Who Gained Ground?

Land, power, and opportunity in the West, 1870 to 1900

USH.2.2 "Analyze the political and social factors associated with the development of the West and impact on the lives of various groups."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two government actions and circle two social or economic pressures in the passage. Draw an arrow from each mark to a group it affected.

The Promise and Cost of Western Land

1 In 1885, a traveler reaching a Kansas railroad town might see grain elevators, new shops, and advertisements for nearby farms. The Homestead Act offered eligible settlers a path to 160 acres of public land if they lived on and improved it for five years. Railroad companies sold land from federal grants awarded before 1871, then carried crops to distant buyers. Rail lines helped towns grow, but shipping charges and the price of tools could bury new farmers in debt. A promise of land on paper did not guarantee a successful farm.

2 That same expansion crossed Native homelands far beyond Kansas. The federal government had promised reservation lands to many Plains Native nations through treaties, yet settlers and officials pushed into those lands. During the 1870s, the U.S. Army fought Native communities that resisted confinement or incursions. Commercial hunters killed bison in huge numbers, while railroads moved hides to markets. The loss of bison weakened food supplies and ways of life for many Plains nations. By the 1880s, federal agents also pressed Native families to adopt farming and sent some Native children to boarding schools, separating them from their languages and families.

3 In 1879, thousands of Black migrants, often called Exodusters, left the South for Kansas. Violence, discrimination, and limited economic opportunity in the South helped drive their move. Some hoped to own land and escape the control of former employers. Like other newcomers, they faced dry weather, scarce money, and expensive farm supplies. Racism could also limit their access to credit and jobs. White settlers generally faced fewer racial barriers, although many also struggled to keep farms profitable. Western development opened chances for some families, but government decisions and social inequality shaped whose chances could last.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did federal land policies and railroads help some settlers, and why could those settlers still struggle?

2. How did government actions and the bison trade together change life for many Plains Native nations?

3. Why did Exodusters move to Kansas, and how could racism affect their chance to succeed there?

4. Compare what western expansion meant for settlers seeking farms and for Plains Native nations. Use one government action affecting each group.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you write for a Kansas newspaper in 1885. In one paragraph, recommend a specific action local leaders should take, using evidence from the passage to explain how it could affect at least two groups and why their interests might conflict.

ANSWER KEY

Who Gained Ground?

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two government actions and circle two social or economic pressures in the passage. Draw an arrow from each mark to a group it affected. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did federal land policies and railroads help some settlers, and why could those settlers still struggle?	**The Homestead Act offered eligible settlers a path to land, and railroads sold land and connected crops to buyers. Shipping charges and the cost of tools could leave farmers in debt.**
2	How did government actions and the bison trade together change life for many Plains Native nations?	**Settlers and officials pushed into treaty-promised lands, and the Army fought Native communities that resisted. Commercial hunting reduced bison, weakening food supplies and ways of life.**
3	Why did Exodusters move to Kansas, and how could racism affect their chance to succeed there?	**Violence, discrimination, and limited opportunity in the South drove many to seek land in Kansas. Racism in Kansas could limit their access to credit and jobs.**
4	Compare what western expansion meant for settlers seeking farms and for Plains Native nations. Use one government action affecting each group.	**The Homestead Act offered eligible settlers a path to farmland. Meanwhile, officials pushed into lands promised to Plains Native nations by treaty, and federal agents pressed Native families to change how they lived.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Local leaders should help new farmers buy tools without requiring costly loans, but they should not advertise treaty-promised Native land for settlement. Affordable tools could help Exoduster families and other settlers who have little money. Yet settlers seeking more farmland might oppose limits on where they can claim land. Native nations have already faced pressure on lands promised to them, as well as the loss of bison. A fair plan must consider that a new opportunity for one family can come at another community's expense.

Accept other passage-supported links between policies, social pressures, and group outcomes. For the open response, look for a specific action, effects on two groups, and a plausible conflict between their interests.