

# The Louisiana Purchase and Exploration

## One American's Story

In 1803, an expedition led by explorers **Meriwether Lewis** and **William Clark** set out to explore the American West. As they neared the Rocky Mountains, Lewis and Clark hired a French trapper to act as an interpreter with the Native Americans. He brought along his young wife, **Sacagawea**, a Shoshone Indian. Her knowledge of Native American languages and the land played an essential role in the expedition.

### PRIMARY SOURCE

“The sight of this Indian woman . . . [assured the Native Americans] of our friendly intentions. . . . No woman ever accompanied a war party in this quarter.”

—William Clark, journal entry, October 19, 1805

Sacagawea did more than enable conversation and trade. Her presence led many tribes to believe that the explorers came in peace.

## The Louisiana Purchase

**KEY QUESTION** How did the United States acquire the Louisiana Purchase?

When Americans talked about the West in 1800, they meant the area between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River.

**The West in 1800** By 1800, thousands of settlers were moving westward across the Appalachians. Many settled on land inhabited by Native Americans. Even so, several U.S. territories soon declared statehood. Kentucky and Tennessee became states by 1800, and Ohio entered the union in 1803.

Although the Mississippi River was then the western border of the United States, there was much activity farther west. France and Spain were negotiating for ownership of the Louisiana Territory—the vast region between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains.



This detail from *Lewis and Clark* by N. C. Wyeth shows Sacagawea with Meriwether Lewis.