



INTRODUCTION

The White House is located in a federal district on the eastern coast of the United States. Today, the majority of states are located west of Washington, D.C., and the White House. However, when President George Washington chose the location for the new capital city, the United States was much smaller and situated on the Atlantic coast. As the nation grew stronger and more populous, presidents began to seek additional territory and expanded westward across the continent, eventually reaching the Pacific coast. Discover some key White House efforts to promote western expansion.

CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

Legislatures and citizens have often questioned the location of the United States capital. In the beginning, Congress debated the placement of a capital city in terms of north and south, not east and west. Their compromise, the Residence Act of 1790, resulted in the federal district now known as Washington, D.C. However, after the burning of the city in 1814, some expressed concern that the current location of the capital was too vulnerable to attacks near the coast and would be safer in an inland location such as Ohio. Later, when the Civil War ended, citizens living in Midwest states wanted a new, more central capital. At the time, the United States consisted of 36 states, the most recent and furthest west addition being Nevada in 1864. In each of these instances, the ultimate decision was to keep the capital and president's residence in the same location, but these examples highlight the nation's westward movement during the nineteenth century.



Image 1

One White House resident, President Thomas Jefferson, provided a significant contribution to western expansion in signing the Louisiana Purchase. Acquired from France in 1803, this territory nearly doubled the size of the United States with lands extending beyond the Mississippi River. Just before the purchase, Jefferson tasked his secretary, Meriwether Lewis, to lead an expedition that would map the new territory (**Image 1**). In July, the acquisition was announced, and Lewis left the White House

to explore these western lands. He and his partner, William Clark, sent back live animals, antlers, and other items from their journey (**Image 2**). Jefferson displayed these trophies in the White House Entrance Hall and invited guests to see them, turning the President's House into a museum for a brief period.

While expanding westward, the federal government and United States citizens encountered Native Americans who had lived on the lands for centuries (**Image 3**). Many Native Americans lost their lives and lands in the ensuing conflicts, but treaties attempted to establish paths to more peaceful relations. At various times, Native Americans visited the White House to meet with presidents. During the winter of 1821-22, Chief Petalesharro, a Pawnee, visited President James Monroe and delivered a speech to the president and his guests. In a painting by Charles Bird King that now hangs in the White House library, Chief Petalesharro is portrayed wearing the warbonnet in which he appeared at President James Monroe's New Year's Day reception, as well as necklaces of trade beads and the Monroe peace medal (**Image 4**).

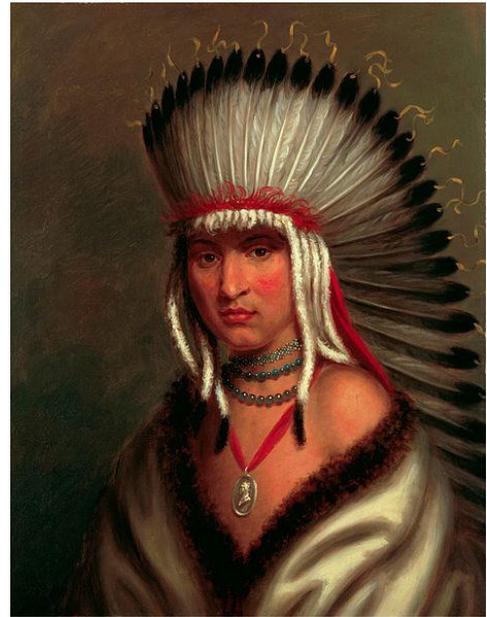


Image 4

In the 1840s, President James K. Polk championed the views of citizens who wanted to add more territory to the United States and was elected, in part, due to his views on expansion and commitment to the nation's "Manifest Destiny" (**Image 5**). During Polk's administration, the country gained much of the modern-day southwest United States territory through the Mexican-American War. At the time, Mexico and the United States each believed Texas belonged to them. On May 8, 1846, Polk met with his cabinet members at the White House and told them that he would ask Congress for a declaration of war on Mexico if U.S. forces were attacked in the Rio

Grande area. Shortly thereafter, news broke of an outbreak of hostilities, and Polk crafted his war message to Congress. Two days after Polk delivered his message, Congress declared war on Mexico. When the war ended, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded land that included what is now California, Arizona, and more to the United States (**Image 6**). President Polk added a vast area to the United States, but its acquisition would lead to a bitter quarrel between the North and South over the expansion of slavery.

President Abraham Lincoln also played a role in the westward movement. In 1862, Lincoln signed the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railway Act. Both encouraged Americans to travel and settle the American West. The Homestead Act promised settlers rights to 160 acres of public land in exchange for a small fee plus five years of residence where the homesteader would improve the land by building a home and growing crops (**Image 7**). This legislation was inclusive of women and African Americans. The Pacific Railway Act provided subsidies in land and loans to build a railroad that would link the eastern and western United States (**Image 8**). Both the transcontinental railroad and western land ownership eased the transition for citizens settling in the new western territories and states.



Image 9

Theodore Roosevelt became president in 1901 after the assassination of William McKinley. During his two terms in office, Roosevelt helped to protect and conserve the western lands acquired in the nineteenth century. Although, born and raised in New York City, Roosevelt was a great outdoorsman (**Images 9 & 10**). As president, he established programs to protect America's forests and create national parks. His work included the

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American Antiquities Act of 1906, which authorized the president to create national monuments. Two years later at the White House, Roosevelt brought together governors from every state to talk about conservation in the United States. Roosevelt was a champion of the country's natural resources, and his efforts eventually led to the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916. Since then, many presidents have visited national parks and established new ones (**Image 11**).

By the early twentieth century, the large tracks of land that Jefferson and Polk acquired for the United States had become established states. Ideas of western expansion evolved into concerns about spoiling the beauty of those western lands. Efforts by various presidents and first ladies, such as Lady Bird Johnson's beautification project (**Image 12**), helped address some of these issues and continued Roosevelt's conservationist vision.



IMAGES

Click on web link to access online and for larger viewing

Source	Title	Date	Created By	Courtesy Of	Thumbnail	Web Link
1	Jefferson Sends Meriwether Lewis	1967	Paul Calle	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Thomas%20Jefferson/1306.tif.info
2	Thomas Jefferson Observes a Magpie and a Prairie Dog	1970	Louis S. Glanzman	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Thomas%20Jefferson/1427.tif.info
3	Emigrant Scene	1837	William H. Powell	White House Collection/ White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Artwork/6971.tif.info
4	Petalesharro (Generous Chief), Pawnee	Ca. 1822	Charles Bird King	White House Collection/ White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Artwork/206.tif.info
5	James Polk	1858	George. P. A. Healy	White House Collection/ White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Portraits/30.tif.info

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6	William Taft Signs Proclamation for Arizona Statehood	1912	Brown Brothers	White House Collection		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/William%20H%20Taft/625.tif.info
7	The first homestead in the United States	1904	Unknown	Library of Congress		https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3a21279/
8	Central Pacific Railroad Company	1866	Lawrence & Houseworth	Library of Congress		https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3a28195/
9	Theodore Roosevelt on Horseback	Ca. 1902	Unknown	Library of Congress		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Theodore%20Roosevelt/8284.tif.info
10	Hands Up!- The Capture of Finnigan	1888	Frederic Remington	White House Collection/ White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Artwork/658.tif.info
11	President Harding's Voyage of Understanding, Yellowstone National Park, Side A	1923	Keystone View Company	White House Historical Association		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Warren%20G%20Harding/1111949.tif.info

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12	Lady Bird Johnson and Nash Castro on a Walk	1968	Robert L. Knudsen	Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library and Museum/ NARA		https://library.whitehousehistory.org/fotoweb/archives/5017-Digital%20Library/Main%20Index/Presidents/Lyndon%20B%20Johnson/9662.tif.info
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SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- Assign each student to research a state gained through the Louisiana Purchase or the Mexican-American War. Starter questions for their research: When did that land become a state? How were its borders determined? Findings can be presented as a poster exhibit.
- By passing the American Antiquities Act of 1906, Congress gave the president the power to select tracts of land to be set aside without getting approval from Congress, the people's representatives. Have students consider why Congress gave the president this authority.
- Reflect on the placement of the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., and the White House. Choosing one of the time periods when questions were raised about location of the capital – the founding of D.C. (1790), the burning of the city by the British (1814), or after the Civil War (1865) – write a persuasive essay about whether the capital (and president's home) should be relocated, and if so, where should it be moved and why.
 - Helpful tip: Have students research what a map of the United States looked like during their chosen time period. What are the states and territories owned by the United States?
- In 1821, Chief Petalesharro visited the White House, and his speech there was transcribed. Read Petalesharro's speech on the White House Historical Association's website. [Click here](#). Then discuss the question: what does this speech say about relations between Native Americans and the White House during James Monroe's administration (1817-1825)?