Westward, for Whom?

Motives and consequences along the western trails

SS24.US1.5d "Analyze reasons for migration via the western trails and the consequences of the rapid settlement of California, Oregon, Texas, and Utah on those migrating, those residing in these regions, and on the United States as a whole."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two different reasons people migrated west, circle two effects on people already living in western regions, and write a 1 beside two consequences for the United States. Use your marks to compare who gained opportunities and who faced costs.

Four Destinations, Many Consequences

1. In the mid-1800s, a family packing a wagon might have had very different reasons to head west. Reports of fertile land drew many settlers along the Oregon Trail, while the 1848 discovery of gold sent fortune seekers toward California. After Texas joined the United States in 1845, it attracted migrants seeking farmland and ranch land. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints traveled to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847 to escape religious persecution and build a community. These journeys crossed lands already home to Indigenous nations. The destinations were not empty places awaiting settlers.

2. Reaching the West did not guarantee a better life. Travelers faced illness, accidents, and scarce supplies; some who reached California found that gold was hard to claim. Yet farms and mining businesses provided income for some arrivals. Oregon's 1850 Donation Land Claim Act offered land to eligible settlers, drawing more migrants onto Indigenous homelands. In California, mining damaged streams and displaced Native communities. In Texas, some Tejano residents lost land amid disputes over property rights as newcomers arrived. Around the Salt Lake Valley, growing settlements competed with Ute and other Indigenous communities for land and water.

3. These movements also changed the nation. The United States annexed Texas in 1845; a dispute over its border helped lead to war with Mexico. The 1846 Oregon Treaty established the U.S. boundary with British territory in the Northwest. After the war, Mexico ceded a vast area that included California and present-day Utah in 1848. More territory brought opportunities for trade and farming, but it sharpened conflict over slavery. California entered as a free state in 1850, while Congress did not prohibit slavery in Utah Territory. Expansion made the country larger without settling who would share its benefits.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the reasons for traveling to Oregon and the Salt Lake Valley differ?

2. How did Oregon's land law benefit some migrants while affecting people already living there?

3. What different consequences did the California gold rush have for some arrivals and for Native communities?

4. How did adding Texas and California affect the United States differently, and what larger debate did expansion intensify?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence letter to a newspaper editor in 1851 responding to the claim that western migration brought only opportunity. Use evidence from at least two regions, including a migrant's reason for going west, an effect on people already living there, and a consequence for the United States.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.5d

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two different reasons people migrated west, circle two effects on people already living in western regions, and write a 1 beside two consequences for the United States. Use your marks to compare who gained opportunities and who faced costs. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the reasons for traveling to Oregon and the Salt Lake Valley differ?	**Many Oregon migrants sought fertile farmland. Latter-day Saints traveled to the Salt Lake Valley to escape religious persecution and build a community.**
2	How did Oregon's land law benefit some migrants while affecting people already living there?	**The law offered land to eligible settlers, encouraging migration onto Indigenous homelands.**
3	What different consequences did the California gold rush have for some arrivals and for Native communities?	**Some arrivals earned income from mining businesses, although others struggled to claim gold. Mining damaged streams and displaced Native communities.**
4	How did adding Texas and California affect the United States differently, and what larger debate did expansion intensify?	**A border dispute after Texas's annexation helped lead to war with Mexico. California entered the United States as a free state. Expansion intensified conflict over slavery.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Editor, western migration brought opportunity, but not only opportunity. Families moved to Oregon for farmland, and eligible settlers could claim land there under an 1850 law. That settlement increased pressure on Indigenous homelands rather than opening land that had belonged to no one. Gold drew migrants to California, but mining damaged streams and displaced Native communities. For the United States, expansion added territory and intensified arguments over slavery, so its gains carried serious costs.

Accept other passage-supported comparisons of motives and consequences. For the letter, look for evidence from two regions and distinct effects on migrants, existing residents, and the nation.