side or the other claiming victory.
- In late 1835, San Antonio was taken over by Texans rebelling against the Mexican government.
- In February 1836, General Antonio López de Santa Anna (c. 1795–1876) and over 1,000 troops approached San Antonio with the goal of driving out the Texans.
- The Texans, who numbered a few hundred, withdrew to the Alamo. These included Davy Crockett (1786–1836), a Tennessee army colonel who had become a politician. After several political defeats, he moved to Texas and gained fame as an expert **frontiersperson**, someone experienced in living on land in its natural state — that is, without the cities, towns, stores, roads, and other conveniences characteristic of pioneer life and settlements.
- General de Santa Anna and his troops surrounded the Alamo and put it under siege for about two weeks. Before breaking into the mission, the general asked the Texans to surrender, but they refused. In the ensuing battle, hundreds of Mexican troops and all the Texans were killed.
- Instead of resolving the conflict between Texas and Mexico, the battle made further conflict inevitable. In ensuing battles with the Mexicans, Texans used this rallying cry: “Remember the Alamo!”
- As a result of his fame as a politician, expertise as a frontiersperson, and efforts during the battle of the Alamo, Davy Crockett became a US folk hero. In the mid-1950s, a television series loosely based on Crockett’s life became popular, and frontier wear featured in the movie, such as hats made of raccoon fur and tails, became a fad among children in North America. The movie’s theme song, “The Ballad of Davy Crockett,” became one of the best-selling songs of 1955.