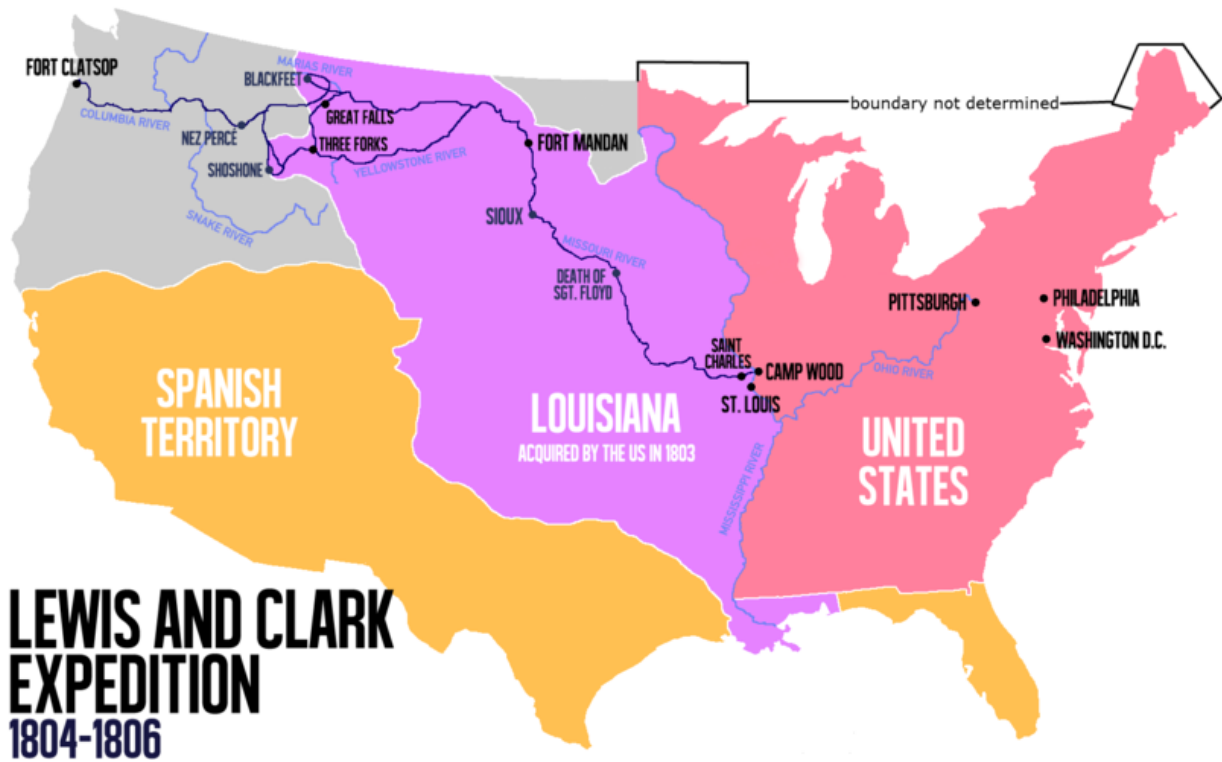


# Primary Sources: Jefferson's Message on the Lewis & Clark Expedition

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The map shows the land that is now the United States as it was controlled at the time Lewis and Clark set out on their expedition. The Louisiana Territory (purple) was purchased July 4, 1803, about six months after Jefferson wrote this letter to Congress. The U.S. bought the territory from France. Victor van Werkhoven, Wikimedia Commons

*Editor's Note: President Thomas Jefferson sent this secret message on Jan. 18, 1803, to ask Congress for \$2,500 to explore the land west of the Mississippi River. At the time, the territory did not belong to the United States. Congress agreed to fund the expedition, which would be led the following year by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.*

Confidential

Gentlemen of the Senate and of the House of Representatives:

At its present session, the Legislature will be considering whether to continue the act for establishing trading houses with the Indian tribes. Therefore, I think it my duty to communicate the views that have guided me in the execution of that act.

This will help the Legislature decide on the policy of continuing it, in the present or any other form, or of ending it altogether, if that shall seem most for the public good.

The Indian tribes residing within the United States have been growing more and more uneasy at the shrinking of their territory. The policy of refusing absolutely all further land sales, on any conditions, has been gaining strength with them. Anyone attempting the purchase of even the smallest portions of their land excites dangerous jealousies and irritations in their minds. Only a very few tribes do not yet obstinately hold this view. In order to peaceably counteract this policy of theirs, and to extend the territory that the rapid increase of our numbers will call for, two measures are deemed necessary. First, to encourage them to abandon hunting and begin raising livestock and growing crops. This will prove to them that less land and labor will maintain them better than their former mode of living. The extensive forests necessary in the hunting life will then become useless, and they will see advantage in exchanging them for the means of improving their farms. Secondly, to multiply trading houses among them, and place within their reach those things that will contribute more to their domestic comfort. Experience and reflection will give them the wisdom to exchange what they can spare and what we want, and for what we can spare and they want. In leading them to agriculture, manufactured goods and civilization, and in bringing together their and our settlements, I trust and believe we are acting for their greatest good.

At these trading houses we have pursued the principles of the act of Congress, which directs that commerce shall be carried on liberally. We consequently undersell private traders and drive them from the competition. Thus, with the good will of the Indians, we rid ourselves of the men who are constantly trying to excite in the Indian mind suspicions, fears and hostility toward us.

### **"Extension Of Public Commerce"**

A letter now enclosed shows the effect of our competition on the operations of these traders. The Indians, perceiving the advantage of purchasing from us, are requesting our establishment of trading houses among them. In one quarter this is particularly interesting. The Legislature must know how desirable it is to possess a respectable breadth of country on the Mississippi River, so that we may present as firm a front on that as on our Eastern border. We possess what is below the Yazoo River, but between the Ohio River and the Yazoo, the country all belongs to the Chickasaws, the tribe most committed to keeping its lands. They

have lately shown a desire to become agricultural, and this leads to the desire of buying implements and comforts. In the strengthening and gratifying of these wants, I see the only prospect of planting on the Mississippi itself. Duty has required me to submit these views to the judgment of the Legislature. As their disclosure might embarrass and defeat their effect, they are committed to the special confidence of the two Houses.

With the extension of public commerce among the Indian tribes, it might be worth the attention of Congress to point our citizens in another direction. The Missouri River is not as well known to us. It crosses a moderate climate, offering a continued navigation from the Western Ocean to the Atlantic through a choice of channels. An intelligent officer, with ten or twelve chosen men, fit for the enterprise and willing to undertake it, might explore the whole line, even to the Western Ocean. The crew could have conferences with the natives on the subject of trade, get admission among them for our traders, and return with the information acquired in the course of two summers. Their arms, some instruments for observation, and light and cheap presents for the Indians would be all they would carry, and would form the majority of expense. It is in the interests of our nation to explore this territory, the only line of easy communication across the continent.

The interests of commerce place this proposal within the constitutional powers and care of Congress. That it should incidentally advance the geographic knowledge of our own continent cannot be but an additional gratification. The sum of \$2,500, "for the purpose of extending the external commerce of the United States," understood and considered by the Executive as giving the legislative approval, would cover the undertaking.

TH. Jefferson Jan. 18. 1803.

Confidential.

Gentlemen of the Senate and of the House of Representatives.

As the continuance of the Act for establishing trading houses with the Indian tribes will be under the consideration of the Legislature at its present session, I think it my duty to communicate the views which have guided me in the execution of that act, in order that you may decide on the policy of continuing it in the present or any other form, or to discontinue it altogether if that shall, on the whole, seem most for the public good.

The Indian tribes residing within the limits of the U.S. have for a considerable time been growing more & more uneasy at the constant diminution of the territory they occupy, still affected by their own voluntary sales; and the policy has long been gaining strength with them of refusing absolutely all further sale on any conditions. — enough that at this time, it hazards their friendships, and excites dangerous jealousies & perturbations in their minds to make any overture for the purchase of the smallest portions of their land. a very few tribes only are not yet definitely in these dispositions. In order peaceably to counteract this policy of theirs, and to provide an extension of territory which the rapid increase of our numbers will call for, two measures are deemed expedient.

First, to encourage them to abandon hunting, to apply to the raising stock, to agriculture and domestic manufacture, and thereby prove to themselves that life and labour will maintain them in this better than in their former mode of living. the extensive forests necessary in the hunting life, will then become useless, & they will see advantage in exchanging them for the means of improving their farms, & of increasing their domestic comforts. Secondly to multiply trading houses among them & place within their reach those things which will contribute more to their domestic comfort than the profusion of extensive but uncultivated wilds. experience & reflection will devote to them the wisdom of exchanging what they can spare & we want, for what we can spare and they want: in leading them thus to agriculture, to

## Quiz

- 1 Which selection from Jefferson's message BEST reflects Jefferson's attitude toward Indians who refuse to do what he wants them to do?
- (A) The Indian tribes residing within the United States have been growing more and more uneasy at the shrinking of their territory.
  - (B) The policy of refusing absolutely all further land sales, on any conditions, has been gaining strength with them.
  - (C) Anyone attempting the purchase of even the smallest portions of their land excites dangerous jealousies and irritations in their minds. Only a very few tribes do not yet obstinately hold this view.
  - (D) In order to peaceably counteract this policy of theirs, and to extend the territory that the rapid increase of our numbers will call for, two measures are deemed necessary.
- 2 Which inference about Lewis and Clark can be made based on the second to last paragraph of Jefferson's message?
- (A) They were experienced traders with the tribes residing west of the Missouri River.
  - (B) They had previous experience exploring the land west of the Missouri River
  - (C) They were responsible for leading a group of citizens to settle the land west of the Missouri River.
  - (D) They needed to gain the trust of the Indians in order to obtain the information that the U.S. wanted.
- 3 Which statement BEST summarizes the central ideas in Jefferson's message?
- (A) By creating conditions that alter the Indians' way of life, the U.S. will entice the Indians to sell their territory to the U.S.
  - (B) By creating conditions that alter the Indians' way of life, the U.S. will provide an easier existence for the Indians.
  - (C) The U.S. will explore territory west of the Mississippi in order to establish a military post on its western border.
  - (D) The U.S. will explore territory west of the Mississippi in order to coexist more peacefully with the tribes located there.

- 4 Read the paragraph below from Jefferson's message.

*At these trading houses we have pursued the principles of the act of Congress, which directs that commerce shall be carried on liberally. We consequently undersell private traders and drive them from the competition. Thus, with the good will of the Indians, we rid ourselves of the men who are constantly trying to excite in the Indian mind suspicions, fears and hostility toward us.*

Does this paragraph help develop the main idea of Jefferson's message? Why?

- (A) Yes; it indicates that Jefferson will do anything that needs to be done to achieve his goals.
- (B) No; it focuses on how trade is conducted at the trading houses rather than on increasing the number of trading houses.
- (C) Yes; it echoes Jefferson's desire to find ways to gain the trust of the Indians so they will sell their land.
- (D) No; it suggests that private traders are solely responsible for the Indians' mistrust of the U.S. government.