The Northwest Ordinance

July 13, 1787

An Ordinance for the government of the Territory of the United States northwest of the River Ohio.

Be it ordained by the United States in Congress assembled, That the said territory, for the purposes of temporary government, be one district, subject, however, to be divided into two districts, as future circumstances may, in the opinion of Congress, make it expedient.

It is hereby ordained and declared by the authority aforesaid, That the following articles shall be considered as articles of compact between the original States and the people and States in the said territory and forever remain unalterable, unless by common consent, to wit:

Article I.
No person, demeaning himself in a peaceable and orderly manner, shall ever be molested on account of his mode of worship or religious sentiments, in the said territory.

Article II.
The inhabitants of the said territory shall always be entitled to the benefits of the writ of habeas corpus, and of the trial by jury; of a proportionate representation of the people in the legislature; and of judicial proceedings according to the course of the common law. All persons shall be bailable, unless for capital offenses, where the proof shall be evident or the presumption great. All fines shall be moderate; and no cruel or unusual punishments shall be inflicted. No man shall be deprived of his liberty or property, but by the judgment of his peers or the law of the land; and, should the public exigencies make it necessary, for the common preservation, to take any person's property, or to demand his particular services, full compensation shall be made for the same. And, in the just preservation of rights and property, it is understood and declared, that no law ought ever to be made, or have force in the said territory, that shall, in any manner whatever, interfere with or affect private contracts or engagements, bona fide, and without fraud, previously formed.

Article III.
Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged. The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent;
and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed,
unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress; but laws founded in justice
and humanity, shall from time to time be made for preventing wrongs being done
to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them.

Article IV.
The said territory, and the States which may be formed therein, shall forever
remain a part of this Confederacy of the United States of America, subject to the
Articles of Confederation, and to such alterations therein as shall be
constitutionally made; and to all the acts and ordinances of the United States in
Congress assembled, conformable thereto. The inhabitants and settlers in the said
territory shall be subject to pay a part of the federal debts contracted or to be
contracted, and a proportional part of the expenses of government, to be
apportioned on them by Congress according to the same common rule and
measure by which apportionments thereof shall be made on the other States; and
the taxes for paying their proportion shall be laid and levied by the authority and
direction of the legislatures of the district or districts, or new States, as in the
original States, within the time agreed upon by the United States in Congress
assembled. The legislatures of those districts or new States, shall never interfere
with the primary disposal of the soil by the United States in Congress assembled,
nor with any regulations Congress may find necessary for securing the title in
such soil to the bona fide purchasers. No tax shall be imposed on lands the
property of the United States; and, in no case, shall nonresident proprietors be
taxed higher than residents. The navigable waters leading into the Mississippi and
St. Lawrence, and the carrying places between the same, shall be common
highways and forever free, as well to the inhabitants of the said territory as to the
citizens of the United States, and those of any other States that may be admitted
into the confederacy, without any tax, impost, or duty therefor.

Article V.
There shall be formed in the said territory, not less than three nor more than five
States; and the boundaries of the States, as soon as Virginia shall alter her act of
cession, and consent to the same, shall become fixed and established as follows,
to wit: The western State in the said territory, shall be bounded by the Mississippi,
the Ohio, and Wabash Rivers; a direct line drawn from the Wabash and Post
Vincents, due North, to the territorial line between the United States and Canada;
and, by the said territorial line, to the Lake of the Woods and Mississippi. The
middle State shall be bounded by the said direct line, the Wabash from Post
Vincents to the Ohio, by the Ohio, by a direct line, drawn due north from the
mouth of the Great Miami, to the said territorial line, and by the said territorial
line. The eastern State shall be bounded by the last mentioned direct line, the
Ohio, Pennsylvania, and the said territorial line: Provided, however, and it is
further understood and declared, that the boundaries of these three States shall be
subject so far to be altered, that, if Congress shall hereafter find it expedient, they
shall have authority to form one or two States in that part of the said territory
which lies north of an east and west line drawn through the southerly bend or
extreme of Lake Michigan. And, whenever any of the said States shall have sixty
thousand free inhabitants therein, such State shall be admitted, by its delegates,
into the Congress of the United States, on an equal footing with the original States in all respects whatever, and shall be at liberty to form a permanent constitution and State government: Provided, the constitution and government so to be formed, shall be republican, and in conformity to the principles contained in these articles; and, so far as it can be consistent with the general interest of the confederacy, such admission shall be allowed at an earlier period, and when there may be a less number of free inhabitants in the State than sixty thousand.

Article VI.

There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted: Provided, always, That any person escaping into the same, from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid.

Be it ordained by the authority aforesaid, That the resolutions of the 23rd of April, 1784, relative to the subject of this ordinance, be, and the same are hereby repealed and declared null and void.