

# The Louisiana Purchase: Jefferson's Noble Bargain? (Monticello Monograph Series, Distributed for the Thomas Jefferson Foundation)

James E. Lewis Jr.

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Two centuries after the signing of the Louisiana Purchase, modern Americans consider the acquisition a foregone conclusion, inherent in our nation's "manifest destiny." At the time of the treaty, however, the idea of doubling the nation's size appeared to many to be impossible, undesirable, and even unconstitutional.

In 1803 President Thomas Jefferson charged James Monroe and Robert Livingston with the task of negotiating with the French to keep an American port open at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Authorized to spend up to \$6 million to acquire as much as possible of New Orleans and Florida, Livingston and Monroe were instead stunned to be offered the entire Louisiana territory. Seizing the opportunity, the two mean, as James Lewis writes in his lively analysis, "agreed to spend two-and-a-half times their budget to purchase a province that they had never been instructed to buy."

This volume offers a thoughtful understanding of a complex moment in American history. The Louisiana Purchase later became celebrated even as it raised fundamental questions about American polity and society-questions about governance, slavery, union, and the young nation's place in the world.



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