

INTRODUCTION

The White House is located on the eastern coast of the United States in Washington, D.C. Today, most states are located west of the capital and the White House. When President George Washington chose the location for the new capital city in 1790, however, the United States was much smaller and situated on the Atlantic coast. As the nation grew and became more populous, presidents sought additional territory and expanded westward across the continent with little consideration for the Indigenous, or Native, Americans who already inhabited the land. Learn more about the White House, western expansion, and its consequences.

CONTEXTUAL ESSAY

In 1803, President Thomas Jefferson bought 828,000 square miles of land west of the Mississippi River from France for \$15 million. Known as the Louisiana Purchase, this land deal nearly doubled the size of the United States while setting up the nation for continued westward expansion in the following decades. From 1804 to 1806, Meriwether Lewis, President Jefferson's secretary, and William Clark, a former military officer, led an expedition organized by President Jefferson for the purpose of



Image 1. Modern pencil drawing of President Thomas Jefferson sending his private secretary, Meriwether Lewis, to lead the Corps of Discovery expedition (1967).

exploring and mapping the new territory. **Image 1**, to the right, is a modern pencil drawing of President Jefferson sending Meriwether Lewis to lead this “Corps of Discovery” expedition. The goals of the expedition included forming relationships with Native American tribes and mapping routes of travel for future settlement. Lewis and Clark sent live animals, antlers, Native American objects, and other items from their journey back to the White House. President Jefferson displayed these objects in the Entrance Hall of the White House and often invited guests to view them. Refer to **Image 2**, in the

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chart below, to see a modern drawing of President Jefferson observing animals brought back from the expedition.

The United States, however, was expanding into land that had been inhabited by Native Americans for centuries. **Image 3**, in the chart below, features William H. Powell's 1847 painting, *Emigrant Scene*. The painting depicts a group of white settlers and their horses surrounding a Native American man pointing off into the distance. He appears to be assisting the group in their travels westward. While the painting suggests that Native Americans welcomed white settlers onto their lands, Native American delegates visited the White House in the early 1800s to protect their land, cultural rights, and resources against the westward expansion of the United States.



Image 4. Portrait of Pawnee Chief Petalesharro (Generous Chief) wearing a silver peace medal with President Monroe's profile on it that was given to all of the male delegates and is visible in their portraits (circa 1822).

Between November 1821 and February 1822, seventeen representatives from various Native American nations visited the James Monroe White House at the invitation of President Monroe, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, and Indian agent for the Upper Missouri, Benjamin O'Fallon. During his visit, Chief Petalesharro (Generous Chief) of the Pawnee delivered a speech to the president and his guests. In one of a series of paintings by Charles Bird King that now hang in the White House library, seen in **Image 4** to the left, Chief Petalesharro is portrayed in the warbonnet he wore at President James Monroe's New Year's Day reception, as well as necklaces of trade beads and the Monroe peace medal. The Monroe peace medal was given to all male delegates who traveled to the White House and are visible in each of their portraits. A female delegate, Hayne Hudjihini

(Eagle of Delight) of the Otoe-Missouria also traveled as a part of the delegation and is featured in a King portrait but did not receive a peace medal.

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In the following years, the United States continued expanding westward at the expense of Native Americans who had lived on these lands for generations. They faced displacement and violent conflict. This behavior was further supported by federal legislation throughout the 1800s, reaching its peak when President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Jackson's forced removal policies led to ongoing suffering among Native American groups including the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole peoples as they were forcibly relocated west of the Mississippi River, suffering from illness, hunger, and dangerous weather conditions along what would become known as the "Trail of Tears."

President James K. Polk, seen in **Image 5** in the chart, entered the White House in 1845 after campaigning on the ideology of "Manifest Destiny," a belief that American territorial expansion was destined by God. During the Polk administration, the United States took the land that makes up much of the modern-day southwest through the Mexican American War, a two-year conflict stemming from the U.S. annexation, or addition of Texas in 1845, though Texas was already a part of Mexico at this time. When the war ended, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted the United States more than 500,000 square miles of Mexico's land holdings including present-day California, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico, seen in **Image 6** above. The addition of this vast area to the United States, however, would lead to conflict between the North and South over the expansion of slavery as President Polk publicly supported extending slavery into these territories.



Image 6. Mexican claims ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, with modern borders included. The white territory is the Mexican Cession.

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In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed two significant pieces of legislation that encouraged Americans to travel to and settle in the American West—the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railway Act. The Homestead Act granted settlers, including women and African Americans, 160 acres of public land in exchange for a small fee and a commitment of five years of residence to improve the land. The land offered through the Homestead Act was considered “public” and open for the taking though Native Americans had already inhabited the land for hundreds of years. View **Image 7**, in the chart, to see a photograph of the Daniel Freeman homestead in Nebraska. Freeman was one of the first people to file a claim under the Homestead Act of 1862. The Pacific Railway Act authorized the construction of a railroad between Omaha, Nebraska and Sacramento, California to link the eastern and western United States. See a photograph of a Central Pacific Railroad Company freight engine in **Image 8**, in the chart below. While these acts eased the transition for citizens settling in the new western territories and states, they also legalized the sale of Native American lands to settlers without the consent of the people already living there.



Image 9. Photograph of President Theodore Roosevelt on his horse while jumping a fence (circa 1902).

Although he was born and raised in New York City, President Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1908) loved being outdoors. View **Image 9**, to the left, to see a photograph of President Roosevelt on his horse. **Image 10**, in the chart, features a painting of western cowboys based on an account in Theodore Roosevelt’s 1888 book, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*. President Roosevelt established programs to protect America’s newly acquired western lands and natural resources. He brought together governors from every state

to discuss conservation efforts in the United States and worked to pass the American Antiquities Act

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of 1906, which granted the president the authority to protect federal land and create national monuments.



Image 12. Photograph of First Lady Lady Bird Johnson walking with the National Park Service's Assistant Director of the National Capital Region Nash Castro (1968).

Years later, Roosevelt's efforts inspired the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916. Today, there are over 400 national park sites in the United States. **Image 11**, in the chart, shows President Warren G. Harding feeding a bear cub in Yellowstone National Park during his tour of the western United States and Alaska in 1923. Various presidents and first ladies continued to cultivate Roosevelt's conservationist vision, including Lady Bird Johnson through her beautification program. **Image 12**, to the right, pictures Lady Bird Johnson walking with National Park Service Assistant Director Nash Castro. Johnson and Castro worked closely together on the beautification of Washington, D.C.

A precedent was set when the large tracts of land acquired during the Jefferson and Polk administrations were all admitted to the Union as states. This led to the addition of Arizona as the 48th state in 1912, depicted in **Image 13** in the chart below, while the territories of Alaska and Hawaii remained territories until 1959. While the White House played a large role in the territorial expansion of the United States, this same westward expansion devastated Native American communities as they faced displacement and loss of authority over their own lands from years of violence and forced removal.

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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	Map of the Mexican Cession with modern borders	1848	National Atlas of the United States	United States Federal Government		https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/62/Mexican_Cession_in_Mexican_View.PNG/1024px-Mexican_Cession_in_Mexican_View.PNG
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
13	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

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Article: “The Myth of the Vanishing Indian” by Sarah Fling for the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Article: “Native American Delegations, Diplomacy, and Protests at the White House” by Jessica Brodt for the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)
- Collection: “Native Americans and the White House” by the White House Historical Association. [Click here.](#)

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

For all learners:

- In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act to encourage Americans to move and settle in the west. The Homestead Act gave 160 acres of western land to American settlers, including women and African Americans, who were willing to live on the land for at least five years and make improvements to it. But the act forced Native Americans off their ancestral lands. Consider the Homestead Act from the perspective of new settlers. What do

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you think their thoughts were about the Homestead Act? What do you think President Lincoln's perspective is on the Act? What about the perspective of Native Americans already living on that land? Share your thoughts on these different perspectives with a classmate, family member, or friend.

For older learners:

- When Chief Petalesharro visited the White House in 1821, he delivered a speech to President James Monroe and other guests. [Click here](#) to read a transcription of Chief Petalesharro's speech on the White House Historical Association's website. What does this speech say about the relationship between Native Americans and the White House during President Monroe's administration (1817-1825)? Write down your thoughts or discuss with a classmate, friend, or family member.
- In passing the American Antiquities Act of 1906, Congress granted the president authority to select tracts of land to be set aside without getting approval from Congress—the people's representatives. Why do you think Congress gave the president this power?

For younger learners:

- President Thomas Jefferson sent Meriweather Lewis and William Clark on an expedition to explore western land. While on their journey, Lewis and Clark sent animals, plants, and other items back to the White House. Imagine you are on an outdoor expedition. What would you send back to the president? Why? Draw your response.