Thomas Jefferson: What did I just buy?

You have just purchased the Louisiana territory from France. You are excited about the potential and the possibilities that this enormous tract of land may hold.

If the soils, the climate, and the weather in these western lands are suitable for cultivation (farming), they could ensure the future of the United States as an agricultural republic. The land could guarantee that hundreds of futures generations of Americans will own and farm their own land, allowing America develop into a truly democratic society, populated by free and independent people.

This land may be rich natural resources as well. We may discover previously unknown plants that hold medicinal value. New species of trees could have great value as timber. New varieties of grains, fruits, and vegetables could be sold in the markets of the eastern cities, or even Europe. The minerals in the soil may also prove valuable.

The native peoples of this territory will be incorporated into our economy, becoming consumers of American goods, and increasing our national wealth. Like some of the eastern tribes, they will adopt our religion, our culture, and our governmental philosophies. They will blend into our population as our people settle among them.

The rivers of this vast territory will be the highways on which these farmers will ship their crops off to markets all over the world. These waterways will connect the various regions of the United States, encouraging internal trade, travel, and settlement. The rivers of Louisiana might even allow for an all water route west to the Pacific coast. If we could find a water route across the continent, the United States would control the quickest and most efficient trade route to Asia. American traders would develop a thriving trade with China and India, and the U.S. would develop into an economic superpower.

You are eager to know more about this territory and its possibilities. However, most of this territory is an unmapped mystery. You know how far west it extends, or what people already inhabit the land. Therefore, you have decided mount an expedition into Louisiana, and have commissioned your personal secretary (Meriwether Lewis) to be its leader.

Lewis is an intelligent and resourceful man with an excellent knowledge of science and nature. You trust him completely, and have full confidence in his abilities. But you want to be sure that when he returns he will have collected all the information you need to plan for the future of the Louisiana Territory.

To ensure that Lewis collects the information you need and want, he will need a detailed list of what information you want him to collect and record.

Create a of list things you want Lewis to be looking for as he travels deep into the Louisiana Territory. This list should include all the things you need to know to help you plan to take advantage of the resources and possibilities of your new western territory.

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