Adam-Onis Treaty

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CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Andrew Jackson led an attack into Florida in 1818 to halt raids by Seminole Indians and runaway slaves on American settlers in Georgia. Jackson’s invasion, combined with American migration south and diplomatic pressure, convinced Spain to sell Florida to the United States.

The Adams-Onís Treaty set the terms of the sale, giving the United States the territory of Florida and establishing the border of the Louisiana Purchase westward to the Pacific Ocean. It also removed the last European power from the area east of the Mississippi River and opened up the West to American settlement.

After the War of 1812 ended, President James Monroe and his secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, attempted to convince Spain to sell the territory of Florida to the United States. Spain was exhausted by the Napoleonic Wars and involved in fighting its rebellious colonies in South America. The Spanish were faced with the problem of American sympathy for the South American rebels and hoped to sell Florida in an effort to keep the United States out of the conflict.

Negotiations between Adams and the Spanish minister Luis de Onís began in late 1817 and continued through 1818. Onís was instructed to try to set the border of the Louisiana Purchase (see Louisiana Purchase) at the Mississippi River. Adams attempted to set the border between the purchase and Mexico as far west as possible. Negotiations went nowhere until Andrew Jackson led American troops into Florida, dispersed the Seminole Indians, seized several Spanish towns, and executed two British citizens.

Onís protested Jackson’s attack, but Adams defended the general and argued that Spain was at fault for not preventing previous raids (by Seminoles and escaped slaves) from Florida into Georgia. Adams pressured Spain, hinting that Jackson would stay in Florida if necessary and that Congress could take the territory without payment to Spain. The Spanish government, intimidated, ordered Onís to negotiate a treaty to sell Florida and to decide on a boundary between Mexico and the United States.

The Adams-Onís Treaty, settled on February 22, 1819, gave Florida to the United States in exchange for the payment of $5 million to American citizens with claims against Spain. It also established a transcontinental boundary between the United States and Spanish Mexico. It began at the eastern border of Texas and proceeded northwest to the forty-second parallel, the present southern border of Oregon, and then west to the Pacific Ocean. The treaty surrendered American claims to Texas, but the United States gained important territories and an opportunity to expand to the Pacific.

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Jackson’s Presidency; Louisiana Purchase; Seminole Wars; Southeastern American Indians; War of 1812; Westward Expansion.