

The passage to the northwest ordinance history essay



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The passage of the Northwest Ordinance was a sign that the nation of the United States was ready and willing for westward expansion. While addressing the broad topic of the Northwest Ordinance, one must attend to the many facets of the topic that make it a whole. This paper will address the following facets: The background and history of the ordinance, the influence of the Ohio Company, key figures in the passage of the ordinance, the Land Ordinance of 1785, and significant outcomes of the ordinance.

The history of the Northwest Territory before the passing of the Northwest Ordinance is interesting and necessary to discuss. Up to 1783, with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the Northwest Territory and the land within was stalled to any settlement because of the Proclamation of 1763. The Proclamation of 1763 said the land in the Northwest Territory was French land and could not be settled by the British. This caused even more tension between both sides during the American Revolutionary War. After the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the British took control of the area (“Northwest ordinance,” 2010).

The Ohio Company was a huge influence in the history and passage of the Northwest Ordinance. Dating back to 1748, the Ohio Company was formed by several wealthy Virginian families. They planned on the Ohio Company surveying the land west of the Appalachians. They wanted to offer the British a certain amount of money for the land surveyed, and in turn, sell the land to those interested for a much higher price. Due to the work of Christopher Gist in 1750, hired by the Ohio Company, the investors chose to settle in the present-day Pennsylvania and West Virginia areas. Gist was vital to the development of the areas, as well as setting up trading agreements with <https://assignbuster.com/the-passage-to-the-northwest-ordinance-history-essay/>

Ohio territory natives (" Ohio Company," 2010). This original surveying and research allowed those in the existing United States just what the new frontier had to offer.

Many historical figures played a role in the passage of the Northwest Ordinance. Often left out, yet important, is the role that Thomas Jefferson played in lending ideas and information to those with power in the territory. It was Jefferson's idea in 1784 to have all states give up their powers in the Northwest Territory west of the Appalachian Mountains. He felt the land was better served as molding new states to admit to the United States. At this time, Congress approved the Territorial Ordinance of 1784 penned by Jefferson (Patrick, 1987). This ordinance was not completely adopted. Jefferson's idea for seventeen rectangular states was rejected and the ordinance provided little insight for a political system, yet it provided a solid framework for subsequent ordinances.

Soon following the Territorial Ordinance, Congress passed the Land Ordinance of 1785. This ordinance was a plan for dividing and selling land in the territories west of the Ohio River. Because the Articles of Confederation did not provide a way to directly tax citizens, Congress saw the new land as a way to make fast money by selling it off. Surveyors divided the land into square townships. The townships were then divided up into one square mile " sections." Those mile sections were auctioned off to those settlers interested in the land. They were sold for \$640 per section (" Land Ordinance of 1785, 2010).

Also answering an issue in the Territorial Ordinance of 1784, the Land Ordinance of 1785 provided a framework for educational organization and veteran benefits. Each of the townships had to leave section 16 dedicated to a public school system. Many of the section 16 areas were sold just to fund the educational system. In answering promises to veterans of the Revolutionary War, sections 8, 11, 26, and 29 were reserved for the veterans. It has been discovered that fairness and equity was not always practiced when dividing the land for the veterans (" Land Ordinance of 1785, 2010).

At the same time that the Northwest Ordinance was ready to be created and finalized, Congress approved the famous Philadelphia Convention that would amend and ratify the Articles of the Confederation into the United States Constitution. Finally, on July 13th of 1787, the Northwest Ordinance was passed by the Confederation Congress (Patrick, 1987). The ordinance proposed a plan for the territory north and west of the Ohio River. The event is often overshadowed by the constitutional convention, but the passing of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was very important, as the ordinance held many values and ideas that those forming the United States Constitution would find intriguing.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 outlined a specific three-step system to implement the territorial government. First, Congress decided the territory leaders; they consisted of a governor, secretary, and three judges. After 5,000 free men held land in the territory, the second step of the system started, which was allowing the settlers to elect their own legislature. A House of Representatives and a legislative council would represent the

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territory. To qualify to vote in the process, one had to be an adult male that owned at least 50 acres of property (“ Northwest ordinance,” 2010).

After the first two steps in the process were complete, the third and final step was actual statehood. The ordinance outlined that no fewer than three and no more than five states could come from the Northwest Territory. Ohio was the first state, in 1803, to come from the Northwest Territory and be admitted to the Union. By 1858, all states in the Northwest Territory were admitted into the Union (Patrick, 1987).

Several important historical events took place after the passage of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. The first governor of the territory, Arthur St. Clair, was appointed to his position on October 5th of 1787. The first permanent settlement under the Northwest Ordinance was settled in Marietta, Ohio, in April of 1788. Although not directly related to the Northwest Ordinance, the country of the United States accepted its first president, George Washington, on April 6th of 1789 (Patrick, 1987). These events were all connected in a sense that one led to the other by way of perseverance. The United States appointed a president that held a resolve to establish an expanding territory.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided many substantial political and liberating outcomes. The ordinance held a freedom of religion, a right to a trial by a jury, freedom from cruel and unusual punishment, and a right to a free public education. Most importantly, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 banned slavery in any form (“ Northwest ordinance,” 2010). The rights and

freedoms outlined in the ordinance provided a solid frame for those creating the Bill of Rights for the United States.

The ordinance also provided guidance for the outcome of the Native Americans who inhabited areas in the territory. In fact, it said, “ The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their land and property shall never be taken without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed” (“ Northwest ordinance,” 2010). Although the idea looked good on paper, most of the Native Americans would not consent to leave their land without a fight, thus causing many bloody battles in the Northwest Territory during settlement.

One could argue that the most substantial outcome of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was that it put a much needed emphasis on proper education. After all, one of the most quoted sections of the Northwest Ordinance says, “...religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged” (Knepper, 2003, p. 59). It is this motto of proper education that has helped Ohio become one of the leading states in higher education.

From a cultural and legal viewpoint, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 provided a framework for westward expansion. Culturally, the ordinance answered many settlers’ issues with where the territory was going in terms of freedom and religion. Legally, the ordinance had a clear plan of execution and completion for the territorial regions to become full states of the Union.

The ordinance was looked at for years to come as a successful blueprint of building the United States of America to the west.