

The Journey Begins Lewis and Clark set out in the summer of 1803. By winter, they reached St. Louis. Located on the western bank of the Mississippi River, St. Louis would soon become the gateway to the West. But in 1803 it was a sleepy town. Lewis and Clark spent the winter there, waiting for the official transfer of Louisiana to the United States. In March 1804, the American flag flew over St. Louis for the first time.

West to the Ocean The expedition, which numbered about 40, left St. Louis in May of 1804. Jefferson had instructed them to explore the Missouri River in hopes of finding a water route across the continent. He also told them to establish good relations with Native Americans and to describe the landscape, plants, and animals they saw.

After reaching what is now North Dakota, the explorers spent the winter with the Mandan people. They also met British and Canadian trappers and traders, who were not happy to see them. The traders feared American competition in the trade in beaver fur—and they would be proved right.

In the spring of 1805, the expedition set out again. This time they were joined by Sacagawea, who was a Shoshone Indian. Her language skills—she knew sign language and several Native American languages—and her knowledge of geography would be of great value to Lewis and Clark.

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COMPARING Perspectives

President Thomas Jefferson sponsored Lewis and Clark's expedition to the West, where they met almost 50 tribes. In an 1806 speech, Jefferson described his goals for relations between the United States and Native Americans. From the Native American perspective, Kiowa Chief Satanta (c. 1830–1878) later described the impact of Jefferson's policies.

Jefferson Speaks

“ My friends and children. We are descended from the old nations which live beyond the great water: but we and our forefathers have been so long here that we seem like you to have grown out of this land . . . you are all my children . . . we wish as a true father should do, that we may all live together as one household. ”

—Thomas Jefferson, Speech to a Delegation of Indian Chiefs, January 4, 1806

Satanta Speaks

“ I hear a great deal of good talk from the gentlemen the Great Father sends us . . . I have heard you intend to settle us on a reservation near the mountains. I don't want to settle. . . . A long time ago this land belonged to our fathers, but when I go up to the river I see camps of soldiers on its banks. These soldiers cut down my timber, they kill my buffalo and when I see that, my heart feels like bursting. ”

—Satanta, Kiowa Chief,
September 1876

CRITICAL THINKING

- 1. Make Inferences** What did Jefferson want for Native Americans?
- 2. Analyze** Why were the Native Americans resentful of the soldiers?

