

Crossing a Continent



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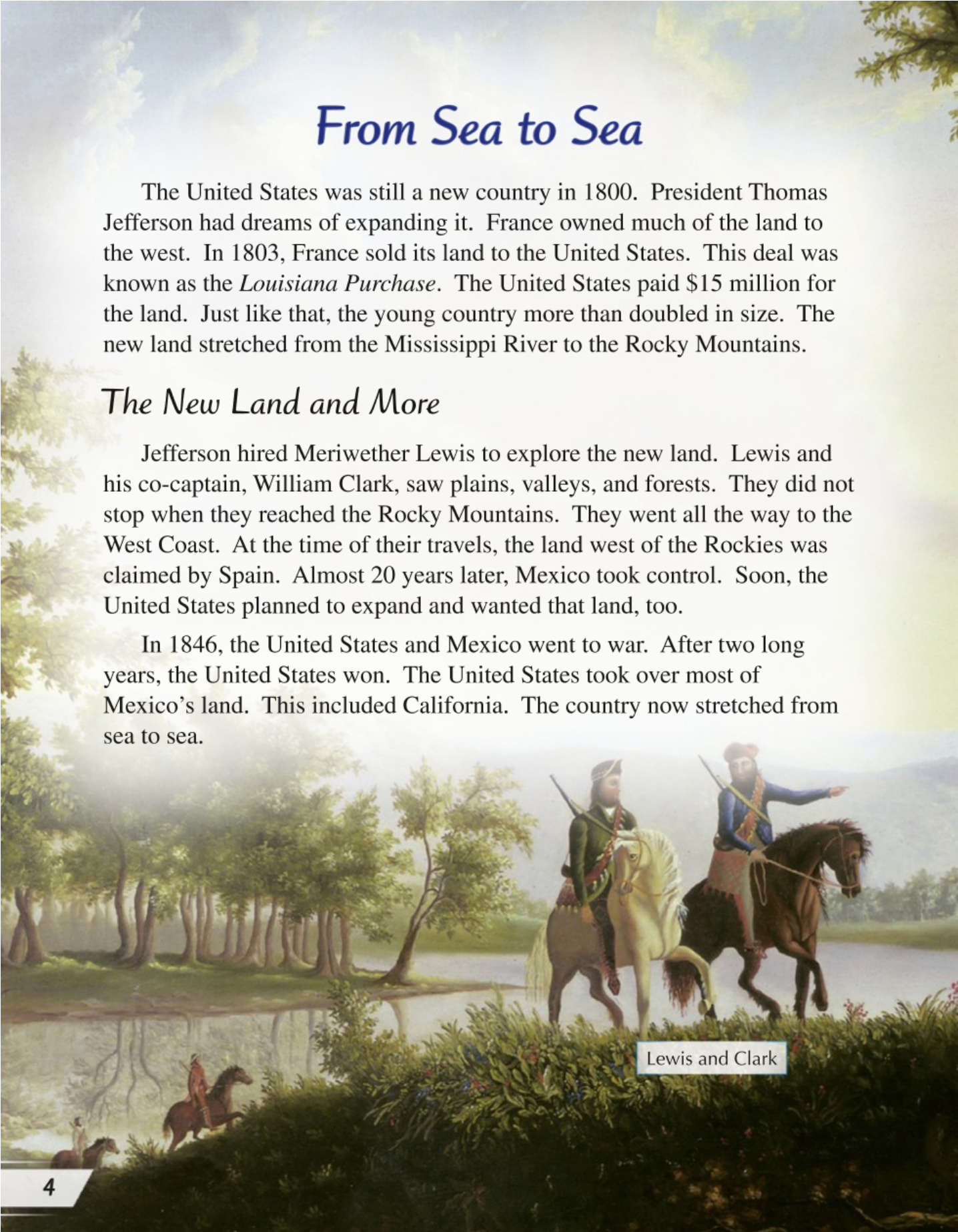
From Sea to Sea

The United States was still a new country in 1800. President Thomas Jefferson had dreams of expanding it. France owned much of the land to the west. In 1803, France sold its land to the United States. This deal was known as the *Louisiana Purchase*. The United States paid \$15 million for the land. Just like that, the young country more than doubled in size. The new land stretched from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains.

The New Land and More

Jefferson hired Meriwether Lewis to explore the new land. Lewis and his co-captain, William Clark, saw plains, valleys, and forests. They did not stop when they reached the Rocky Mountains. They went all the way to the West Coast. At the time of their travels, the land west of the Rockies was claimed by Spain. Almost 20 years later, Mexico took control. Soon, the United States planned to expand and wanted that land, too.

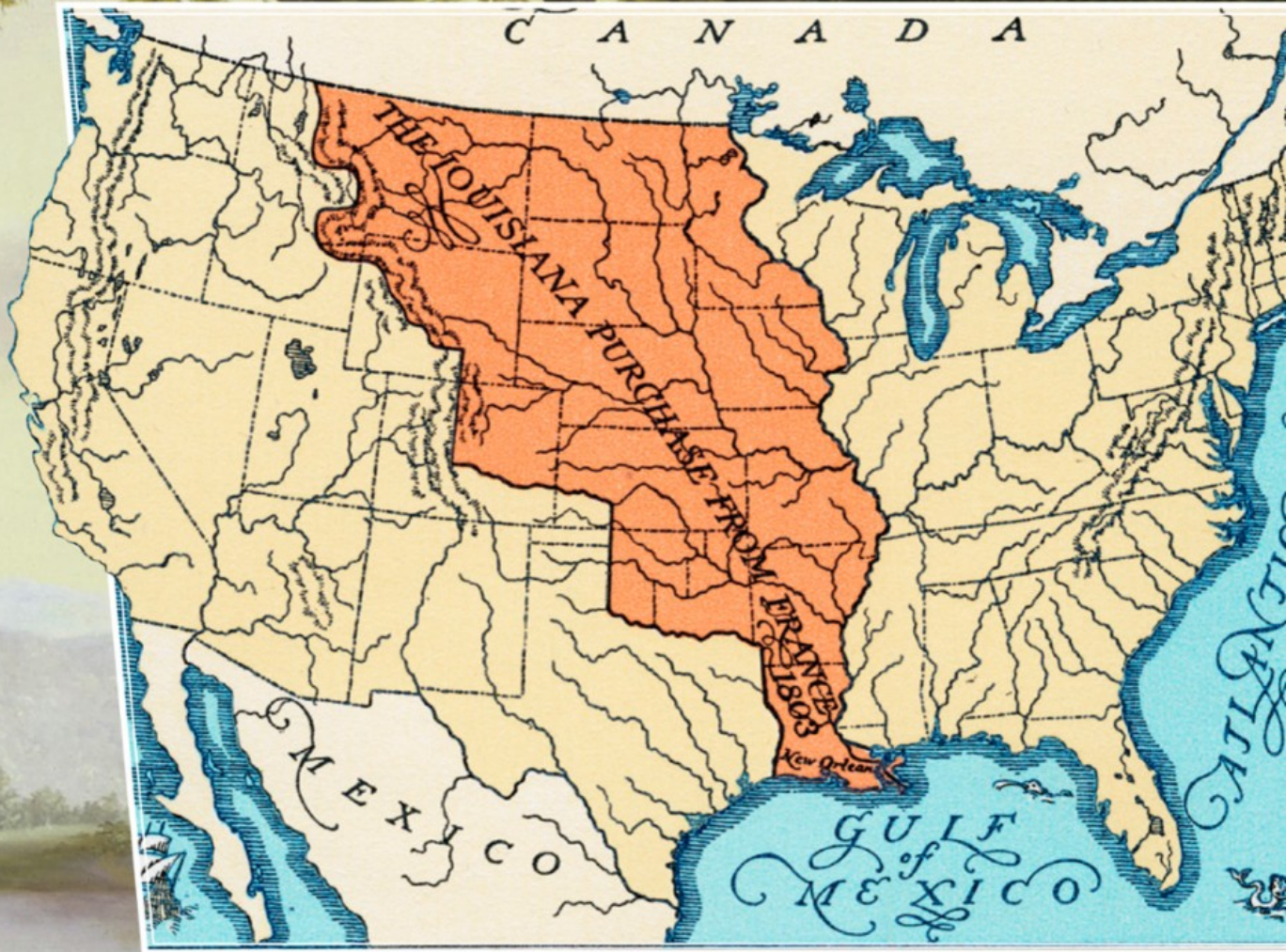
In 1846, the United States and Mexico went to war. After two long years, the United States won. The United States took over most of Mexico's land. This included California. The country now stretched from sea to sea.



Lewis and Clark

Manifest Destiny

John O'Sullivan was a writer. In 1845, he wrote an article using the term *Manifest Destiny*. This term symbolized what many Americans felt at the time. It was their God-given right to expand West. He went on to say that it was the country's duty to spread democracy.



Pioneers and Prospectors


Some Americans wanted to go west. The most common ways people crossed the land were on foot, by wagon, or on horseback. Mountain ranges only had a few places where wagons could cross. These were known as *trails*. It took three to six months to travel across the land.

Large wagons were needed to carry people and supplies. Six horses pulled each wagon. The trip was dangerous because of the rugged land, bad weather, and the threat of attacks by American Indians. It was much safer for wagons to travel together. So, people formed **wagon trains**.

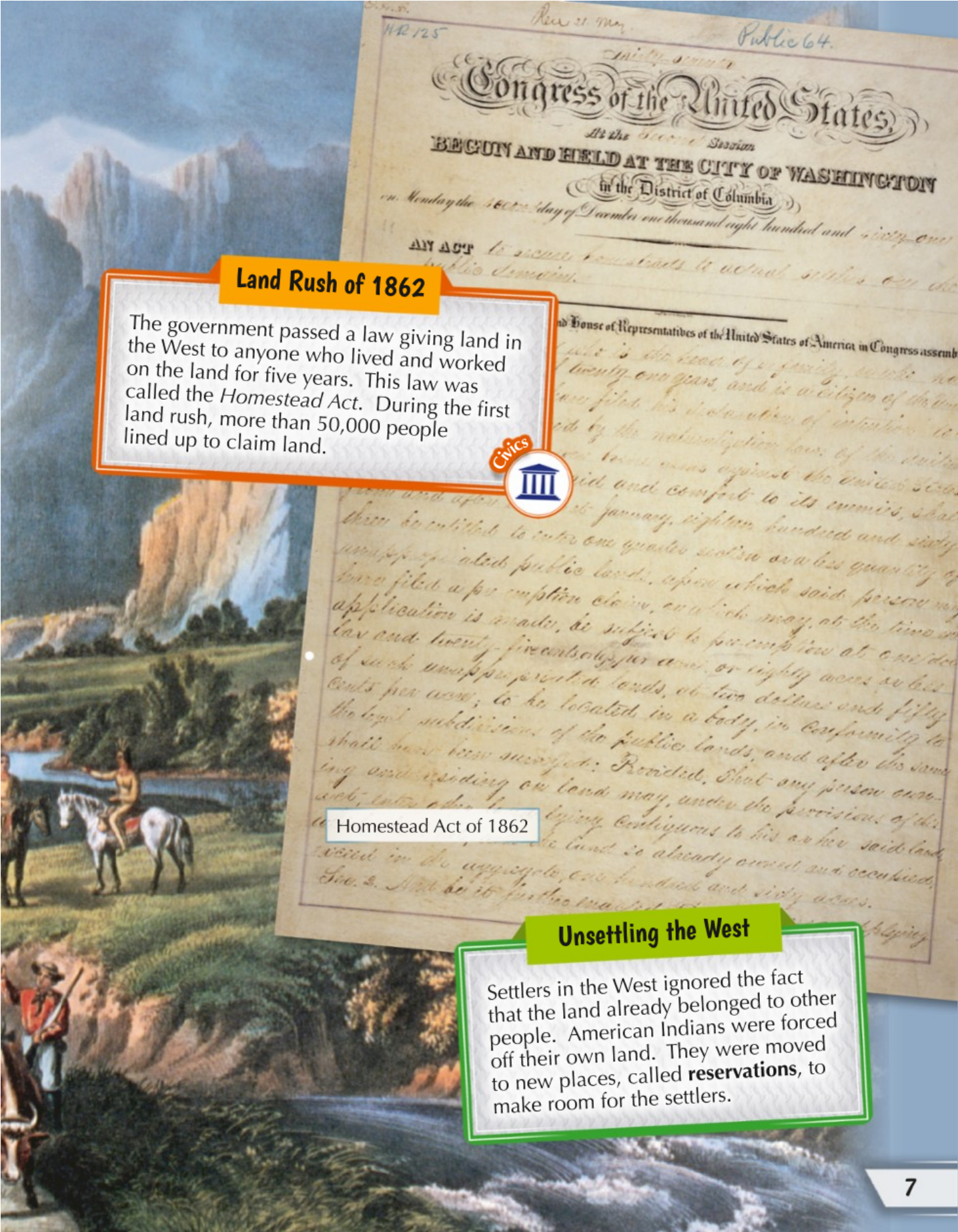
Free Land and Gold

What lured people to move west? The cities in the East were very crowded. Factory work was hard and dangerous.

Then, gold was discovered in California in 1848. Thousands of **prospectors** came on horseback. They wanted to get rich. Other people went west to claim land. These settlers were called **pioneers**.



Settlers cross the Rocky Mountains in the mid-1800s.



Land Rush of 1862

The government passed a law giving land in the West to anyone who lived and worked on the land for five years. This law was called the *Homestead Act*. During the first land rush, more than 50,000 people lined up to claim land.

Civics



Homestead Act of 1862

Unsettling the West

Settlers in the West ignored the fact that the land already belonged to other people. American Indians were forced off their own land. They were moved to new places, called **reservations**, to make room for the settlers.

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