

NORTH AMERICA'S WEST

Starting in the seventeenth century, the British began to colonize the east coast of North America. The west of the country remained an unknown land to the white settlers, but this would soon change.

The War for Independence

The people living in the North American colonies wanted to found their own independent country and no longer be governed by the British Crown. This is why they wrote the Declaration of Independence. Following the American Revolutionary War, the British recognized the 13 existing states as independent. This document freed the country we now know as the United States of America from British control. The regions occupied by the indigenous peoples of North America were treated as separate countries—for now, at least.



Although the Declaration of Independence famously declared that “all men are created equal,” it also categorized the indigenous peoples of the continent as enemies.



Why were the settlers so mean? The indigenous tribes were there before them.



The Lewis and Clark Expedition

This first expedition out west was led by Meriwether Lewis and his partner William Clark. For large parts of their journey they were accompanied by Sacagawea, a woman from the Lemhi Shoshone tribe, who helped them speak with other indigenous tribes they encountered. Without the assistance of many Native American peoples, the expedition would not have succeeded in its journey west. The expedition paved the way for the further settlement of North America by Europeans—and the violent suppression of indigenous peoples and their culture.



The settlers killed so many buffalo as they advanced that they almost hunted them to extinction.



The newly founded United States of America claimed the land documented by its explorers as its own. Many Native American tribes were forcibly displaced or even enslaved.



Many Native Americans also died from diseases carried into their lands by the white colonizers.



The chief's head-dress is awesome.



A New Plan

President Thomas Jefferson (in office from 1801 to 1809) wanted to expand the country's territory in the west. The indigenous tribes living there were to adapt to the lifestyles of the settlers. A key first step in this plan of westward expansion was the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, through which the United States of America “purchased” a large amount of land previously controlled by the Kingdom of France. One year later, the first expedition set off to explore this new territory.