Four Paths West

How agreements and laws shaped territorial expansion

SS24.US1.5a "Describe how the Treaty of Paris of 1783, Northwest Ordinance of 1785, Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and the Louisiana Purchase affected American territorial expansion."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the two actions that gave the United States new territorial claims, circle the action that organized land sales, and write 1 beside the action that set a path to statehood. Use your marks to compare their effects on expansion.

Claiming, Selling, and Governing Land

1. In 1783, diplomats signed the Treaty of Paris to end the Revolutionary War. Britain recognized the United States and agreed that its western boundary would reach the Mississippi River. The treaty also placed the Great Lakes near the nation's northern edge and Spanish Florida along its southern edge. Imagine a settler hearing that the new country now claimed land far beyond the Appalachian Mountains. That claim gave the United States room to expand, but it did not erase the nations already living there. Native peoples had not signed away their homelands, and control of the region remained contested.

2. A claim on land is not the same as a plan for settling and governing it. In 1785, Congress passed the Land Ordinance, sometimes called the Northwest Ordinance of 1785. It directed surveyors to divide western land into six-mile-square townships and smaller sections that could be sold. This system helped the government raise money and made land sales more orderly. Two years later, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 set rules for governing the Northwest Territory and admitting new states on equal footing with existing states. It also banned slavery there, while expansion into Native homelands continued despite Native resistance.

3. In 1803, the United States bought Louisiana from France. The Louisiana Purchase added a vast territory west of the Mississippi River and gave the country control of New Orleans, a port important to river trade. The purchase roughly doubled the size of the United States, though its exact borders were disputed. Unlike the 1785 and 1787 ordinances, this deal acquired a new territorial claim rather than setting rules for land already claimed. River merchants saw access to a busy port; land buyers saw possibilities farther west. Native nations, whose lands lay within the purchase, had not agreed to sell their homelands to the United States.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Treaty of Paris of 1783 change the United States' territorial claims, and why did that not give it full control of the land?

2. How did the 1785 ordinance make western land easier for the United States to sell?

3. How did the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 shape the political growth of the United States, and what rule did it set about slavery?

4. How did the Louisiana Purchase affect expansion differently from the 1785 ordinance?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine advising Congress in 1803. In a paragraph of 80 to 100 words, recommend how ideas from both the 1785 and 1787 ordinances might guide decisions about the Louisiana Purchase, and explain why those ideas alone would not settle Native nations' claims.

ANSWER KEY

Four Paths West

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.5a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the two actions that gave the United States new territorial claims, circle the action that organized land sales, and write 1 beside the action that set a path to statehood. Use your marks to compare their effects on expansion. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Treaty of Paris of 1783 change the United States' territorial claims, and why did that not give it full control of the land?	**Britain recognized a United States claim extending west to the Mississippi River, but Native nations living there had not surrendered their homelands, so control remained contested.**
2	How did the 1785 ordinance make western land easier for the United States to sell?	**It directed surveyors to divide land into townships and smaller sections, creating an orderly system for sales.**
3	How did the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 shape the political growth of the United States, and what rule did it set about slavery?	**It established territorial government and a path for new states to join on equal footing with existing states. It banned slavery in the Northwest Territory.**
4	How did the Louisiana Purchase affect expansion differently from the 1785 ordinance?	**The purchase added a vast new territorial claim west of the Mississippi, while the 1785 ordinance organized land sales in territory the United States already claimed.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Congress should not treat the Louisiana Purchase as land ready for immediate sale. The 1785 ordinance offers a way to survey territory into townships and sections before any sales. The 1787 ordinance offers a plan for territorial government and eventual statehood, rather than leaving distant settlers without a political path. But neither ordinance means that France owned the homelands of Native nations or had their permission to sell them. Congress must recognize those nations' claims and negotiate with them instead of assuming a purchase from France settled every question of ownership.

Accept explanations that distinguish acquiring a territorial claim from organizing land sales or establishing territorial government and statehood. For the open task, look for a plausible application of both ordinances and recognition that the purchase did not erase Native nations' claims.