

In 1803 the United States negotiated the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France for \$15 million.

With a stroke of a pen America doubled in size, making it one of the largest nations in the world.

The sale included over 600 million acres at a cost of less than 3 cents an acre in what today is the better part of 13 states between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains.

For President Thomas Jefferson it was a diplomatic and political triumph.

In one fell swoop the purchase of Louisiana ended the threat of war with France and opened up the land west of the Mississippi to settlement.

By any measure the purchase of Louisiana was the most important action of Jefferson's two terms as president.

Jefferson knew that acquiring the very heart of the American continent would prove to be the key to the future of the United States.

Initially Jefferson sent his minister to France, Robert Livingston, offered Napoleon \$2 million for a small tract of land on the lower Mississippi.

There, Americans could build their own seaport.

Impatient at the lack of news, Jefferson sent James Monroe to Paris to offer \$10 million for New Orleans and West Florida.

Almost at the same time, and unknown to Jefferson, France had offered all of Louisiana to Livingston for \$15 million.

Though the transaction was quickly sealed, there were those who objected to the purchase on the grounds that the Constitution did not provide for purchasing territory.

However, Jefferson temporarily set aside his idealism to tell his supporters in Congress that "what is practicable must often control what is pure theory.

" The majority agreed.

Jefferson later admitted that he had stretched his power "till it cracked" in order to buy Louisiana, the largest single land purchase in American history.