

The Movement West

Louisiana Purchase

In 1803, the United States bought the Louisiana territory from France for \$15 million in the Louisiana Purchase. The purchase doubled the size of the United States, as the territory covered more than 800,000 square miles of land. Although the Constitution did not authorize the president to purchase land, President Thomas Jefferson could not pass up the opportunity. He resolved the issue by citing his presidential power to negotiate treaties.

Manifest Destiny

Manifest Destiny, a term coined by politicians in the mid-1800s, was used to explain the need for westward expansion on the American continent by the United States. People believed that it was their “national destiny” to expand across the continent. Walt Whitman and John O’ Sullivan were a few of many individuals who wanted take certain parts of Mexico and add them to the Union. Democrats supported expansion while Whigs believed that Southerners were trying to expand slavery (although this had rarely been the case at this time). James K. Polk explained that since America had technology, democracy, and God on its side it had a “divine right” to do this. Manifest Destiny is important because this idea caused people to spread across the American continent. Westward expansion occurred, and people spread across the continent. People tried to get as much land as possible for the United States, especially land on the west coast due to trading opportunities out there. This also pushed us into many conflicts.

Wilmot Proviso

The Wilmot Proviso was created by David Wilmot in the mid-1800s, after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the end of the Mexican-American War. This proposal was trying to prohibit slavery in land acquired from Mexico, including California and New Mexico. This proposal hoped to keep the work and jobs in these areas for white men to benefit from. The proposal was never accepted by both houses in Congress, however. While northern Democrats were for it, southern Democrats strongly disliked anything that tried to limit slavery. The Wilmot Proviso is important because it brought to light issues within the Constitution about whether slavery could be limited or not and questioned whether slaves were human or property. It was one of the main factors that led to the outbreak of the Civil War and led in part to the creation of the Republican Party.

Tariff of Abominations

The Tariff of Abominations, officially called the Tariff of 1828, was among the most controversial tariffs in U.S. history. Put in place to protect American industries, the tariff led the British to export fewer goods to the United States and buy less cotton from the South. South Carolina declared the tariff unconstitutional, triggering the Nullification Crisis of 1832.

Indian Removal Act

The Indian Removal Act was a law that was passed in the early 1800s by Andrew Jackson. This act allowed Jackson to use money and force to remove Native Americans from their lands. Natives were removed from lands (mainly in the southeast-Tennessee and Georgia) and forced to live in federal territory across the Mississippi River. Southerners liked the act because they wanted to take lands occupied by the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee-Creek, Seminole) for themselves. Some natives wanted to resist, but were eventually pressured into signing treaties and leaving their land. Many European-Americans were happy about the treaties, but some missionaries were not. Some Native Americans (Creek mostly) under Chief Black Hawk tried to go back to their old lands because they disliked Iowa and the surrounding area. They had come in peace but were met with violence from European-Americans, causing Black Hawk's War. The Cherokee people tried a different approach and tried to fight using the legal system. This resulted in two cases, Cherokee Nation v. Georgia and Worcester v. Georgia. John Marshall found that the Cherokee had rights to their land in Georgia and shouldn't be forced off. Andrew Jackson then delivered his famous quote of, "John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it!" The Indian Removal Act is important because this act led to the emigration of thousands of natives and gave European-Americans more farmland in the process. It led to the Treaty of New Echota and the Trail of Tears, which was a dark part of our history. The removal of the natives led to bitter feelings as well.

Homestead Act

Under the Homestead Act of 1862, the federal government guaranteed 160 acres of land in the West to any settler who would homestead it. Homesteading meant cultivating the land, building a home, and inhabiting it for at least five years. The government was eager to develop agriculture in the West; however, Native Americans already occupied the area.

Whig Party

The Whig Party was a political party that rose in opposition to the ruling Democratic Party of the early nineteenth century. Whigs were more prone to favor government activism, especially around social issues. Many were deeply religious and supported the temperance movement and enforcement of the Sabbath. William Henry Harrison, elected in 1841, was the first Whig president.