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# "Children of the Great Mexican Family": Anglo-American Immigration to Texas and the Making of the American Empire, 1820-1861

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# "Children of the Great Mexican Family": Anglo-American Immigration to Texas and the Making of the American Empire, 1820-1861

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the thousands of Anglo-Americans who immigrated to Mexican Texas during the years following its independence from Spain. Long assumed to be the forbears of Manifest Destiny, it argues instead that these immigrants demonstrated a sincere desire to become Mexican citizens, that they were attracted to that country as much for its political promise as for its natural resources, and that they in fact shared more with their northern Mexican neighbors than with their compatriots in the northeastern United States.

Drawing chiefly from the personal papers, diplomatic correspondence, and newspapers of Anglo settlers and their Mexican allies, this dissertation exposes a political irony at the heart of the United States' imperial rise - that it had to do with that country's early political weakness, rather than Mexico's, and that the people most responsible for it were in fact trying to escape US dominion, not perpetuate it. It argues that Mexico offered a viable and attractive alternative to the US. Rather than seeing Mexico's commitment to regional sovereignty and local autonomy as its chief failure, this project argues that it was precisely what attracted these immigrants to Mexico and formed the basis of their loyalty.

Yet, if Mexico's weak central government was its strength in the 1820's, it would be the source of conflict and secession by the 1830's and 1840's. But Mexico was not unique in this regard. Indeed, this project recasts the US Civil War as part of a longer and more expansive experiment in extreme federalism by arguing that Texans seceded from Mexico for many of the same reasons that they and the rest of the South would ultimately secede from the United States. Thus, throughout the early part of the nineteenth century, the dominant geopolitical arrangement of the northwestern hemisphere was not primarily national. Rather, the southern United States and northern Mexico formed a semi-autonomous region united by its inhabitants' shared commitment to regional sovereignty, martial citizenship, forced labor, and free trade; and one that presented the possibility of a geopolitical arrangement very different from that which ultimately emerged.

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“CHILDREN OF THE GREAT MEXICAN FAMILY”  
ANGLO-AMERICAN IMMIGRATION TO TEXAS AND THE MAKING OF THE  
AMERICAN EMPIRE, 1820-1861

Sarah KM Rodríguez

A DISSERTATION

in

History

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“CHILDREN OF THE GREAT MEXICAN FAMILY:”

ANGLO-AMERICAN IMMIGRATION TO TEXAS AND THE MAKING OF THE  
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Tietelman. Matt and Roberto contributed the most intellectually to this project, reading portions of it and supplying valuable feedback; Jack contributed to my understanding of the early American militia; and Maryn, Greg, and Justin have been there from the beginning. Finally, I have relied far too much on Erika Kitzmiller and Zain Lakhani over the last eight years. Their loyalty, courage and intellect continues to awe and inspire me, and without their friendships I don't know where I would be.

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## ABSTRACT

“CHILDREN OF THE GREAT MEXICAN FAMILY”  
ANGLO-AMERICAN IMMIGRATION TO TEXAS AND THE MAKING OF THE  
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This dissertation examines the thousands of Anglo-Americans who immigrated to Mexican Texas during the years following its independence from Spain. Long assumed to be the forbears of Manifest Destiny, it argues instead that these immigrants demonstrated a sincere desire to become Mexican citizens, that they were attracted to that country as much for its political promise as for its natural resources, and that they in fact shared more with their northern Mexican neighbors than with their compatriots in the northeastern United States.

Drawing chiefly from the personal papers, diplomatic correspondence, and newspapers of Anglo settlers and their Mexican allies, this dissertation exposes a political irony at the heart of the United States' imperial rise - that it had to do with that country's early political weakness, rather than Mexico's, and that the people most responsible for it were in fact trying to escape US dominion, not perpetuate it. It argues that Mexico

offered a viable and attractive alternative to the US. Rather than seeing Mexico's commitment to regional sovereignty and local autonomy as its chief failure, this project argues that it was precisely what attracted US immigrants to Mexico and formed the basis of their loyalty to that country.

Yet, if Mexico's weak central government was its strength in the 1820's, it would be the source of conflict and secession by the 1830's and 1840's. But Mexico was not unique in this regard. Indeed, this project recasts the US Civil War as part of a longer and more expansive experiment in extreme federalism by arguing that Texans seceded from Mexico for many of the same reasons that they and the rest of the South would ultimately secede from the United States. Thus, throughout the early part of the nineteenth century, the dominant geopolitical arrangement of the northwestern hemisphere was not primarily national. Rather, the southern United States and northern Mexico formed a semi-autonomous region united by its inhabitants' shared commitment to regional sovereignty, martial citizenship, forced labor, and free trade; and one that presented the possibility of a geopolitical arrangement very different from that which ultimately emerged.

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- 1) "Map of Coahuila y Tejas, 1836" from Greg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999 . . . . . p. 81

## INTRODUCTION

Just after the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, an acquisition which effectively doubled the United States' national territory, John Quincy Adams wrote that "The whole continent of North America appears *destined by Divine Providence* to be peopled by one nation." After the United States acquired Florida from Spain in 1819, he wrote that the world must be "familiarized with the idea of considering our proper dominion to be the continent of North America. From the time when we became an independent people," Adams wrote, "it was as much a law of nature that this should become our pretension as that the Mississippi should flow to the sea."<sup>1</sup> Central to the imperial vision of Adams and others like him were Anglo-American settlers themselves, especially small landholders, whose rights and privileges were at the core of United States political tradition, and who, many believed, would help pave the way for US continental domination.<sup>2</sup>

Not long after Adams wrote his second correspondence, US citizens would, in fact, begin slowly trickling across the eastern Louisiana border with New Spain, to settle its far northern province of T  jas. Between 1820 and 1836, this region, nestled between the Rio Grande and Sabine Rivers, attracted thousands of *norteamericanos*, most from southern states like Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. This, as well as its geographic placement, rich natural resources, and seemingly sparse population, convinced many US leaders that Texas would serve as the United States' gateway to the

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<sup>1</sup> John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1874-77), vol. 4, p. 439; Adams quoted in D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical perspective on 500 Years of History* Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 19913), 211.

<sup>2</sup> Reginald Horsman, *Race and American Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 81, 86-87.

rest of the continent, and that those Americans settling there would act as its primary ambassadors.<sup>3</sup> Yet, while national elites may have envisioned US expansion through population dispersal, most of those who were actually settling the region had no such intent. Their aim was to escape US dominion, not perpetuate it.

The United States has long been a destination for immigrants, especially from Mexico and other parts of Latin America. It is hard, then, to imagine US citizens seeking new lives south of the border. But in the years following Mexican independence, this was precisely the case. Traditionally, historians have interpreted their decision as strategic not sincere.<sup>4</sup> How could it be otherwise? Mexico was still a monarchy when these immigrants first set their sights on it.

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<sup>3</sup> Mattie Austin Hatcher, "The Opening of Texas to Foreign Settlement, 1801-1822", *University of Texas Bulletin*, No. 2714: April 8, 1927 (Austin, University of Texas), 277.

<sup>4</sup> This is the view of most traditionalist scholars including Eugene C. Barker, "Mexico and Texas: A Collision of Two Cultures" (Dallas: P.L. Turner, 1928), 1-5, 143-146. See also *The Life of Steven F. Austin, Founder of Texas* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1925), Chapter 16; T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000), Chapter 8; Laura Lyons McLemore offers an excellent synthesis of this first and earliest group of Texas historians who cited Mexican political, cultural and moral inferiority as the primary cause for the Texas Revolution in *Inventing Texas: Early Historians of the Lone star State*(College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), Chapter 2. They included such nineteenth-century amateur historians as Mary Austin Holley, Chester Newell and Frederic LeClerc. This view was then extended into academic and popular knowledge by professional twentieth-century scholars such as George P. Garrison, Walter Prescott Webb, J. Frank Dobie, Charles W. Ramsdell, and Eugene C. Baker.

Many revisionist historians, however, have also failed to take seriously Anglo settlers' declarations of loyalty and in so doing have largely reinforced the notion of an inevitable incompatibility between Anglo-American immigrants and Mexico. See Robert A. Calvert and Arnaldo de León ,eds. *The History of Texas* (Harlan Davidson: Arlington Heights, 1990), Chapter 3 and 4; Arnaldo de León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Towards Mexicans in Texas, 1821—1900*, (Austin: University of Texas, 1983); David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico*. For an synthesis and critique of Texas historiography until 1991 see Walter Buenger and Robert A. Calvert's Introduction to *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1991), ix-xxxv.

Borderlands scholars have done much to advance our understanding of these early immigrants to Mexican Texas. Rather than merely dismissing their Mexican nationalism, scholars like Andrés Reséndez, Greg Cantrell and Andrew Cayton argue that these settlers demonstrated a flexible and pragmatic nationalism, and insist that the story of early Texas is essentially one of shifting allegiances at a time of national weakness for both Mexico and the United States. But they stop short of acknowledging the full power and appeal of the early Mexican political system to many Anglo southern frontiersmen, nor the extent to which they participated in the early Mexican nation building project. Eric Slereth's recently argued that early settlers drew on the notion of "expatriation" or "a natural right under international law to unilaterally exchange citizenship in one country for that of another." Although compelling, this interpretation fails to address the question of "why Mexico?"<sup>5</sup> Was there anything about that nation specifically that attracted thousands of US immigrants other than the fact that it happened to be just across the border? This dissertation insists that there was.

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<sup>5</sup> For examples of works that point to the inherent flexibility of early national identities along the US-Mexico border see David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico*. Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Greg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). For an synthesis and critique of Texas historiography until 1991 see Walter Buenger and Robert A. Calvert's Introduction to *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1991), ix-xxxv; Andrew R.L. Cayton, "Continental Politics: Liberalism, Nationalism, and the Appeal of Texas in the 1820s" in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. by Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 2004). Eric R. Slereth, "Privileges of Locomotion: Expatriation and Politics of the Southwestern Border Crossing," *Journal of American History*, (March 2014), 995-1020, quote p. 997.



More recently, in their efforts to answer the question of just how the United States came to replace Mexico as the geopolitically dominant nation in the Northwestern Hemisphere, scholars of the US empire have pointed to non-state forces such as cotton and powerful Native American groups who paved the way for US westward expansion by compromising Mexico's efforts at national consolidation, social cohesion and inter-ethnic peace. Yet these histories, however illuminating, do little to challenge the long-standing assumption of Mexican political weakness and incompetence. In fact, in many ways they reinforce it.<sup>6</sup> Yet, in failing to sufficiently interrogate the long-standing assumption of Mexican political weakness and ineffectuality, scholars have missed a profound irony at the heart of this particular stage of American expansion – that the United States' rise to continental dominance had more to do with *that* nation's early political weakness, rather than Mexico's, and that the people most credited with perpetuating US dominion were in fact trying to escape it.

Indeed, for some, especially those living on the frontier, Mexico appeared even more politically viable than the United States. Just as the latter was falling under the sway of an increasingly centralized government, seemingly committed to pursuing the aims of a capitalist elite, the newly fledged nation to its south promised immigrants a

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<sup>6</sup> For the role of cotton in fueling US westward expansion see Andrew Torget, *Cotton Empire: Slavery and the Texas Borderlands, 1820-1837* (PhD. Diss. University of Virginia, 2009) and Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*. For Native American power in the Mexican North and its role in facilitating US westward expansion see specifically Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the US-Mexico War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), Chapter 8; Pekka Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire* (New have: Yale University Press, 2008), "Introduction" and Chapter 4.

system more firmly grounded in the traditional republican principles they held most dear. While there is no question that these immigrants played a crucial role in Texas' secession from Mexico, and that country's subsequent loss of half its national territory to the United States, neither such a result nor the settlers' part in it were as predictable as many have assumed. Indeed, it could be said that at the time of Mexico's independence, that country, not the United States, appeared poised to dominate the continent.

This, of course, has significant implications for how we understand the United States and Mexico, and their relationship with each other during this period. The case of thousands of disillusioned Americans renouncing their homeland for its neighbor to the south shows that the Jacksonian US was no stronger or more unified than Mexico.<sup>7</sup> Both republics would, throughout the early nineteenth century, struggle with questions surrounding national cohesion, citizenship, regional sovereignty, states' rights, and, of course, slavery. And both nations would be torn asunder, with the United States facing one of the bloodiest civil wars of modern history – a war ignited by many of the very same impulses that had attracted so many Americans to Mexico in the first place.

Indeed, as frontier southerners, Anglo-American immigrants and their northern Mexican neighbors shared more in common with each other than they did with the

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<sup>7</sup> Most histories of Jacksonian America see it as the high point of American nationalism and cohesion. See Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); William Appleman Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A Study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), Chapter 2 and 3.

economic and political elites of their respective countries. This included a commitment to regional sovereignty, local autonomy, and martial citizenship; an embrace of various forms of forced labor; engagement in a lucrative transnational economy; and an increasingly strained relationship with their respective central governments. In other words, the American South and Mexican North formed a more or less politically, economically and culturally coherent unit distinct from the emerging centers of national power in both the northeastern United States and Mexico City, and one that presented the possibility of a third geopolitical arrangement very different from that which exists now. United States hemispheric domination was hardly a foregone conclusion.

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Even as historians have by now long rejected the notion of inevitability, many entrenched assumptions about the course of US westward expansion remain. Chief among them is the tendency to see Anglo colonists, wherever they may settle, as effective ambassadors of Anglo culture, values and institutions. Recent scholarship on settler colonialism has argued that the nineteenth century saw the “rise of the Anglo world,” with settlers from the United States to Australia effectively reproducing their own societies abroad, and thereby paving the way for British and US imperial dominance.<sup>8</sup>

The thought that white American men would *choose* to live under a Mexican monarchy rather than a US republic may seem peculiar to some, but this was in fact the

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<sup>8</sup> James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America*. While Meinig rejects the notion of inevitability in theory, he too, largely accepts that US immigrants to Texas helped to unilaterally facilitate US expansion, 39-41.

case. Indeed, this dissertation challenges the scholarly and popular assumption that US republican democracy was always a preferred form of government to European-style monarchy. In fact, this was not even the case for some white, property-owning men, the very people we would assume to be the most fervent defenders of US republicanism. By focusing on prominent figures like Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, both of whom articulated a faith in the superiority of their nation and a desire to either transport its model abroad or adopt a policy of aggressive national expansion in its name, studies of the early republic have tended to take US political superiority and appeal for granted.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, studies of early Mexico have tended to see that nation's post-independence era as a time of disintegration and national humiliation. However, I would argue that Mexico's chief political characteristic - its provincialism – should be seen as a source of viability, rather than weakness.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this work argues that what we term “strong” versus “weak” states is ultimately historically contingent and culturally constructed.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of Jeffersonian imperial ideology see Peter S. Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000) and for the most comprehensive study of Jackson see Robert V. Ramini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson: The Course of American Empire, 1767-1821* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> For examples of scholarship that significantly reconsiders early Mexican politics and nationhood see Timothy E. Anna, *Forging Mexico, 1821-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), “Introduction” and Chapter 1; Jaime E. Rodríguez O., ed., *The Independence of Spanish America* (New York: Cambridge, 1996), Chapter 3 and 5; Eric Van Young, *Writing Mexican History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), Chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> For works on the supposed “strength” of the early US republic in terms of its martial and economic presence, especially in the West, see Bergman, William H. *The American National State and the Early West* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For work on the limitations and popular criticism of the early state's centralizing tendency see Saul Carnell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill, University North Carolina Press, 1999); Steven Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay*

Indeed, many frontier Americans saw in the United States a nation that had betrayed many of its founding principles. And those who immigrated to Mexico admired that country, first as a monarchy and later as a confederate republic, precisely for its firm commitment to weak central government, regional sovereignty, and local autonomy. For many in both Mexico and the United States, these principles constituted the lynchpin of democracy.<sup>12</sup> At a time when the United States was rapidly centralizing in an attempt to modernize and reform its economy and infrastructure, Mexico was founded on a federalist promise at least as fervent as that which existed in the US.

For example, post-independence Mexico's renewed commitment to the militia, considered to be one of the primary bulwarks against political tyranny, particularly appealed to US citizens who, by the 1820's, were seeing their federal government slowly move away from locally organized militias in favor of a professional army. Anglo-Texans embraced the Mexican militia, which relied on the leadership, authority and skill of the local community, as not only a way to protect and ensure their rights in their adopted nation, but as a means of demonstrating their loyalty to it.

Additionally, Anglo settlers, most of whom were from the South, felt at home in a region whose inhabitants shared their commitment to a compulsive labor system – much of it racialized. Whether it be chattel slavery or debt peonage, both American southerners and their *tejano* neighbors saw forced labor as perhaps the only means to develop and

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(Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996). For a reconsideration of the supposed “weakness” of the early Mexican political systems see Anna, *Forging Mexico*, “Preface” and Chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup> Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

enrich Texas, and they worked together to convince reluctant Mexican leaders to allow settlers to admit their slaves as debt peons. This arrangement worked for some time until slaves themselves managed to take advantage of their new status to have their contracts manumitted under Mexican federal law.

Rather than seeing these settlers' "southernness" as the root of their hostility towards Mexico, this dissertation argues that it was precisely what attracted them and facilitated their cooperation with tejanos. United States settlers were indeed invited to the region to mitigate Indian attacks on Mexicans and introduce a southern-style cotton economy replete with its slave labor force. Counter to how many American imperialists assumed Anglo settler colonialism would work - and to how many scholars since have assumed it did - American immigrants to Mexico demonstrated a flexibility and willingness to conform to Mexican law and culture. When racial antagonism did ultimately emerge between Anglos and Mexicans, it was the result not the cause of conflicts like the Texas Revolution and US-Mexico War.

Far from feeling a tension between their American identity and Mexican nationality, many immigrants believed that Mexico was in fact the only place where they could truly be American. Time and again, they expressed the notion that only in Mexico could they enjoy the kind of republican autonomy and independence that their grandfathers had fought for in the American Revolution. Far from an imposition or hindrance, they viewed the Mexican state as guarantor and protector.

Furthermore, they were deeply invested in the Mexican nation-building project in a way that historians have not fully acknowledged. Texans certainly did not want to evade the state, nor did they necessarily find it an imposition.<sup>13</sup> In fact, they strove to make Mexico a more viable and lucrative republic by forging a vital transnational network that linked the rugged deserts of the Mexican North with the lush plantations of the US South and thriving metropolises of the Caribbean. And they saw their efforts as in service of the Mexican state, not in contradiction to it. Yet, as much as they wanted to help Mexico flourish, they wanted it on their terms. They decried Mexican efforts at taxation and other kinds of regulation they saw as a hindrance, while at the same time calling for increased infrastructure to enable foreign and domestic trade. They proclaimed a commitment to Mexican industry, but continued to rely on the US for most necessities like food and clothing. While their claims may seem contradictory or even hypocritical to a twenty-first century reader, the question of what exactly a republic was, how it functioned, and its citizens' rights and responsibilities within it were still yet to be determined in the early nineteenth century. What may appear as hypocrisy was, perhaps more accurately, the birth pangs of modern nation building. Ultimately, however, these immigrants' actions would undermine the national sovereignty and nation-building

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<sup>13</sup> Most borderlands scholarship has tended to represent national identity as more fluid and contingent than I do here. For examples see Samuel Truett and Elliott Young's Introduction to *Continental Crossroads: Remapping US-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1-32. For examples of influential borderlands scholarship on early Texas see Andrés Reséndez *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Greg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

efforts of both Mexico and the United States by posing a geopolitical alternative that threatened the dominance of both nations.

Indeed, Mexico's strength was its greatest weakness and, as the 1830's progressed, Mexican leaders experienced increasing difficulty holding their nation together while honoring its federalist impulse. This resulted in a significant generational shift in settler attitudes towards and relationship with Mexico, with those arriving after the country's move towards centralism demonstrating a more tentative loyalty than those who came earlier. Americans who immigrated after 1830 would enter a nation that no longer appeared the federalist Promised Land that earlier immigrants saw it as. While members of the earlier generation held out hope that Mexico would one day return to the principles that had attracted them, those who only knew it to be plagued by political turmoil, violence and conflict, seemed more dubious.

It was members of this latter group that, in 1835, would push for independence when it looked like Mexican federalism was finally dead. This was the year that Antonio López de Antonio Santa Anna, in an attempt to save his country from political chaos, instituted a sweeping set of administrative changes designed to centralize authority and strengthen the executive. Yet independence was still not a desirable option for most Texans. Instead, they joined with their Mexican compatriots in a nation-wide effort to reinstate the beloved Constitution of 1824, to which they had pledged their loyalty when they first immigrated. When this failed, after Santa Anna crushed the last federalist stronghold in Zacatecas, Texans began a slow, reluctant and ultimately incomplete



embrace of independence. Their move was brought on by the rapidly changing demographics of wartime Texas, which saw a dramatic increase of recruits from the US who, tempted by promises of cheap land, joined the fight against Santa Anna. For most of these men, Mexican federalism meant little. Unlike earlier immigrants, they had no real desire to leave the United States, a nation that under the leadership of Andrew Jackson was beginning to return to its federalist origins, and they had no prior connection with Mexico. Their only impressions of the country and its people had been formed in a time of war.

Texan independence, rather than a momentary blip in the United States' otherwise uninterrupted westward march, ushered in a period of geopolitical experimentation, whereby Texans entertained a variety of possibilities. These included joining the United States, remaining independent, and even returning to Mexico. Although Texans would ultimately annex themselves to the US, they would remain a part of that country for a mere fifteen years before seceding for many of the same reasons they had seceded from Mexico.

The United States, in fact, would face the very same set of geopolitical challenges that Mexico had and, at least momentarily, it would meet the same fate. Just after acquiring massive territory territory from its supposedly weaker neighbor, the United States fell apart in 1861.<sup>14</sup> In many ways, the Civil War and the issues that prompted it, extend far beyond the chronological and geographic boundaries that

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<sup>14</sup> David M. Potter, *Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), Chapter 1.

historians have traditionally awarded it. Furthermore, as the only southern state with a history of secession, Texas would hold a special place in the Confederacy's historic imagination.

Indeed, this project points to the inherent southern character and history of the American Southwest, challenging the longstanding assumption that the West was somehow separate from the rest of the country.<sup>15</sup> Yet, while most studies of the "Southern Empire" focus on elites, this one highlights the contributions of less prosperous, sometimes wayward, southerners who turned their backs on the US much earlier than their elite counterparts did, and who were far more interested in starting new lives beyond the confines of their native country than in extending slavery or rectifying a sectional power imbalance.<sup>16</sup> It is perhaps more helpful to imagine Texas as the nexus of a region distinct from the American northeast and Mexico City, both of which, despite their undeniable economic and political power, remained largely peripheral to the imagined world of most inhabitants of the Northwestern hemisphere.

Yet, just as Texas occupied a central place in the hearts and minds of those who lived there, it deserves to be at the center of the larger national history and historiography of both the United States and Mexico. As Walter Buenger observes, Texas and US

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<sup>15</sup> Walter I. Buenger, "Texas and the South" in *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 103, No.3 (Jan., 2000), p. 308.

<sup>16</sup> Robert E. May, *The Southern Dream of a Caribbean Empire, 1854-1861*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Gerald Horne, *The Deepest South: The United States, Brazil, and the African Slave Trade*, (New York: University Press, 2007); Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life in the American South, 1810-1860*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

history have long constituted a kind of “dual provincialism,”<sup>17</sup> which is peculiar considering how crucial Texas was to the larger story of US nation building and westward expansion. Yet historians of Texas have nonetheless resisted integrating their story into the larger national narrative, while historians of the United States have returned the favor by mostly ignoring Texas. This dissertation, however, places Texas where it should be - at the epicenter of the United States’ imperial rise.

This story begins in the early 1800’s with the first Anglo-American settlers in northern New Spain and ends in 1861 with Texans’ decision to secede from the United States and the onset of the American Civil War. Most of the sources are family and personal papers belonging to US settlers in northern Mexico. These documents provide the best insight into these immigrants’ politics, society and changing relationships with each other and national officials. It also relies on the collected and personal papers of northern Mexicans – principally tejanos - to understand their relationship with Anglo settlers and their own central government in Mexico City, their reasons for inviting these settlers into their country, and for joining the Texas Revolution and later the Civil War. Newspapers, particularly in the later chapters, track how political opinion developed in Texas as its status and demographics changed. Finally, municipal records, such as the B exar Archives, explain how Anglo institutions took shape on the frontier, and how Texans’ relationship with both Mexican and US authorities changed as a result.

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<sup>17</sup> Walter L. Buenger and Robert A. Calvert, “Introduction” to *Texas Trough Times: Evolving Interpretations*, Buenger and Calvert eds., (Texas A&M University Press: College Station, 1991), ix-xxxv.

Being that this is a national story of the US, Mexico and Texas, I also consult the collected papers and diaries of US and Mexican national leaders like Andrew Jackson and General Manuel Mier y Terán, as well as state documents and correspondence. These documents reveal how national leaders understood and reacted to the events surrounding Texas independence and annexation, and the national and international debates surrounding these and other events.

The dissertation proceeds chronologically with the first chapter exploring US immigrants' perceptions of Mexico and particular political philosophy, one grounded in a commitment to local autonomy and small federal government. I argue that this was central to both their alienation from the US and their loyalty to Mexico. Chapter 2 explores the conditions they encountered in Mexican Texas, the lengths they went to defend their adopted nation's sovereignty in suppressing the Fredonian Rebellion, and their relationship with the local tejano community. Chapter 3 explores how immigrants reconciled themselves with Mexican laws regarding established religion and labor, often adopting Catholicism and admitting their slaves as indentured servants. It also explores how former slaves used this change in their status to pursue their freedom under Mexican federal law and how this complicated the relationship between Mexican northerners, both Anglo and tejano, and national leaders in Mexico City. Chapter 4 explores the vital transnational economy that emerged in Mexican Texas - one that, although declared in the service of Mexico, actually drew the region ever closer to the US, undermining both Mexican and US leaders' efforts to build cohesive nation-states. Chapters 5 and 6 offer a

retelling of the oft recounted Texas Revolution and the Republic of Texas that it created, arguing that the conflict started as an effort to re-instate the federalist Mexican Constitution of 1824, not separate from Mexico, and that Texans embraced secession late, reluctantly, and mostly as a means of attracting US support. Many in the United States of the North, however, interpreted these events differently, contributing to the notion that the United States was deservedly destined to dominate the rest of the continent, a vision eventually consummated with the US invasion of Mexico and the subsequent Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. Yet, as I point out in Chapter 7, US continental domination was still far from a forgone conclusion, as that country would soon face the same fate that Mexico did when Texans, along with the rest of the slave south, seceded from the United States. I conclude by arguing that popular misunderstandings of US immigration to Texas, and the events that resulted from it, have perhaps wrongly convinced that country of its own political strength and superiority over other nations – an assumption that has informed US foreign policy well into the twenty-first century.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**“The Greatest Nation on Earth”**  
**The Politics and Nationalism of the First Anglo-American Immigrants to Mexican**  
**Texas**  
**1820-1824**

“[W]e may from this instant consider North America, with the exception of Canada, as divided into two grand and important commonwealths,” wrote James Smith Wilcocks on the occasion of Mexico’s independence from Spain in October 1821. The soon-to-be US consul to Mexico went on to praise that young nation’s revolutionaries for their “brotherly love, patriotism, disinterestedness, truth, and good fait[h],” and compared their leader, General Agustín de Iturbide, to George Washington. Assuring his correspondent, John Quincy Adams that the new Mexican monarchy was “established on a sure and solid foundation,” Wilcocks predicted that the two young nations would cooperate to “give the law to the opposite continent.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet not all United States leaders were as excited about the prospect of sharing control of the continent with their newly independent southern neighbor. In fact, as early as 1786, when the United States was still just a decade old and did not yet extend past the Appalachian Mountains, Thomas Jefferson wrote that “our Confederacy must be viewed as the nest from which all America, North and South, is to be peopled.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>18</sup> James K. Wilcocks to John Quincy Adams, 25 October 1821 in *Diplomatic Correspondences of the United States Concerning the Independence of Latin American Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), 1599-1614.

<sup>19</sup> Jefferson in Reginald Horsman, *Race and American Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 86.

Americans leaders not only specifically looked to the expansive northern frontier of New Spain as ripe for conquest, they identified US settlers as its primary agents. Jefferson wrote that he looked forward to a time “when our rapid multiplication will expand itself” to “cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws.”<sup>20</sup>

This determination to populate and control the rest of the continent, if not hemisphere, persisted well into the nineteenth century, gaining confirmation with the Louisiana Purchase, which effectively doubled the United States’ national territory. It was confirmed again with the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1819, which transferred Florida from Spain to the United States. Still not satisfied, US leaders began to set their sights on the Spanish province of T<sup>e</sup>jas - a vast, fertile region that, many believed, could serve as their nation’s gateway to the rest of the continent. Criticizing the “imbecility and malignity” of Spain for not surrendering the region to the United States as it had Florida, Jefferson expressed little doubt that Texas would inevitably fall into US hands, making it “the richest state of our Union.”<sup>21</sup>

News that the Spanish Empire might be on its last legs only heightened expansionist interest. Six months before Wilcocks penned his correspondence to Adams, Henry Clay spoke of the need to populate the newly independent nation’s northern frontier with Anglo-American settlers:

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>21</sup> Jefferson in Mattie Austin Hatcher, “The Opening of Texas to Foreign Settlement, 1801-1822”, *University of Texas Bulletin*, No. 2714: April 8, 1927 (Austin, University of Texas), 276.

The question was by what race shall Texas be peopled? In our hands it will be peopled by freemen and the sons of freemen carrying with them our language, our laws, and our liberties; establishing on the prairies of Texas, temples dedicated to the simple and devout worship of God, incident to our religion, and temples dedicated to the freedom which we adore next to Him. In the hands of others it may become the habitation of despotism and of slaves, subject to the vile dominion of the inquisition and of superstition.<sup>22</sup>

Expressing none of the admiration that Wilcocks did, Clay's words demonstrate his belief that few US leaders had any intent of sharing control of the continent with their newly independent neighbor. Clay not only believed in the inherent superiority of Anglo-American society, especially when compared to that of the Catholic world, but he expressed a firm conviction that US citizens themselves would pave the way for their nation's expansion by importing Anglo-American culture, laws, and institutions.

But men like Clay were wrong. Those who immigrated to Texas had little intention of serving as the forbears of Manifest Destiny, nor was it evident to them that the United States would emerge as the most geopolitically dominant nation in the Northwestern Hemisphere. Indeed, for several centuries, while the US had remained a marginal outpost of the British Empire, New Spain had enjoyed virtual unrivaled control of the continent. The United States may have doubled its size a quarter of a century after independence and gained control of the continent's most important river network and port, but the newly independent Mexican Empire remained the second largest nation in the Western Hemisphere, encompassing two million square miles and spanning from

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<sup>22</sup> Henry Clay in *Ibid.*, 277.



present-day Costa Rica to Northern California. Strategically nestled between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, it possessed all manner of climate and topography, rich in natural resources and with a population three times larger than that of the US.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it had inherited a long tradition of provincial autonomy from Spain, meaning that as a republic it possessed an unrivaled commitment to federalism and state sovereignty.

Historians and contemporaries alike have long considered Mexico's commitment to a weak central government to be its fatal flaw, the political characteristic most responsible for compromising its political viability, territorial integrity, and national cohesion. But for many *norteamericanos*, this was its most attractive feature, especially for those in the country's southwestern frontier, from which the vast majority of Texas settlers came. In addition to being highly mobile, many of these early settlers had lived under Spanish jurisdiction in Missouri or Louisiana, and had long benefitted from the open, porous boundaries and inter-ethnic exchange that characterized the late eighteenth-century borderlands. They therefore demonstrated a flexible and contingent nationalism, often more influenced by pragmatics than ideology. But if they shared one thing in common with their northern Mexican counterparts, it was a strong localist tradition that, by the nineteenth century, rendered a complicated and often fraught relationship with their respective federal governments. Many of these people saw in Mexico not just a chance to start over in a nation blessed with fertile land and rich natural resources, but a

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<sup>23</sup> D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1993), 129-132.

nation that held as much political promise as economic. These immigrants did not so much hope to see Texas absorbed by the US, as they aimed to contribute to the birth of perhaps an even greater nation – larger, wealthier, and more politically viable. For many of these people, especially Stephen Austin and his small cohort of several hundred families who first settled the area, it was Mexico that appeared poised to become “the greatest nation on earth.”<sup>24</sup>

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“In contrast to the congratulatory nature of most writing on the emergence of the United States, historians appear diffident, almost embarrassed about the birth of Mexico,” writes Jaime E. Rodríguez O. Commonly referred to as the result of an “unfortunate revolution,” Mexico’s independence from Spain was long assumed to have ushered in a period of economic decline, social conflict and political chaos that lasted for at least the next four decades. “[I]nstead of interpreting the country’s political history as a process of evolutionary change, as is the case in the United States,” writes Rodríguez, “historians of Mexico often dismiss the nation’s first political structures and institutions as irrelevant, while seeking ‘revolutionary’ transformations that presumably advanced the country’s political development.”<sup>25</sup> The fact that Mexico ended up inheriting its earliest institutions from Spain meant that the new nation was virtually doomed to fail. Such a

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<sup>24</sup> William Walker, 27 August 1822, Asbury Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio.

<sup>25</sup> Jaime E. Rodríguez O., “Introduction,” *The Evolution of the Mexican Political System* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), quote on pg. 1 and 4. For more on the changing historiography of early Mexico see Timothy E. Anna, *Forging Mexico, 1821-1835* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska, 1998), Chapter 1.

conclusion, of course, assumes a universal preference for those institutions most commonly associated with republicanism and overlooks the extent to which the United States did not also inherit from Britain.

In fact, Moses Austin specifically cited the Spanish political system as the reason for his decision to relocate to Texas in December 1820, when he was summoned before Colonel Don Antonio Martínez, the Governor of the Province of Coahuila y T<sup>e</sup>jas, “in order to obtain detailed information about the condition of affairs and movements on the frontier of the United States.”<sup>26</sup> According to Martínez’s report, Austin claimed that he “came to this province for the purpose of applying to the Government for authorization to settle himself in it with his family.” When asked why he had not applied sooner for settlement in New Spain, since he had obtained a Spanish passport in 1797, Moses answered

[T]hat, since the year above mentioned, he went to reside at Saint Louis (Missouri) which territory belonged, then to Spain; he had there lead mines, the produce of which he exported to Havana, until the year 1800, when the American Government having prohibited the working of mines by private enterprise, he lost all the benefit of his labor.

Austin’s testimony points to several factors informing his and others’ decision to emigrate to Mexico. Not only did he have experience living under the Spanish Empire, but he specifically cited the Spanish political system as the primary impulse behind his decision to immigrate. “[B]ut now, in view of the new system of Government adopted by

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<sup>26</sup> “Examination of Moses Austin,” 23 December 1820, *Austin Papers (AP)*, Vol. I, Part I, 370-71.

Spain,” Moses continued, “he resolved upon applying for authorization to settle this province.”<sup>27</sup> This remained the case after Mexican independence as that nation decided to preserve, rather than discard, most of its colonial institutions.

But what system of government was this and why did some frontier Anglo-Americans prefer it to that of the United States? Earlier to 1812, the Spanish Monarchy had been composed of a series of kingdoms and provinces united only in their direct relationship with the king. The Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century reinforced provincial identity among creole elites by giving each province its own administrative government, thus permitting “the reinforcement of regional societies, by sponsoring local economic development and the appearance of strong regional oligarchies opposed to Mexico City.”<sup>28</sup>

This long tradition of provincial power and autonomy explains the Spanish reaction to the event that set the American independence movements in motion - Napoleon Bonaparte’s 1808 peninsular invasion and capture of the Spanish King Fernando VII. In accordance with Spanish law, which stipulated that in the absence of the monarch, political power transferred to the people in the form of their corporate entities, provinces throughout Spain independently began forming their own governing juntas. Each province then elected deputies to represent them in a newly formed Cortes that met in the southern Spanish town of Cádiz. In an act which elevated Spanish

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 379

<sup>28</sup> Sergio Ortega Noriega. “Hacia la regionalización de la historia de México,” *Estudios de la historia moderna y contemporánea de México*, no.8 (1980): 9-21; Anna, 34-42.

Americans to an almost equal status with their *peninsular* counterparts, the Cortes then invited each of the American provinces to elect their own deputies to the Central Junta based on a ratio of one deputy per 100 white male inhabitants.<sup>29</sup>

The process of forming a new government based on the rule of the people prompted a number of questions regarding Spain's relationship with the Americas, not least of which was popular sovereignty. On December 16, 1810, the day after the Cortes opened, the American deputies presented a program of eleven reforms. These included stipulations that the American provinces have twice the number of deputies to match those of the peninsula; that natives, mestizos and Africans be included in representations; and that free commerce be permitted throughout the colonies. The most noted advocate of these reforms and the man perhaps most credited with leading the way towards greater representation and enhanced local autonomy throughout the empire was none other than the representative from the Eastern Interior Provinces, a recently designated administrative department that included Coahuila, Nuevo León, Nuevo Santander, and, Tέjas. Indeed, as the sole representative of a region that had long suffered under administrative neglect, incompetence and over-consolidation, Dr. Miguel Ramos de Arizpe - native of Coahuila, cleric, and graduate of the University of Mexico - eloquently expressed the longstanding creole desire for greater representation and local autonomy. As a result of their relative remoteness "from the center of higher government," Arispe

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<sup>29</sup> Jaime E. Rodriguez O. *The Independence of Spanish America*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75-82.

complained that the interior provinces suffered from an “absence . . . of governing bodies engaged in the administration of justice and the supervision of the political economy.” Instead, they were controlled by “arbitrary” governors – many of them military men - who enjoyed protection “from any responsibility whatever for their actions.” Such a system, Arizpe insisted, fostered “despotism” and violated the empire’s principles of limited and constitutional monarchy. As a remedy, Arizpe called for the establishment in each province of “an *executive council* or a *provincial deputation* to have charge of the government of its community.” These deputations would be composed of men elected from the community itself and each body would enjoy a direct relationship with the monarch. This, Arizpe insisted, was consistent with the principles of the monarchy and indeed formed the very basis of the Cortes themselves: “When the orphan state of the nation caused by the shameful imprisonment of our beloved King Ferdinand VII was hardly known and the horrible plot of Napoleon to enslave us was still imperfectly seen, the provinces, having determined to defend the national liberty and to rescue their king, renounced the old government and established governing juntas.”

At the core of this system of government rested the principles of local autonomy and popular democracy then sweeping the Atlantic. “Each community is an association of freemen who are united[,] not to be despotically commanded by the strongest,” declared Arizpe, “but by one or more prudent men, capable of being fathers of the

republic.”<sup>30</sup> Here we see evidence of New Spain’s gradual and complex transition from monarchy to republic. Rather than a dramatic break with its imperial past, Mexicans looked to its legacy as they moved towards independence, first as an imperial monarchy and later as a republic.

American demands resulted in a fundamental restructuring of the Spanish Empire and contributed significantly to a new constitution - the Constitution of 1812 - established on the principles of regional sovereignty, representative government and free enterprise. It limited the monarchy, abolished viceroalties and extended citizenship to all men - except those of African descent. Finally, the Constitution of 1812 dramatically decentralized power by creating provincial deputations consisting of locally elected members. According to Rodríguez, “large numbers of people were incorporated into the political process” for the first time in the empire’s history as part of a system that “appears to have been more popular and democratic than those of most insurgent governments then vying for power in the New World.”<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, while historians have long argued that the impulse towards popular and regional sovereignty that emerged in Spanish America in the years leading up to independence came from France or the Anglo world, more recent studies argue that it derived from a specifically Hispanic political tradition. Mexico’s “impulse to

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<sup>30</sup> Dr. Miguel Ramos Arizpe, Nettie Lee Benson trans. *Report to the August Congress on the Natural, Political, and Civil Condition of the Provinces of Coahuila, Nuevo León, Nuevo Santander, and Texas of the Four Eastern Interior Provinces of the Kingdom of Mexico* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1950), quotes on pages 28, 30, 37-8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-94.

provincehood,” as historian Timothy Anna has termed it, was perhaps its most marked feature, and one borrowed directly from its colonial past.<sup>32</sup>

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A similar political impulse had been finding expression in the United States for decades. Anti-Federalists may have technically lost many of their nation’s early constitutional debates, but they would continue to influence its political discourse well into the nineteenth century. As with Spanish liberals like Arizpe, the most definitive aspect of their philosophy was their commitment to localism and suspicion of centralized authority. Elements of the Anti-Federalists critique, according to historian Saul Cornell, included the need for a Bill of Rights, the charge of “aristocracy” and exclusion among the nation’s leaders, concerns about taxation, and anxiety over a standing army. But the federal government’s underlying flaw, they contended, was its “consolidationist tendency.” Anti-Federalists believed that “civil rights and states’ rights were one in the same” and the states should operate as “the primary units of political organization and contain the bulk of political authority.” These elements would not only serve as the primary inspiration for American politics for generations to come,<sup>33</sup> but coincided with many of the Spanish reforms of 1812. Central to both critiques was a desire to decentralize power and enhance local authority.

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<sup>32</sup> Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 34.

<sup>33</sup> Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999), “Introduction, Cornell, Chapter 1, quotes page 11 and 29.



Perhaps no part of the United States better illustrated both the promise and perils of a centralizing US government than the Kentucky-Missouri frontier from which the majority of early US immigrants to Mexico came. Beginning in the 1790's, Federalists under the leadership of Alexander Hamilton unleashed an aggressive economic agenda "designed to place the new government on a solid economic basis and forge strong ties between the new government and financial interests."<sup>34</sup> Part of his plan involved the establishment of a national bank which promised to stabilize the new economy, attract the support of wealthy creditors, and stimulate economic growth through lending. The First Bank of the United States, however, received heavy criticism from Jefferson and the Anti-Federalists who accused it of usurping the power of the states in claiming banking as the exclusive right of the national government.<sup>35</sup> Anti-Federalists like John Taylor criticized what he deemed an unholy alliance between the legislature and a "powerful faction" of banking interests, whom he claimed "have no interest and feel but little concern, in all those questions of fiscal policy which particularly affect the land-holder, the merchant and the artist." Instead, this group had redirected the government towards "principles dangerous to the rights and interests of the community" and designed to serve their own interests. According to Taylor, a group of "monarchic speculators," had seized upon the government's legislative functions and "by virtue of this combination [of

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<sup>34</sup> Cornell, 174.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of the First Bank and the controversy surrounding it see Edward S. Kaplan, *The Bank of the United States and the American Economy* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), Chapter 2.

governing and banking interests] all regard for their constituents has been abandoned” so that “the public can neither count upon the independence or integrity of the legislature.”<sup>36</sup>

The Bank’s relationship with the citizenry was slightly more complicated, especially in the West, where it facilitated land purchases among the less wealthy while simultaneously opening the door to speculation. Even as it paved the way for greater land ownership, the federal government failed to regulate purchases or adjudicate competing land claims, sometimes permitting a single individual to purchase and hold a large tract of land without living there, thereby depriving other less wealthy settlers. Such practices were especially prevalent in places like Kentucky and Tennessee. By the 1790’s half of Kentucky householders were landless and the rest held only tenuous claims to their property.<sup>37</sup>

It was during this time that Anglo-Americans first began immigrating to Spanish-controlled Louisiana and Missouri in the hopes of finding “a less complicated and more democratic legal system.” Historian Andrew McMichael explains that, unlike their US counterparts, “the Spaniards were fairly rigorous about their policy of not creating a class of large-scale landholders.” In fact, the Spanish land policy operated under the dual assumption that every man deserved enough land to sustain his family, and that the best way to govern and protect the frontier was to populate it. While all one needed to do to apply for a grant was swear allegiance to the Crown, an applicant had to inhabit and

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<sup>36</sup> John Taylor, “Examination of the late Proceedings in Congress, Respecting the Official Conduct of the Secretary of the Treasury,” (Richmond, 1793), quotes on page 7,11, 12, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Steven Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky from Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 82-3.

cultivate the land for at least four years before he could receive title to it. Plot sizes were determined by family size so that recipients did not acquire more land than they could realistically manage, and squatters who occupied and improved land for at least ten years were permitted to purchase their plots outright. As McMichael explains, such a system had two results: First, it guarded against rampant land speculation like that seen in Virginia and Kentucky. Second, it promoted, indeed necessitated, actual settlement since the landholder had to live on and work the land.<sup>38</sup>

Thus throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Lower Mississippi Valley, where the Austin's resided for nearly twenty-five years before immigrating to Texas, was characterized by fluid borders, "multiple frontiers," and overlapping colonial systems as some frontier Americans who experienced a complex and strained relationship with their central government opted to live under Spanish jurisdiction.<sup>39</sup> "At one time or another and sometimes at the same time in the last half of the eighteenth century [the region] played host to each of North America's major colonial powers: France, Spain, England and the United States," writes Stephen Aron.<sup>40</sup> Some of these jurisdictions offered significantly different political and economic systems, especially when it came to distributing land grants. Borderlands residents could take

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<sup>38</sup> Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 18-20.

<sup>39</sup> For statistical information on early US immigrants to Texas see Villamae Williams ed., *Stephen F. Austin's Register of Families* (Baltimore: Genealogy Publishing Co., 1984).

<sup>40</sup> Steven Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), x, xviii.

advantage of imperial competition and the need to populate and settle vulnerable regions to secure optimal conditions for themselves.

Scholars have observed that many US borderlands residents demonstrated a pragmatic and flexible nationalism, motivated above all by an enduring desire to remain economically self-sufficient. Aron explains that the independence that mattered most to them came in the form of property ownership. For this reason the Spanish Empire remained a periodically appealing alternative to the United States. When the Spanish decided to close the Mississippi River to American navigation in 1784, leaders in Tennessee and Kentucky entertained the possibility of seceding from the United States and aligning themselves with Spain in exchange for access to the river and its outlet at New Orleans. While the “Spanish Conspiracy” never materialized, the fact that it was considered at all reveals not only the surprising political contingency of this time and place, but a history of negotiation and cooperation with the Spanish while that empire controlled much of the Louisiana Territory.<sup>41</sup>

Before settling in Texas, the Austins established a mining operation at Mine à Breton on the western side of the Missouri. There Moses and Stephen enjoyed a virtual monopoly on the lead mining industry during the brief time that the Spanish held claim to

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<sup>41</sup> Aron, *American Confluence*, 71; McMichael makes a similar argument that Anglo-American loyalty to Spain was motivated above all by economics. He writes that “As long as the Spanish Crown could guarantee easy access to cheap land and a relatively stable regime, local residents willingly lived under Spanish rule and swore allegiance to the king. When those guarantees failed, so did local loyalty. In that sense West Floridians had little real political and national loyalty to Spain; what passed for allegiance to the Spanish Crown was instead only the exercise of individualistic pursuits that for most of the period from 1785 to 1810 occurred within the context of allegiance to the Spanish Crown,” 4; For more on the Spanish Conspiracy see Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 17-19, *American Confluence*, 78-9.

the territory. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, however, the Spanish transferred jurisdiction to the French who ultimately transferred it to the United States. During this time the British and Spanish influence in the Missouri Territory all but disappeared in the face of an onslaught of US settlers - many of them fleeing the worsening situation in Kentucky – whose sudden presence threatened to disrupt the pre-existing social hierarchy. Initially, the US government proved reluctant to shift its military and administrative presence to the western theater, prompting frequent complaints about the republic's indifference and incompetence. However, by the end of the decade, this had changed, although not necessarily to the benefit of pre-existing settlers like the Austins.<sup>42</sup>

Historians are now beginning to acknowledge the role that federal intervention played in developing the trans-Appalachian West, and not just in terms of supplying loans for land purchases. William Bergman has observed that the federal government proved essential to protecting settlers and fueling local infrastructure: “Since 1789, the federal government had deployed fiscal and military powers granted to it . . . to transform the early western economy through land acquisitions, infrastructure, commerce, and communication,” thereby expanding “its bureaucratic institutions into the West, bridging geographic and political obstacles.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Aron, *American Confluence*, Chapter 5.

<sup>43</sup> William H. Bergman, *The American National State and the Early West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), quote pg. 1.

But for pre-existing settler populations – not to mention Indians - the state's growing presence could prove more problematic than its absence. In an attempt to make way for a flood of US citizens then heading into Missouri, the Federal Land Claims Commission decided not to honor the majority of Spanish land grants. While the Austins managed to hold onto their property, others were not so lucky. Established settlers and Indians now found themselves overwhelmed by the torrent of settlers backed by a federal government that refused to honor their land rights. Furthermore, government failure to regulate land speculation allowed for precisely the same circumstances that had occurred in Kentucky - corrupt lawyers and legislators purchased large parcels of land on which squatters had settled and then bid up the price.<sup>44</sup>

The federal government's increased presence in the west was accompanied by a series of reforms designed to develop, modernize and integrate its economy. Many of these reforms came at the behest of western elites eager to benefit from integration with the eastern market. Arguing that nothing hampered Kentucky trade more than its underdeveloped infrastructure, none other than Henry Clay became the champion of federally funded canals, roads, and mines. Convinced by his time in the Kentucky House of Representatives that federal funding was necessary for such large scale projects, Clay advocated a modern, industrialized political economy in the name of agrarianism.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Aron, *American Confluence*, 158-69, quote pg. 68.

<sup>45</sup> Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, Chapter 4, quote on page

But while the increasing presence of the US government certainly had its benefits, it did not come without formidable costs. For one, the new system clearly deviated from the principles of agrarianism and localism that had characterized the region for decades, and pre-existing settlers such as the Austins no longer enjoyed the privilege they had under earlier jurisdictions.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, localism and federal intervention existed in an uneasy marriage on the frontier. While federal backing for agriculture and industry certainly aided and insulated merchants, manufacturers, and settlers, and helped bring intra-regional trade and commerce to the west, it also fueled the very kinds of speculation that westerners had complained about for decades and introduced federal intervention into areas of the economy that had once been locally controlled. Federal incorporation, of which Austin specifically complained in his testimony before Gov. Martínez, was one of the most controversial of the Hamiltonian reforms. While it gave people the opportunity to invest in risky enterprises without the threat of considerable loss, skeptics argued that the system favored insiders and was prone to corruption.<sup>47</sup>

Predictably, the situation fueled the longstanding tension between federalist and anti-federalist impulses. The central government's increasing reach into commerce, trade, law and infrastructure prompted fears that such measures "would stimulate commercial interests unduly, undermine agriculture, centralize power, and violate the

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<sup>46</sup> Aron., *American Confluence*, Chapter 5, quote on page 185.

<sup>47</sup> Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, (New York: The Noonday Press, 1990), page 68.

Constitution.” Many even feared that it would destroy state and local authority all together.<sup>48</sup> Nothing, however, ignited criticism of the Federalist reforms more than the collapse of the federal banking system in 1819. Rather than regulating the lending practices of its state branches as the First Bank had done, the Second Bank of the United States followed their example by over lending in paper money and then permitting the notes of state banks to circulate as specie, rather than insisting that they be returned to the bank for payment. By 1818 the bank had recognizing the recklessness of its lending policies as well as the significant specie drain it caused in the east and began calling on state banks to repay their debts. This, of course, forced many who had previously enjoyed a policy of near unlimited lending, into bankruptcy and foreclosure.<sup>49</sup>

The contraction was worse in the west where lending had been the most liberal. There, the Panic took hold earlier, lasted longer and hurt more than anywhere else in the country. As one legislator put it, “All the flourishing cities of the West are mortgaged to this money power . . . They are in the jaws of the monster! A lump of butter in the mouth of a dog! One gulp, one swallow, and all is gone!”<sup>50</sup> The unfortunate turn of events reinforced the sense that monied elites had effectively usurped, centralized and corrupted the federal government, and that the poorest and furthest from the seats of economic and federal power were the losers. Their sense of betrayal was palpable. By 1824, men like John C. Calhoun warned of a “general mass of disaffection to the government, not

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<sup>48</sup> Watson, 62.

<sup>49</sup> Edward S. Kaplan, *The Bank of the United States and the American Economy* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), Chapters 4 and 5; Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 192.

<sup>50</sup> Watson, Chapter 2, quote on pg 39.



concentrated in any particular direction, but ready to seize upon any event and looking out anywhere for a leader.”<sup>51</sup> Attempts by state banks to tax the central bank for its failure to regulate or recall loans, failed. The landmark *McCulloch v. Maryland* effectively shielded the central bank from state demands for monetary reparation and “declared that national law superseded state law whenever the two conflicted.”<sup>52</sup>

The Austins experienced the devastating effects of the Panic first hand. By March 1819, the Bank of St. Louis, which Stephen had helped establish, filed a credit claim for \$9,000, most likely in response to the sudden demand for payment by the Bank of the United States. Moses assumed responsibility for the debt, but no sooner had he done so than the struggling bank demanded he repay \$15,000 that he had borrowed earlier against the Mine à Breton property. By now, the only thing that kept the Austin family from complete financial ruin was a \$9,000 investment in Arkansas that Stephen had made entirely on credit, making himself even more vulnerable to the pending national economic collapse. When the Panic finally reached Missouri by the fall of 1819, Moses and his son became the target of numerous creditors who had won civil judgments in Missouri and began losing property to foreclosure. What is more, Moses struggled to sell the Mine à Breton property which he had mortgaged to the now-insolvent Bank of St. Louis.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> John C. Calhoun in Charles Sellers, *Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*. (New York: Oxford, 1991), 172.

<sup>52</sup> Kaplan, 71-3.

<sup>53</sup> Cantrell, 69

Despite the fact that the events of 1819 and 1820 were in many ways the result of deregulation rather than over-centralization, they contributed to a renewed skepticism regarding the power and influence of the federal government. Many, especially in the west, began to express the belief that the central government's growing influence, especially in economic matters, had wrought more devastation than gain. The Panic, however complicated its causes, lent credibility to the earlier claim that the bank and other such reforms threatened the political rights of the community as well as its economic wellbeing. Not only had it concentrated wealth in the hands of a few distant lenders rather than harmonizing and increasing the wealth of the entire community, but it replaced the locally oriented public sphere with a powerful central government that held economic sway over its citizens, thereby undermining popular democracy itself.<sup>54</sup>

While for most Americans, the events of 1819 and 1820 would reignite an agrarian anti-federalism coalesced around the philosophy of states' rights, for still others the transformation called into question the very viability of their young republic. "When our rights are invaded it is of no consequence to the Citizen or Subject whether it comes by the hand of an Emperor King or Demon in office under Republic. [T]hey are alike destructive of all security to person and property." This is what Moses Austin declared in his formal address to the citizens of Jefferson County issued shortly after the County Sheriff had besieged his home in pursuance of a debt.<sup>55</sup> Many men like Moses

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<sup>54</sup> Cornell, 172-9.

<sup>55</sup> Moses Austin to the Citizens of Jefferson County, 10 January 1820, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 352-3.

believed they could no longer rely on their government's guarantee of "civil and religious liberties," nor on the political autonomy and protection of local authority. Austin perceived what many Anti-Federalists had warned would happen - government corruption so entrenched and pervasive that it extended all the way to the sheriff's office. So disillusioned was Austin with the turn of events in the United States, that he was prepared to renounce the country of his birth: "[A]s I am, ruined in this [country], I found nothing I could do would bring back my property again, and to remain in a Country where I had enjoyed *welth* in a state of *poverty* I could not submit."<sup>56</sup>

But he might not have been so willing to do so had things not looked more promising further west. Like many living on the frontier, Moses had followed the events surrounding the Mexican independence movement since its inception in 1810. According to Stephen, Moses first proposed the idea of forming a colony in Texas in 1813, following the signing of the Adams-Onís Treaty which confirmed Spain's possession of Texas and helped pave the way for the authorization of Spanish land grants in the region.<sup>57</sup> In February 1820, nearly a year after first proposing the project to his son, Moses requested a copy of the passport that Spanish authorities had issued him in 1797. With passport in hand, the fifty-eight-year-old Moses set off for Texas with nothing more

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<sup>56</sup> Moses Austin to J.E.B. Austin, 8 April 1821, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 385

<sup>57</sup> Cantrell., 73-4.

than fifty dollars, a horse, a mule and a slave named Richmond. They were all borrowed.<sup>58</sup>

As for the younger Austin, he had little intention of joining his father in Texas. Instead, Stephen fled to New Orleans and tried to rebuild his fortune there. But in the summer of 1821, Stephen received news that his father had passed away shortly after returning from a brief trip to Texas. During the trip, however, Moses had managed to secure a land grant to settle three hundred US families along the Brazos and his last wish was that his son Stephen “go on in the business in the same way he would have done had not sickness and oh dreadful to think of perhaps death not prevented him from accomplishing.”<sup>59</sup> Stephen could not ignore his father’s dying wish, and that fall he departed for Natchitoches to take claim of the lands that Moses had applied for and received from the Spanish Government. Determined to fulfill his father’s request, Stephen quickly began recruiting colonists.<sup>60</sup>

Despite his initial reluctance to emigrate, Stephen appeared pleasantly surprised by what he encountered in Texas where a less imposing and restrictive government meant greater economic prosperity and promise for ambitious immigrants such as themselves. In a letter to prospective settlers intended for publication in the *Arkansas Gazette*, he explained that

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> Moses Austin to J.E.B. Austin, 8 April 1821, *AP*, 385.

<sup>60</sup> Cantrell, 77-79, 88-91, 98-100.

The Constitution of Spain is in full operation at those provinces and recent accounts state that the beneficial effects of it are already perceptible. The gold and silver mines are getting into more extensive operation than they have for many years. Money is becoming more abundant, a free trade is permitted, and the restrictive system heretofore pursued in regard to foreigners has been superceded by the most liberal encouragement.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, Stephen envisioned Texas as a place where not just he, but thousands of disillusioned American agrarians like himself could start over. “Should you yet meet with any Farmers of good character or mechanics, who wish to emigrate to this fine country and participate in the advantages secured to my father by this grant you will oblige them,”<sup>62</sup> he wrote to his cousin James. New Spain not only promised rich resources, but made it possible for immigrants to benefit from them, to start their lives over again, in a country where they would not be harassed or disadvantaged by a system that seemed committed to serving the interests of a few at the expense of the many.

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What the Austins never acknowledged in their writings, but what they may have been aware of in 1820 was that the Spanish Empire was in fact on its last legs. The formation of local governing juntas in the Americas paved the way for increased democratization and, eventually, independence. The creation of provincial deputations in accordance with the 1812 Constitution, consummated a pre-existing “sense of provincehood.” According to Timothy Anna, “the provincial deputations made more

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<sup>61</sup> Stephen F. Austin (SFA), 1 July 1821, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 399.

<sup>62</sup> SFA to James E.B. Austin, 1 January 1823, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 566.

explicit the preexisting tendencies of self-government.”<sup>63</sup> But many conservatives and royalists feared what this “urge to provincehood” might render if carried to its logical conclusion as had nearly occurred in 1810.

Originating in northern Mexico, a seedbed of radical provincialism, the Hidalgo Revolt began as a call for greater provincial autonomy and quickly turned into a violent demand for independence by the lower classes that carried echoes of the Haitian Revolution. The rebellion was crushed with the aid of Spanish reinforcements, but the autonomist spirit that sparked it was not. In fact, “By interrupting a political restructuring that seemed to be moving toward a federated Monarchy, the royalists created the condition that would ultimately destroy the Spanish Monarchy.”<sup>64</sup>

When Fernando VII returned to the throne in 1820, many hoped for an accommodationist arrangement that would entail greater political representation while still honoring the legitimacy of the Crown. But this was not to be. Instead, Fernando attempted to turn back the clock on Spanish political reform by re-implementing monarchical absolutism. Not only did he abolish the beloved 1812 Constitution, but he vigorously prosecuted liberal constitutionalists throughout the empire, brought back the Inquisition, and appeared to make every effort to reverse the reforms made during his absence. Many in Spain and the Americas struggled with how to go about restoring a constitutional government under the new Monarchy. Northern New Spain again became

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<sup>63</sup> Anna, 57-8.

<sup>64</sup> Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*, 159-68, quote pg. 168.

a revolutionary flashpoint when a group of Spanish liberals, aided by a handful of creole, British and US supporters, attempted to stage a constitutionalist insurrection there that they hoped would extend throughout the rest of the empire. The expedition failed and its leaders were eventually executed, but the constitutionalist impulse did not die. In the words of one historian, “Regionalism succeeded where armed insurrection failed,” as the provinces took advantage of such unrest “to restore the home rule granted them by the Constitution of 1812.”<sup>65</sup>

By 1820 there was a renewed desire for autonomy. This was particularly the case in New Spain which had long been the site of some of the most vehement autonomist sentiment and activism. Cities like Mérida and Veracruz were among the first to reinstate the Constitution and call for elections. Rodríguez observes that political activity was the most “intense” in North America where nearly all adult males were eligible to vote regardless of literacy or property-owning status. Elections for virtually every type of municipal, provincial and imperial post throughout New Spain were held in late autumn and winter of 1820 as Moses Austin was applying for land grants in Texas. Rodríguez estimates that over 1,000 elections for ayuntamientos - or town councils - occurred during this time.<sup>66</sup>

Similar activity occurred in other parts of the empire, but to a far lesser degree because of ongoing social violence, so that when the Cortes convened in mid-1820, the

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-7; Anna, 66.

North American contingents dominated. They dutifully pushed the “American Question,” demanding that provincial deputations be established in every intendancy in the New World in an attempt to equalize representation for the Americans. The Mexican deputies also proposed the creation of three separate American monarchies – in Mexico City, Bogotá, and Lima – each with its own prince appointed directly by Ferdinand himself. But the Cortes never took any further action and the proposal lay dormant.<sup>67</sup>

Sensing that the degree of autonomy to which it aspired might not be possible under the current regime, the independence movement back in New Spain began to pick up steam again. In February 1821, a former royalist officer, Colonel Agustín de Iturbide drafted a proposal that combined New Spain’s desire for an autonomous regency with the Constitution of 1812. Although the Plan de Iguala was intended as a compromise that left open the possibility of reconciliation with the Crown, the cause of independence was rapidly gaining support, even among disillusioned royalist American officers including Anastacio Bustamante and Antonio López de Santa Ana, both of whom would later serve as president of Mexico.<sup>68</sup>

Eventually Iturbide drafted the Plan de Iguala which declared New Spain to be “a sovereign and independent nation” with a representative constitutional monarchy. Scholars have observed that the Plan’s success rested chiefly in its conservatism. As one noted historian writes, “Eleven years of rural insurrection and guerrilla warfare were

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 194-04, *Ibid*, 67-8.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 205-08.



preempted by a movement created and led by urban creoles and Spanish elites that, though not a counterrevolution, represented nonetheless a distinct moderation of the goals of the revolution.” The Plan protected the *peninsulares* and royalists from reprisals, affirmed the primacy of the Church and military, and declared Roman Catholicism the new nation’s official religion. In so doing, it was able to accomplish what earlier revolts like Hidalgo had not - unite Mexicans of vastly different interests behind independence.<sup>69</sup>

But, as Anna argues, the real key to the Plan’s success was its affirmation of regional autonomy. Unlike the United States, Mexico entered independence as a collection of provinces. Thus, Mexicans’ provincial identity preempted their national one. Herein lies the explanation for why Mexicans opted for the term *empire* rather than nation. Rather than a singular union, the new state was “an aggregation of provinces, some central and well integrated, some peripheral and scarcely populated,” and all of which had the right to join and leave the empire of their own volition. In this sense, Spanish Americans rejected the French idea of nation and instead embraced a “contractual conception of sovereignty that was fundamentally different from the emerging European idea of sovereignty based on nationhood.” Mexico’s independence, therefore, not only represented a far less dramatic break with Spain, but also rendered far less internal violence and class conflict as the pre-existing institutions, interests and social order were preserved. Even the “impulse to provincehood” was an affirmation of Spanish imperial constitutionalism. As Anna puts it, “Iguala and Córdoba, represented a

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<sup>69</sup> Rodríguez, “The Constitution of 1824,” 85; *Ibid.*, 69, 79, 81-2.

remarkably tolerant, even magnanimous foundation for a break with the mother country, serving as they did the interests of Mexicans (although not evenly) while firmly but almost politely closing the door on the Old Regime.”<sup>70</sup>

Mexico’s independence movement must have also felt conservative to many in the United States, where citizens had opted for a far more dramatic break with their mother country. Regardless, as news of the events just across the border swept the frontier, newspapers in places like Arkansas and St. Louis expressed awe and admiration for Mexico’s ability to achieve independence without considerable conflict or bloodshed. “Not a man has suffered persecution or privation of property in this revolution,” reported the *Arkansas Gazette*, “and the traveler now passes in perfect security thro’ all parts of the country under the authority of the patriot government.”<sup>71</sup> Welcoming Mexico to the “*great family* of the new world” the *Gazette* termed Mexico’s a “most extraordinary revolution, affected without bloodshed.”<sup>72</sup> The paper praised its founders for managing to achieve “equality of rights for all persons, Indians, Mulattos, and Negroes, as well as whites,” celebrating their remarkable ability to accomplish a revolution that “united all interests, and promised to all; to the soldiery promotion, to the priests their authority over souls, to the titles their titled, to the merchants commerce to the planter commerce, and to

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<sup>70</sup> Anna, 65, 85-9, quotes on page 65, 85 and 87.

<sup>71</sup> *The Arkansas Gazette*, 25 August 1821.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 February 1822.

the various classes of laborers, liberty, all were consulted and, named and respected, and all interests were reconciled.”<sup>73</sup>

Regarding the form of government that such conciliation had rendered, the *St. Louis Enquirer* lamented that “the condition of the country, and the inhabitants is probably such, as to have rendered it expedient to adopt a monarchical form of government.” However, the paper warned its audience of the dangers that too rapid a transition to a republic could entail, reminding them of what happened when “a more enlightened people” - the French – “ran in their rapid transition from despotism to a republic, and the short duration of their licentious freedom.” The paper praised Mexico’s “gradual regeneration” as evidence of “a cautious and enlightened policy” informed more by a fear of “aiming at too much to defeat all, than any hostility to a republican form of government.” The *Enquirer* concluded by suggesting that Mexico might look to its northern neighbor as an example to which to aspire in the future: “Let us hope that, a more unrestrained intercourse with our citizens, a nearer view of the perfections of our institutions, may lead to such changes in the political condition of these our north American brethren, as may assimilate more nearly to our own.” Such condescension informed more than a few reports on Mexico’s decision to opt for monarchy. “I do not think a milder government would suit this people,” admitted an editor of *The Nashville Whig*, “I, alas, cannot conceal from myself that they are not fit for the enjoyment of a free

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, October 9 1822.

and liberal government.”<sup>74</sup> As for Iturbide himself, whom Congress later claimed to have reluctantly elected president after a series of raucous street protests by enlisted army men,<sup>75</sup> the new leader garnered mostly effusive praise from frontier newspapers, many of which were published in places that had once been a part of the Spanish Empire. Claiming to rely on a source who knew Iturbide personally, the *St. Louis Enquirer* declared him to be “of the highest encomium,” possessing “moderation, disinterestedness, and heroism.”<sup>76</sup>

Austin himself remained undeterred by his adopted country’s chosen form of government. In reference to it he wrote to his cousin that “you must not be frightened at the name of the Imperial Government, you like myself have lived under a Monarchy, when Louisiana belonged to Spain and I think we lived as happy then as under the government of the United States.” This is not to say that Stephen viewed imperial monarchy as a superior form of government. He simply saw it as the best form of government for Mexico at that time and one that he himself could live under quite happily. What he could not live under was the system of government that had recently emerged in the United States of the North. “A Central Republic is the worst Gov’t in the world,” Stephen wrote, “for all the power will be in the hands of a few men in Mexico and instead of a Republic it will in effect be an aristocracy which is worse than a

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<sup>74</sup> *Nashville Whig* reprinted in the *Arkansas Gazette*, 29 October 1822.

<sup>75</sup> Anna, 94.

<sup>76</sup> *St. Louis Enquirer*, 13 April 1822.

monarchy, for in it we shall have 100 Tyrants instead of one.”<sup>77</sup> Here we see perhaps the strongest evidence of Austin’s hostility to a centralized form of government, which no doubt informed his preference for Mexico over the United States. For Austin and others like him, the newly independent Mexico offered an appealing alternative to the United States of the 1820’s. Although a monarchy, Mexico was a nation founded on the very principles of decentralized authority with no central banking system and a land grant system that all but prohibited speculation.

Yet, while Austin may not have minded monarchy and adamantly opposed a “Central Republic,” his clear preference was for a very particular form of republicanism. “I do not wish to take an active part in politics,” he wrote, “but if I can do anything in favor of the confederate system I will do so with pleasure.”<sup>78</sup> Despite his attested support for the Spanish and later Mexican Empire, the most ideal form of government in Austin’s eyes was one established on the principles of local autonomy and regional sovereignty. That said, Austin was fully prepared to accept Mexico as it was and content to stand on the sidelines while its leaders worked out the kinks of their new nation.

Indeed, Austin did not have to look far to find thousands of willing immigrants among disillusioned and beleaguered rural Americans, especially those from the south and west. “There are hundreds on the way and *thousands* ready to go if one word of encouragement could now be had from you,” wrote James Hawkins, Austin’s friend and

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<sup>77</sup> SFA to J.E.B. Austin, 20 May 1823, AP, 644.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

former business partner from New Orleans, just months after Mexico had gained its independence from Spain. Many of the people to whom Hawkins referred had by now lost almost all interest, let alone hope, in the nation of their birth. In their minds, the answers to their woes did not lie in Washington D.C. or Philadelphia and they certainly did not lie in the chambers of Congress or the White House, but rather, in Stephen F. Austin and his tiny settlement in Texas. “You and your Colony excite more interest than the assembled sages of the nation,” wrote Hawkins.<sup>79</sup>

These people did not speak from ignorance. Many had first-hand knowledge of life under the Spanish Crown and, given the present state of circumstances, did not mind returning to a similar system. “It has become a subject of considerable interest in this section of Missouri,” wrote Daniel Draper of Lincoln, Missouri in December 1821. “All those who once experienced the gratuity of the Spanish Government (a thing I never have done) speaks, generally, in favor of it with a few exceptions of social inconveniences.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the Austin family had little reason to doubt that their colony would soon be full of former US citizens, grateful and loyal to a country that had saved them from poverty and ruin. “I can assure you that a great Number of Families will move from this State, and from other States,” wrote Austin’s brother-in-law, James Bryan, “I have no doubt that the Colony will be filled up in twelve months.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Joseph H. Hawkins to SFA, 6 February 1822, *Ibid.*, 476-8.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel Dunklin to SFA, 25 December 1821, *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>81</sup> James Bryan to SFA, 4 March 1822, *Ibid.*, 481.

Immigrants who planned to settle permanently expressed a greater interest in the political climate of the country. “If you have found a good Constitution and the Government is settled I am clearly of the Opinion that no section of Territory has ever settled so rapidly as the Texas Colony, or the Austin Colony,” Austin’s cousin wrote in April 1822.<sup>82</sup> Most American immigrants seem to have shared Austin’s opinion regarding the Mexican political system. While perhaps not ideal, it was not bad either, and certainly an improvement over what many perceived as the failed republic of the North. “[Y]es I am not pleased with the form of government, it is a limited monarchy; but as Mexico has not bought her independence at the expense of much blood, it is perhaps better that the change should be gradual.” This is what William Walker of Mississippi wrote his father in August of 1822. “I think the policy of Mexico at this time, is practically good.”<sup>83</sup> American-style democracy, after all, was still being tested and did not look very appealing to those furthest from the center of political and economic power. Above all, Mexico had promise. “The nation possesses great resources, and its vast and successful effort for independence combined with the general harmony which at this time prevails, furnish, I think, sure pledges of future greatness and prosperity,”<sup>84</sup> wrote Austin.

Indeed, news of Mexico’s natural wealth, impressive topography and remarkable beauty filled western newspapers as much as reports on the recent revolution. In words seemingly intended to attract farmers, the *Arkansas Gazette* reported that “The fertility of

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> William Walker 27 August 1822, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, Folder 168, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Archives, San Antonio.

<sup>84</sup> SFA to Hawkins, 1 May 1822, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 505.

[Mexican] soil is astonishing, and the fields are covered with harvests which exceed in their produce, by twenty fold, the corn fields of Europe.” The paper claimed that Mexico produced twice the wheat of the US and “in any actual dearth” could feed the whole population of Great Britain.<sup>85</sup> Yet it was not just Mexico’s natural wealth that American newspapers remarked on. “The capital of the Spanish dominions in North America is one of the finest cities built by Europeans in either hemisphere,” wrote the *St. Louis Enquirer* of Mexico City. “There does not exist a city equal to Mexico for the elegance, regularity and breadth of the streets.” Its market presented “a plane of immense commerce, and the shops display a profusion of gold, and silver, and jewels.” Travelers to Lima, Philadelphia, Rome, Paris and Naples, claimed that Mexico’s “majesty” surpassed them all. Such praise was not unmerited. The three-hundred-year old capital had been built on top of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, established two hundred years earlier, and was home to 120,000 inhabitants. It had served as the political, commercial and administrative center of the Spanish empire and capital of New Spain. It was impressive not only for its wide, brilliantly illuminated streets and remarkable architecture - perhaps best exemplified by its imposing presidential palace - but also for its strategic placement on an isthmus with ready access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. All of this seemed to make it “destined to possess a powerful influence over the events which agitate the two continents.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *The Arkansas Gazette*, 9 October 1822.

<sup>86</sup> *St. Louis Enquirer*, 19 August 1822



Those who immigrated to Austin's colony expressed a similar vision. "It seems as if province designs this world to outshine the balance of the earth, in every respect," wrote William Walker of Mississippi, "Her streams, her mountains, her soil, her men, her politics, all, allure on great scales – nothing small or contracted on her whole construction." Indeed, it was not just Mexico's geography and resources that made it destined for greatness. What nationalists like Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams saw in the United States these men saw in Mexico – the promise of a natural and political utopia that could inspire the rest of the world. "[T]he spire of [Mexico's] political fabric," predicted Walker, "will be seen as a mirror to the civilized world." Mexico did not just promise a fresh start for beleaguered US citizens, it offered a fresh start for democracy as well. "With these and a thousand other advantages I repeat that Mexico cannot fail, under the influence of a wise and liberal government, to become the greatest nation on earth."<sup>87</sup>

No matter what political course Mexico took, it offered a special appeal to the thousands of struggling agrarians in the United States. "The prospects of the farmer and planter, were nevermore promising in any country, than in this, at the present time," Austin wrote. "[W]hatever be the collision arising from difference in opinion as to the course this government should pursue it is gradually gaining strength, and will, I trust,

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<sup>87</sup> William Walker, 27 August 1822, Asbury Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio..

ultimately secure the end of all government, the happiness of the people.”<sup>88</sup> Such happiness, these immigrants understood, was ultimately no more dependent on their country’s rejection of monarchy than it was guaranteed by it. And for many, Mexico’s promise, yet still unrealized, was enough to prompt them to forsake all that they had left behind in the North. Yet, even as immigrants expressed their admiration for their new country’s natural and political virtues, things were about to get even better.

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From its inception there had been little consensus regarding the actual structure and form of Mexico’s new government. While local elites seized on the opportunity that independence wrought to establish their own governing entities and advance their longstanding aspirations to home rule, Iturbide fostered the notion that, as the leader of the independence movement and recently appointed head of state, his power was supreme. This brought him into direct conflict with the provinces and their representative body, which Iturbide attempted to dissolve in late 1822. Believing their new leader to be in direct violation of the very principles that had sparked their independence movement in the first place – that of provincial self-determination and supremacy - the provinces rebelled a few months later. Rebel leaders under the command of a young ambitious captain named Antonio López de Santa Ana, drafted the Plan de Casa Mata, which granted greater local authority to provincial deputations and called for the election of a new congress. Sensing his own defeat, Iturbide eventually abdicated in March of 1823.

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<sup>88</sup> SFA to Joseph H. Hawkins, July 1822, *Ibid.*, 536.

A Constituent Congress formed of appointees of the former emperor and rebel leaders from the provinces, declared itself in session ten days later. One of its first acts was to declare the legislature – not the executive – supreme.<sup>89</sup>

Other than the primacy of Congress, however, national leaders struggled to agree on much else. Just as in the United States, a political fissure emerged between those who wanted to enhance provincial power (federalists) and those who wished the provinces to operate more like administrative units as they had done during the colonial era (centralists).<sup>90</sup> Mexico entered a phase of intense political activity as the two factions debated the virtues of their respective visions. According to Rodríguez, the “ayuntamientos became the most active political bodies in the nation” as the provinces themselves began to determine the future course of their young nation. In May the province of Guadalajara dissolved its “social pact” with the central Mexican government. The Guadalajara declaration went on to state that it was time for the provinces to declare “their natural rights” as free, sovereign and independent entities, “without there being between them, one and another, the slightest inequality.”<sup>91</sup> Before long, seven other provinces followed Guadalajara’s example including Yucatán, Oaxaca, Coahuila, Nuevo

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<sup>89</sup> Anna, 89-94, 109, quote p. 94.

<sup>90</sup> Anna, 110; J. Loyd Mecham, “The Origins of Federalism in Mexico,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 18, No.2 (May, 1938), 167-68.

<sup>91</sup> Jaime E. Rodríguez, “The Formation of the Federal Republic” in Virginia Guedea and Jaime E. Rodríguez O., eds., *Five centuries of Mexican History*, (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones, 1992), 318. José María Bocanegra, *Memorias para la Historia de México Independiente, 1822-1846* (Mexico, 1892), I, 260-1. Also discussed in Lloyd, 172.

León, Nuevo Santander, and Tέjas. Some adjoining states expressed the intention of forming confederations.<sup>92</sup>

Yet, it cannot be emphasized enough that they made no attempt to secede. What they were terminating was a connection with the current government of Mexico, not Mexico itself. Anna argues that this came from an understanding that the provinces lacked the infrastructural development and political organization to function as fully independent nations. Thus

when the states called themselves ‘sovereign’ the meaning was that each state was independent from each other and from Mexico City in all matters involving internal government, but also that each of them recognized the national sovereignty of the republic, that is, that each surrendered to the republic or endowed the national state with certain powers, primarily to conduct interstate or foreign affairs.

This was born out by the fact that local bodies kept the secretary of internal affairs abreast of their actions, even as they moved forward without the central government’s approval, thereby confirming their commitment to the empire while asserting their right to govern internal matters.<sup>93</sup> Yet in so doing, the provinces also asserted their own political supremacy. The government’s legitimacy was entirely dependent on the consent of the provinces.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Anna, 120-1.

<sup>93</sup> Rodríguez, “Federal Republic,” 318; Rodríguez, “Constitution of 1824,” 81; Mecham, 170-71; Anna, 127-8.

<sup>94</sup> Anna, 131.

Nevertheless, leaders in Mexico City began to express the fear that their country was on the verge of disintegration. Civil War appeared imminent by late July when the Supreme Executive Authority dispatched troops to Guadalajara and Zacatecas. Eventually, the standoff ended and a new congress was finally elected and convened in November. It was more representative of the provinces, and while the delegates agreed that Mexico was to be a republic, they could not agree on what kind. Heading the federalist contingent were Lorenzo de Zavala, Valentín Gómez Farías and Miguel Ramos Arizpe. The first two were great admirers of the United States, had lived or travelled there extensively, and wished to see Mexico adopt a similar form of government. Heading the centralists were Carlos María Bustamante and Father Servando Teresa de Mier, perhaps the most eloquent member of the convention.<sup>95</sup> Under pressure to draft a constitution that the provinces would approve before the nation deteriorated, Arizpe, the representative from Coahuila who had played an active role in creating the Spanish Constitution of 1812, composed an outline known as the *Acta Constitutiva*, and proposed that it be distributed to the provinces for a vote. The first article of the document declared that “The Mexican nation is composed of the provinces.” In other words, the provinces were the preeminent governing bodies of the land. Yet, it also confirmed the sovereignty of the nation and claimed for it the right to adopt whichever form of government appeared “most conducive to its conservation and greatest prosperity.” Finally, Articles 5 and 6 declared that Mexico be led by a “representative, popular,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 319-28; Mecham, 174.

federal” government, composed of “free, sovereign, and independent” provinces, each possessing their own exclusive “administrative and interior government.”<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, as it became increasingly clear that federalism was the only form of government that the majority of Mexicans would accept, centralist delegates launched an intense interrogation of a system they claimed was not suited for a nation as vast and diverse as Mexico. The most eloquent voice for this position came from Father Mier, who insisted that, while federalism might work for the United States, Mexico’s expansive territory, coupled with its long history of revolution and relative lack of experience as a unified republic, meant that a federalist system would only enhance division and lead to the nation’s disintegration. Furthermore, Mier insisted that federalism was foreign to Mexico, imported from the United States by power-hungry provincial “demagogues.”

But proponents of the article countered by insisting that federalism was, in fact, the only system suited for a nation like Mexico. Centralism, they warned, would unfairly subject the remote regions, such as Texas, to the same kind of marginalization and neglect that they had suffered under the Crown. In this respect, federalism was Mexico’s salvation, not its doom. Besides, as Gómez Farías pointed out, it was what the majority of Mexicans had called for. The provinces, he insisted, were already “separate and were going to unite, and not the contrary, because there is not union without a fundamental pact.”<sup>97</sup> This was the essence of Mexican federalism: Nationhood was a voluntary social

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<sup>96</sup> *La Aguila Mexicana*, 23 November 1823.

<sup>97</sup> *La Aguila*, December 14 and 15, 1823.

compact among the provinces, not one imposed upon them by a central authority - therein lay its legitimacy. As their political precedent, Mexican federalists pointed to the Spanish imperial model and the crisis of 1808 in which the king's absence had necessitated that the provinces form their own, new social compact. The same was true now with Iturbide's abdication, they insisted. The responsibility for forming a new government once again rested with the provinces and they had chosen federalism.<sup>98</sup>

In this regard, the contest between Mexican federalists and centralists in 1823 and 1824 mirrored that which had been unfolding in the United States since that nation's founding. Just as Anti-Federalists had in the United States, Federalists in Mexico believed that greater representative authority ought to be awarded to community leaders. Meanwhile, Mexican centralists and their counterparts in the US (confusingly referred to as Federalists, although their views conflicted with Mexican federalists) embraced the view that representatives ought to be distanced from their locales.<sup>99</sup>

The compromise was Article 3 which declared that, with the establishment of a new central government, only that body had the authority to determine which form of government Mexico would adopt in the future. In essence, the central government could abolish federalism if and when it saw fit. "Sovereignty resides radically and essentially in the nation," it stated, to which "exclusively belongs the right to adopt and establish by means of its representatives, the form of government and other fundamental laws."

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<sup>98</sup> Valentín Gómez Farías in *La Aguila*, 15 December 1823; Also discussed in Anna, 144-147.

<sup>99</sup> Cornell, 152-3.

Although it represented a compromise between federalist and centralist impulses, the *Acta*, which ultimately passed 70 to 10, nonetheless represented a profound accomplishment, culminating fourteen years of political change that started with a call for provincial home rule and ended with an independent republic.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, scholars by now agree that the real origins and “spirit” of the *Acta* lie in the Spanish Constitution of 1812.<sup>101</sup> This is most clear in the very first article of the *Acta*: “The Mexican nation is composed of the provinces.” Herein lies the distinctly Mexican notion of “shared” or “duel” sovereignty, – the nation was a union of sovereign provinces “reciprocally joined into a federation of equals.” Each state was independent of the others and Mexico City when it came to internal affairs such as taxation, and they “endowed” the national state with power over affairs that transcended states, except of course, for determining the future form of government. Indeed, the Mexican Constitution exceeded that of the United States in its privileging of regional sovereignty. In fact, the only other constitution that would come close to Mexico’s in this regard was that of the Confederate States of America established nearly four decades later.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Rodríguez, “Constitution of 1824,” 71-2, 82-6

<sup>101</sup> Historians by now nearly universally agree that the 1824 Constitution, while certainly informed by the US constitution, arose from the specific historical experiences of Mexico during its first years of independence. Rodríguez writes that “The framers of the constitution carefully considered the needs of their country. They granted the states the important role demanded by the regions, and that accommodation contributed significantly to maintaining national unity,” “Constitution of 1824,” 89. Anna’s whole thesis, as stated in Chapter 2, is that it came directly from Mexico’s long history of provincialism and plural identity. And even as he insists that federalism was essentially a concept borrowed directly from the US not at all consistent with Iturbide’s regime or anything that took place during the colonial period, Mecham writes that “the nerves, the real spirit of the constitution, find their inspiration in [the 1812 Spanish Constitution],” 179.

<sup>102</sup> Anna 127-8.



Yet, despite its accomplishment, the Constitution of 1824 did not resolve the underlying conflict between federalist and centralist impulses that had dominated the political atmosphere of Mexico's first few years of independence, just as it had done in the United States. "In short, the great issues at stake in creating the new nation were not laid to rest but continued to be the focus of profound conflict throughout the lifetime of the first federal republic and throughout most of nineteenth-century Mexican history," writes Anna. "Indeed, it can be said that the most profound issues a society can face were only beginning to be formulated."<sup>103</sup> This was as true for Mexico as it was for its neighbor to the north.

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"Was it probable, was it possible," John Adams later wrote, "that such a plan . . . of a free government, and a confederation of free governments should be introduced and established among such a people, over that vast continent, or any part of it?" Such a possibility appeared to him "as absurd as similar plans would be to establish democracies among the birds, beasts, and fishes?"<sup>104</sup> Yet, for other *norteamericanos*, especially those living on the frontier where newspapers had closely tracked events in Mexico for some time, the news was far less surprising, although no less pleasing. In June of 1823, the *St. Louis Enquirer* reported, in reference to the overthrow of Iturbide, that "Days of Prosperity, of liberty, and concord" had replaced "usurpation and despotism. Honour and

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<sup>103</sup> Anna, 149.

<sup>104</sup> John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, (Boston, Little Brown and Co., 1850-56), 124.

praise to the valiant soldiers of the country!”<sup>105</sup> When the nation decided to embrace a federal form of government the following year, the paper applauded the decision, reporting that there manifested “the best feeling between the ‘Sovereign Congress’ and the Congresses of the States,” and referred to “the excellent example” supplied by the United States.<sup>106</sup> Several months later it reported that “every part of the new political system was in regular and successful operation in Mexico.”<sup>107</sup> The *Arkansas Gazette* referred to Iturbide’s execution at the end of that year as evidence of “how far the spirit of Republicanism has taken root [in Mexico],” and declared that “Crowned heads may maintain themselves in Europe by means of bayonets, but here in the New World they are justly consigned to the worms.”<sup>108</sup>

Frontier Americans were particularly excited by the prospect of freer international commerce and trade with their new “sister republic,” with whom they envisioned sharing the role of moral and political steward to the rest of the continent. “The use of an unmolested passage between Mexico and the United States is a necessary in a political as in a commercial point of view,” declared the *Louisiana State Gazette*. The US and Mexico were not only “neighboring powers, inhabitants of the same continent, their territories contiguous, and their settlements approximating to each other,” they were now “two chief powers of the new world, and standing at the head of a *cordon* of Republics,

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<sup>105</sup> *St. Louis Enquirer*, 7 June 1823.

<sup>106</sup> *The St. Louis Enquirer*, 24 May 1825

<sup>107</sup> *The Arkansas Gazette*, 15 August 1825.

<sup>108</sup> *The Arkansas Gazette*, 19 October 1824.

which, stretching from pole to pole across the two Americas, are destined to make the last stand in defense of human liberty.”<sup>109</sup>

As for Stephen Austin, he could not have been more thrilled with the direction of Mexican national politics which, more than anything before it, solidified his and the other immigrants’ loyalty to their adopted country. In a formal proclamation issued to the “Fellow Citizens” of his colony on May 1, 1825, Austin declared, “I am convinced that there is not a breast amongst you that will not palpitate with exultation and delight at the prospects of Freedom, Happiness, and Prosperity which the *Federal Republican System of Government* presents to you.” He went on to express full faith in every immigrant’s ability to see their dreams realized if they only remained true and patient citizens of Mexico. “[N]o difficulty or embarrassment can or ever will arise unless produced by your own impatience or imprudence.”<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, in their embrace of extreme federalism, Mexican leaders skillfully combated precisely the fear that the Austins and so many other disillusioned Americans like them had expressed – an overly robust central government controlled by political and economic elites. Now, of course, Mexico had adopted what many of them considered the ideal form of government – a confederate republic.

Convincing Mexico of their fidelity, however, was no easy task for the thousands of US immigrants who sought Mexican citizenship during these years, especially in light

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<sup>109</sup> Louisiana State Gazette, 16 December 1825

<sup>110</sup> SFA, “Proclamation,” 1 May 1824, *AP*, Vol., Part I, 781-2.

of US leaders' very public interest in acquiring Texas. But these immigrants both actively demonstrated their loyalty to their adopted country and asserted their rights within it in the same way that their fathers and grandfathers had done for the United States - through armed defense of their nation.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**“Children of the Great Mexican Family”**  
**Citizenship, Identity, and Rebellion on Mexico’s Far Northern Frontier**  
**1824-1827**

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1822 Stephen F. Austin penned a letter to the recently appointed Emperor Augustín de Iturbide of Mexico. “I make a tender of my services, my loyalty, my fidelity,” Austin wrote, “This solemn act cuts me off from all protection or dependence on my former government – my property, my prospects, my future hopes of happiness, for myself and family, and for the families I have brought with me, are centered here – This is our adopted Nation.” Two years earlier, Austin’s father Moses had applied for and received an *empresario* contract from the Spanish government. Designed to facilitate the development and security of New Spain’s Far North, the *empresario* program granted land to small communities of foreign settlers if they promised to become Spanish subjects, convert to Catholicism, and develop and defend the region. By the time he penned his letter to Iturbide, Austin had managed to recruit and settle several hundred US colonists in a small tract on the Brazos River. He now sought to convince the nation’s new leader to honor the contract he had made with his predecessors, the Spanish. “I therefore supplicate that his imperial majesty will have the goodness to take the settlement I have formed under his protection, and that we may be received as children of the great Mexican family.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Stephen F. Austin to Emperor Iturbide, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1822, Eugene C. Barker, ed., *The Austin Papers (AP)*, Vol. II, Part I, (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1924, 1928) p. 519.

Historians have long greeted Austin's supplications with skepticism.<sup>112</sup> But it is perhaps more helpful to see them as evidence of the complicated identity that he and other colonists fostered as Anglo immigrants to Mexico. These men consistently referred to Mexico as their "adopted nation," rather than their "mother country" and continued to identify as American. Yet Austin and others like him consistently declared and enacted their Mexican loyalty. Not only were the two reconcilable, they were interdependent. Mexico, as we shall see, was the only place where many believed they could truly be American.

Meanwhile, Mexican leaders from Iturbide to Bustamante had a good motivation to believe such appeals and to facilitate Anglo settlement of the Far North. For over a decade Mexico had been struggling to secure its northern border from Indians who targeted Mexican settlements and missions. Indeed, by 1820, the Comanche appeared to be the most dominant imperial force in the Mexican North. But it was also during this time that Spanish officials and their Mexican successors finally began heeding local leaders' appeals to allow settlers, specifically those from the United States, to acquire and settle land. Thousands responded to the new policy and, by 1827, Texas was home to nearly 27,000 Anglo immigrants and their slaves.

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<sup>112</sup> Randolph B. Campbell in *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 104 explains that "Anglo-Americans poured into Austin's colony for one simple reason – cheap land". David J. Weber in *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982) argues that immigration was primarily a result of economic depression in the US following the Panic of 1819. Weber writes that "the 'push' of the bill collector and the sheriff seems to have been more important in causing immigration to Texas than was the 'pull' of cheap land", p. 166.

Many described their relationship to their adopted country in terms similar to Austin. As Lynn Hunt has notably written “most Europeans in the eighteenth century thought of their rulers as fathers and of their nations as families writ large.”<sup>113</sup> What is surprising is that the language of paternity was employed so late, long after citizens of the United States and France had abandoned it for and begin to describe their relationship to the state in more egalitarian terms. Yet, for Austin submission to a patriarchal authority such as Iturbide *was* a form of free will.

Yet, for others, loyalty did not come so readily, especially when they sensed that Mexico failed to live up to their expectations. When a group of disgruntled settlers and squatters attempted to form their own nation and secede from Mexico, it provided Austin and other loyalists with the opportunity to prove their loyalty to their adopted nation rather than merely declare it. While the Fredonian Rebellion ultimately enjoyed only limited support before being suppressed by the Anglo militia, it revealed a latent tension between some settlers’ loyalty to their adopted family and loyalty to their nuclear family. This, in fact, was characteristic of many nations transitioning to republicanism at this time. As Jennifer Heuer has observed of France, “From the birth of the Revolution in 1789 to the consolidation of a new monarchy, family and citizenship rights were thus both deeply intertwined and frequently opposed.”<sup>114</sup> Perhaps nowhere was this tension

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<sup>113</sup> Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), xiii.

<sup>114</sup> Jennifer Heuer, *The Family and the Nation: Gender and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

more evident than in the Mexican North, where personal and national security sometimes coincided and other times clashed.

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For centuries Texas' immense size and relative lack of navigable waterways hindered Spanish efforts to settle and develop the region. It was not until the eighteenth century, in the face of increasing French encroachment in the Lower Mississippi Valley, that the Spanish began establishing a series of missions and presidios with the aim of winning the loyalty of local Indians.<sup>115</sup> But unlike the New Mexican Pueblo, the nomadic eastern plains tribes, in the words of one official, "refused to submit to the merciful yoke of the Church." Having established close commercial ties with the French from whom they obtained muskets and ammunition, southern plains tribes ignored Spanish appeals to halt trade with the French and, at least according to one report, even "presumed to threaten with death" anyone who prohibited such activity. "All the Nations are prepared to take up arms against the Spanish," wrote one official, "declaring that they will receive in their territory none other but the French, who supply them their necessaries."<sup>116</sup>

Foreign trade allowed Indian groups like the Lipan Apache, the Karankawa and others to remain independent of the Spanish. But perhaps no group proved better able to bend the European presence to their own ends than the Comanche. Arriving in the

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<sup>115</sup> Donald E. Chipman and Harriett Denise Joseph, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010, original 1992), Chapter 4 and 5; Mattie Austin Hatcher, *The Opening of Texas to Foreign Settlement, 1801-21*, (Austin; 1927), 41-44

<sup>116</sup> "Communication Touching the Conversion of the Indians, 1730," Buquor Papers, Briscoe Center of American History, University of Texas, Austin.



southern plains in the early eighteenth century, the Comanche proved able “to harness the empowering potential of the new technology more fully than their Native rivals,” according to Pekka Hamalainen. Horses, guns and ammunition permitted them not only to adopt mounted Bison hunting, but to replenish their livestock, ammunition and even their own population by raiding other Indians and Spanish settlements. It is fair to say that by the mid-eighteenth century the Comanche, more than any European power, dominated the Mexican north.<sup>117</sup> Having colonized most of the grassy plains of the Arkansas Basin, in the late 1760’s the Comanche attempted to expand westward into the Rockies and southward into Texas, a region previously controlled by the Lipan. Rather than expanding their territory, the Comanche sought “a vigorous diplomatic and commercial expansion,” aligning themselves with neighboring tribes such as the Wichita in order to conduct raids on San Antonio and its surrounding environs.<sup>118</sup>

However, by the 1770’s, France transferred its North American territories to the Spanish, effectively ending the two empires’ American rivalry and inspiring Charles III to unleash a series of administrative reforms designed to integrate, modernize and secure Spanish dominance on the continent. This meant a renewed effort to secure Spain’s northern frontier. In 1771, New Spain’s Minister of the Indies, José de Gálvez, called for a series of reforms based on his six-year inspection of central and northern New Spain. Concerned primarily with the British and Russian imperial threats, Gálvez and other

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<sup>117</sup> Pekka Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), Chapters 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, quote page 70; Chipman and Joseph, Chapter 8.

officials believed they could subdue native groups and harness them to Spanish imperial aims. In 1776, he ordered the establishment of the Commandancy General of the Interior Provinces and appointed Teodorode Croix to its head. Unlike his superior, Croix recognized the primary threat to Spanish imperial sovereignty to be the marauding tribes of the central and southern plains. Since the Spanish had failed to subdue the southern plains Indians through conversion, Croix called for adoption of the “French approach” - trade and gift-giving would replace the sword and the cross.<sup>119</sup>

The need to gain the loyalty of the northern Indians became even more urgent with the birth of a new and territorially aggressive neighbor to the west. Although Spain had formally supported United States independence, the new nation’s own imperial ambitions were not lost on Spanish officials who hoped that through an alliance with the Comanche, they might secure their eastern border from US encroachment.<sup>120</sup>

While the Spanish were able to achieve a lasting peace with the western Comanche, preserving it in the east proved more difficult. “Unlike in New Mexico,” explains Hamalainen, “Spanish officials in Texas had only sporadic interactions with and limited knowledge of the top-level Comanche leadership.” But before long the recuperation of the Lipan forced an alliance between Texans, Comanche, and Wichita in which the Spanish supplied guns, ammunition and uniforms to their Indian allies in exchange for their loyalty and cooperation. Thus, by the 1790’s, northern New Spain appeared to have

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<sup>119</sup> Chipman and Joseph, Chapter 9.

<sup>120</sup> Hamalainen, 112.

entered a new era characterized by trade, military cooperation and peace.<sup>121</sup> Yet, the practice was less successful in Texas where officials had access to fewer resources than their counterparts in New Mexico and “operated in a more complicated geopolitical setting,” with more than thirty-three Indian nations soliciting trade from them.<sup>122</sup>

Starting in the 1780’s, US traders began venturing into Texas, some of whom had ties to known filibusters in the North.<sup>123</sup> In an attempt to crack down on such individuals, Spanish officials in 1795 decreed “that the utmost vigilance shall be exercised over the persons who introduce themselves in our Provinces from the United States of America, there being serious grounds to suspect that emissaries are being sent to arouse our people to rebellion.” The Lieutenant Governor of the Town of Nacogdoches, which rested on the border with Louisiana and had long been a hotbed of foreign trade and other illicit activity, was instructed to “have arrested any foreigners existing, or who may hereafter introduce themselves among our friendly Indian Nations inducing our Chiefs to lend their assistance for this object.”<sup>124</sup> Thus, the Spaniards’ efforts to hold onto Indian allegiance was proving increasingly difficult in the face of foreign traders, especially from the United States.<sup>125</sup> The Comanche, for their part, continued to ignore Spanish orders to trade with or harbor foreign interlopers as they began to shift their allegiances to the United States. Governor Antonio Martínez reported that “the traffic between the

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 117-130, quotes on page 128,

<sup>122</sup> Hamalainen, 130-40, quote pages 130, 137

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 145-6; Chipman and Joseph, 226-7.

<sup>124</sup> The General Commanding the Eastern Provinces to the Governor of Texas, 30 July 1795, Buquor Papers.

<sup>125</sup> Hatcher, “Chapter II: Decisions for a Buffer Against the United States,” 70-101.

Comanches and the traders from the interior continues without interruption, and that arms, munitions, and other war supplies are being brought in.”<sup>126</sup>

Spanish anxieties were heightened when Louisiana came under the control of the United States in 1804. Now, the Spanish were confronted with the most territorially aggressive nation on the continent abutting one of the most vulnerable and least populated parts of their empire. Meanwhile, French aggression was about to revisit Spain, this time on the other side of the Atlantic with the Napoleonic invasion and capture of Fernando VII.

As the sole representative of the Eastern Interior Provinces of the Kingdom of Mexico to the Spanish Cortes in 1810, Miguel Ramos Arizpe took it upon himself to enlighten the Cortes to the centuries of imperial neglect and mismanagement that had been visited upon Coahuila and its surrounding provinces. “At the present,” Arizpe declared, “[Texas,]after so many years of abandonment, contains in all its vast territory only three towns, which are most commonly known by the names of presidios, and five missions of native Indians of the region.” Indeed, the non-Indian population at that point did not exceed 3,000 inhabitants, according to Arizpe, most of whom struggled under administrative neglect and the constant threat of Indian raids and foreign filibustering. Arizpe spoke specifically of the Comanche, whom he termed the most “warlike” of the local tribes. Despite “Poverty, wars, and epidemics of smallpox,” he claimed they “can

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<sup>126</sup> Hamaleinen, 147-50, quote page 150; Antonio Martínez to Joaquín de Arredondo, 13 May 1818 in *The Letters of Antonio Martínez, Last Spanish Governor of Texas*, ed. and trans. Virginia H. Taylor and Juanita Hammons, (Austin: Texas State Library, 1957), 136; Also quoted in Hamaleinen, 150.

in a few days assemble many thousands of *Gandules*, that is, men from eighteen to fifty years of age, who are very skillful with the arrow, the spear, and the gun, which they all have of an excellent quality.”

Texas’ resultant lack of development was especially unfortunate considering how much natural wealth and economic promise it offered. Not a little regional pride factored into Arizpe’s characterization of the interior provinces: “Their vast extent, their location, their climate, so varied and healthful in the larger part, and their most abundant and varied native products make them worthy of constituting by themselves one of the most extensive and richest empires of the universe.”<sup>127</sup>

Indeed, Arizpe’s remarks gestured towards a distinctive *norteno* identity among the region’s Hispanic inhabitants, characterized by a rugged agrarianism, martial lifestyle and close economic and cultural ties to Indians and foreigners, especially those from the United States. Andrés Reséndez has written that over the course of the early nineteenth-century “Pueblo Indians, Anglo-American colonists, tejanos, and nuevomexicanos became linked together through several institutional networks revolving around land, commerce, politics, and religion, forging impressive multiethnic local and regional alliances.” Thus, while Spanish officials feared and attempted to prevent Anglo encroachment on the frontier, the region’s inhabitants welcomed, and often formed close personal connections with *norteamericanos* who offered goods, skills and connections

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<sup>127</sup> Miguel Ramos Arizpe, *Report to the August Congress of the natural, Political, and Civil Condition of the Province of Coahuila, Nuevo León, Nuevo Santander, and Texas of the Four Eastern Interior Provinces of the Kingdom of Mexico*, Nettie Lee Benson trans, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1950), 5-7.

that they needed to thrive and, as the century progressed, began to look to Anglo-Americans as the answer to develop, enrich and protect their struggling province.<sup>128</sup>

Meanwhile, tejano relations with the rest of the empire had become increasingly strained due to generations of administrative neglect and incompetence. For example, in 1787 citizens of the Villa of San Fernando and the neighboring presidio of San Antonio issued a formal complaint to Governor Rafael Martínez Pacheco regarding the Commandant-General's practice of seizing thousands of supposedly wild horses and cattle. Based on "the royal authority granted to us by our Lord, the king," the petitioners requested "a remedy" to the tribunal orders issued from the commandant-general of these Eastern Interior Provinces of New Spain. They claimed an "undeniable, indisputable, and legal right" to the horses and cattle based on the belief that they were descended from stock that had belonged to their fathers and grandfathers, those "honored first settlers" of the far north. They explained that their forbears had "been obliged to abandon" their cattle and horses during the previous wars with the Apache, which had "caused the Indians to steal the greater part of the stock they chanced to find unguarded." Now, having finally reestablished themselves, they faced "a still more dangerous enemy" in the Governor "so that if our situation was most miserable during the whole time of the war, it was much worse when peace began." The petition concluded: "[W]e could use our forefinger's length of paper and still not tell all the miseries we have endured." Although

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<sup>128</sup> Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 56-57.

“the king had ordered that we be protected and encouraged, [the governor] destroyed and annihilated us. He seized our patrimony, he took our heritage.”<sup>129</sup>

Fully conscious of the increased regional alienation of the provinces, especially Texas, Arizpe called for greater integration, representation and infrastructure to facilitate “reciprocal trade among their inhabitants” and “draw them into every kind of relationship,” thereby contributing “to greater uniformity of habits and customs and make their people well adapted to living together under the same internal centralized government.”<sup>130</sup>

But the one policy that Arizpe seemed to suggest was most necessary to the development, adhesion and security of the northern provinces – especially Texas - was increased population:

[T]he eastern internal provinces’ size, their climate, their products, their excellent seaports, invite millions of men to enrich themselves; but never has the government put into practice effective measures for leading men there. This idea has never attained more than the projected stage . . . Perhaps all the advantages of this or similar measures has not been recognized, nor has an attempt been made to show the Spaniards that it was aimed at making them quickly and permanently rich and prosperous.

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<sup>129</sup> “Memorial, Explanation, and Defense Presented by The Citizens of the Villa of San Fernando and the Royal Presidio of San Antonio de Béxar to Rafael Martínez Pacheco, 1787” trans by Mattie Austin Hatcher, San Antonio Archives, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas Austin.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 34.

To these ends Arizpe recommended a project designed to enhance Texas' population, "not withstanding the circumstances in which the nation finds itself," and insisted that such a policy constituted "the principle road to national prosperity."<sup>131</sup>

Arizpe's remarks did not go unheeded. The imperial government soon commenced a sustained effort to encourage settlers from the North who declared their loyalty to Spain. Initially, authorities admitted only Spanish vassals from Louisiana wanting to escape the "harsh" rule of the United States. But before long, many Anglo-Americans were expressing their interest in immigrating as well. Spanish officials at first refused, but local leaders argued that they needed the additional population and resources to secure the region.<sup>132</sup>

Indeed, it was in 1809, when exclusion policies reached their zenith in response to rumored territorial aggression on the part of the United States and Napoleon, that Texan officials had first argued that increased settlement and a strong militia were required to establish territorial integrity. "[A]ll indicates a very considerable upturning if this Province is not attended to, from which it would be difficult to dislodge the American if he succeeds in occupying it," wrote Nemesio Salcedo in June of 1812. "[H]ow the cares and troubles of this Province daily increase," he bemoaned, predicting "that their continued succession will alone show the evidence of their reality."<sup>133</sup> Increased population, he and others insisted, was the only remedy. "[T]his place seems to me

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 39-40.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Nemesio Salcedo, 26 June 1812, Asbury Papers, Folder 227, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.



suitable for Your Lordship to found a new settlement and doubtless it would be most beneficial to these Provinces,” wrote the Senior Commandant General at Nacogdoches, “I am certain that settlers of means will settle there for the advantage of finding a good sale for their produce and grains, provided they find themselves protected properly.” But settlement was not possible, he insisted, without an aggressive and relentless war against hostile Indians, “Your Lordship must not believe that [the Indians] become more peaceable . . . for their happiness they find it in robbing, their valor, in killing the unfortunate being even when they find them in the greatest misery, hungry and naked.” Such traits made them “incapable of being attracted to the Christian Religion.”<sup>134</sup> Local leaders objected to the imperial practice of attempting to curry favour with and eventually Hispanicize the Indians, and in this way corresponded more to the attitudes of Anglo-Americans, especially frontiersmen, than they did with Mexican federal leaders, many of whom decoupled race from citizenship, tending to see Native Americans as Spanish subjects who should be “civilized” not exterminated. For the next decade, frontier leaders would skirt Spanish restrictions by permitting foreigners, many of whom they had come to know and trust over extended commercial and personal interaction, to establish themselves illegally along the western frontier, and would continue to carry on a clandestine trade with Louisiana as well.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Manuel Sambrano to the Commanding General, 4 September 1813, Folder 228, *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Hatcher, “Chapter 3: Establishment of Villas and Difference Over Management of Villas, 1806-07,” 102-126.

Such was the *status quo* until the Fall of 1820 when revolution in Spain necessitated the reestablishment of the Cortes which, among other things, called for local leaders to issue a report on vacant lands and their ideas about how best to distribute them to needy and loyal citizens. On September 28, 1820, in response to the demands of local leaders, the new government overturned the long established prohibition by offering asylum to all foreigners, whether legally or illegally residing in parish dominions, if they promised to respect the new constitution and laws. The new government also adopted a more liberal immigration policy that invited foreigners to settle in small communities along the northern frontier if they promised to help develop the region and contribute to the government's efforts to combat Indian hostilities. This *empruario* system is precisely what allowed the Austins to establish their colony of 300 families along the Brazos.<sup>136</sup>

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Stephen Austin arrived in Natchitoches by steamboat on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1821. There he met a group of Spanish officials headed by Erasmo Seguín, the recently elected *alcalde* of San Antonio, assigned to deliver the confirmation of Austin's grant and accompany him into Texas. Seguín was among that class of men who, according to historian Jesús de la Teja, "had navigated the treacherous waters of the Mexican War of Independence, had advocated the development of the province their grandparents and great grandparents had settled for a century, and [later] welcomed and formed alliances with the recently

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., "Chapter 4: Final Preparations for a Successful Colony," 278-86.

arrived Anglo-American settlers.” His forebears, many of them soldiers who had been stationed at the presidio of San Antonio beginning in the early 1700’s, were among the town’s founders and some of its most prominent citizens. His paternal grandfather, Bartolomé Seguín had been a well-respected carpenter and landowner who was also active in San Antonio politics and society, and had served on several town councils. Erasmo’s father, Santiago, quickly became one of San Antonio’s most successful cattle exporters and also served on the ayuntamiento in 1784 and 1787. He was a militant advocate for local interests and his name is found on the 1787 appeal to Governor Martínez.<sup>137</sup>

The third of Santiago’s seven children, Erasmo himself followed the path of his father and grandfather into civic politics. He was appointed postmaster in 1807, a position that he would hold for almost three decades. During Mexico’s war for independence, Erasmo remained ostensibly a royalist, he was accused of treason after agreeing to carry a letter on behalf of the revolutionaries during his return from a business trip to Louisiana. Although he insisted he was coerced into the task, the royalist governor nonetheless branded him a traitor, had him arrested, and his property confiscated. Having cleared himself of charges by 1818, the government eventually returned his ranch and he began rebuilding his fortune.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Jesús F. de la Teja, “Juan N. Seguín: Federalist, Rebel, Exhile” in Jesús F. de la Teja, ed. *Tejano Leadership in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (Texas A&M Press, 2010), quote on page 213; Also see “The Making of a Tejano” in *A Revolution Remembered: The Memoirs and Selected Correspondence of Juan N. Seguín*, (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2002).

<sup>138</sup> De la Teja, “The Making of a Tejano,” 3-5.

Accompanying Seguín was another San Antonio merchant, stock raiser, and councilman, Juan Martín de Verramendi. Verramendi was at least in part selected for his thorough knowledge of the roads between Nacogdoches and San Antonio. As a wool trader, he had travelled them extensively. He had also most likely come into repeated contact with Anglo traders from Louisiana, and had very likely engaged in contraband trade with them, as he was in fact accused of doing on at least one occasion. In exchange for wool, cattle and mules, Louisiana traders often supplied items like tobacco and cloth, both popular in San Antonio and extremely difficult to come by. As prominent stock raisers, businessmen, and civic leaders, these men saw in Anglo-American colonization the potential to develop and enrich Texas through increased trade, security, infrastructure, and economic development. As de la Teja writes, men like Seguín and Verramendi saw in Austin and the Anglo-American colonists “an unprecedented opportunity for Texas to rise from the depths of the poverty and backwardness from which the Mexican War of Independence had left the province.”<sup>139</sup>

As the men travelled west toward San Antonio, Austin observed that Texas’ “red land is very productive and is covered with the most luxuriant growth of Gras I ever beheld in any country.” He recorded in his journal that the landscape was “gently rolling” like the “Barrens of Kentucky” and appeared “tolerably well watered” with “numerous” creeks of “pure and limpid” water. He designated the country along the

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<sup>139</sup> David R. McDonald, “Juan Martín de Veramendi: Tejano Political and Business Leader“ in Jesús de la Teja ed., *Tejano Leadership*, 29-31; Jesús de la Teja, “The Making of a Tejano,” 7.

Guadalupe River “the most beautiful I ever saw” with “rolling Prairies” and “soil very deep and rich.” On July 26<sup>th</sup> the men learned of a likely Indian attack along the Comanche trail on which they were travelling. They also received information that an unspecified group of Indians had recently ridden “into the very town of San Antonio and killed men and stole horses and mules, and that the people were in a very distressed situation.” On August 12<sup>th</sup> they received more cheerful news - Mexico had gained independence from Spain. Austin reported that his travel companions “hailed this news with acclamations of ‘viva Independencia’ and every other demonstration of joy,” and that “Erasmus invited us to breakfast with him on various Spanish dishes sent out by their wives.”<sup>140</sup>

Along the way Austin also encountered the “head chief” of the Tankawas, Gacoso. As the two men smoked together, Austin wrote in his journal that he “informed [Gacoso] of my settlement which pleased him” and he said he would “inform his nation who we were and our objects.” His impressions of the Tankawa differed markedly from those of Karankawa, whom he met later. This tribe, according to Austin, were “the universal enemy of man” who “killed of all nations that came in their power, and frequently feast on the bodies of their victims.”

The men finally arrived in San Antonio on August 26<sup>th</sup>. Austin observed the town “in a state of ruin” as a result of the recent revolution and “subsequent Indian depredations.”

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<sup>140</sup> Stephen F. Austin, “Journal of Stephen F. Austin on his First Trip to Texas, 1821,” *Texas Historical Association Quarterly*,” Date ?, 286-317.

Although the inhabitants appeared to have “but few cattle and horses and raise some corn,” they nonetheless enjoyed a “very considerable trade” with western Louisiana “and money is tolerably plenty.” Of San Antonio’s residents, Austin only observed that they “live poorly, have but little furniture or rather none at all in their houses – no knives, eat with forks and spoons and their fingers.”<sup>141</sup>

In San Antonio, Austin met the man who had been perhaps the most pivotal in achieving his colonization grant – Philip Hendrik Nering Bogel, also known as the Baron de Bastrop. The Baron and Austin’s father, Moses, first met in New Orleans nearly twenty years earlier. Born of a prominent Dutch family in Guiana, Bastrop had been accused of tax embezzlement in the Netherlands, prompting him to flee to Spanish Louisiana where he re-invented himself as a Baron and gained a colonization contract to settle a group of Europeans in the Ouachita Valley. The United States failed to recognize his contract after the Louisiana Purchase and Bastrop eventually ended up settling in San Antonio in 1805, where he became a well-respected member of the community. It was Bastrop who had helped Moses convince Governor Martínez to allow him to settle three hundred American families on the Colorado River. Previously suspicious, Martínez eventually concluded that Austin “was a man of honesty and formality, and that the proposal he is making is, in my opinion, the only which is bound to provide for the increase and prosperity of this province.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 298.

<sup>142</sup> Cantrell, 85-6; Governor Martínez quoted page 86.

While Spanish authorities ultimately granted their approval, many remained suspicious of the immigrants and the issue remained contested well past independence, often pitting local leaders such as Seguín, Verramendi, and Bastrop against government officials. As the level of interest among prospective settlers in the US surprised even Austin, who soon requested another contract, debates ensued over the location of settlements, how seriously immigrants took their Catholic faith, and whether or not they were bothering to learn Spanish. For example, Anastacio Bustamante, the Commandant General of the Internal Provinces suggested that the immigrants should establish themselves closer to Béxar so as to remain “under the protection and observation of our government subject of course to our laws, and under terms that we prescribe.” Permitting them to settle too far from the center of governmental power might compromise the security of the young empire “facilitating a free pass to the ambitions of the United States” thereby “paving the way for invasion.”<sup>143</sup>

The provincial deputation allayed his fears, assuring Bustamante that, in addition to being “convenient,” the immigrants would all be Catholics of good character, “giving their obedience to the Government.” They would cultivate cotton, sugar, and corn and take up arms in defense of the empire or against “the barbarous Indians.” One local official compared the Port of Veracruz to Boston in its promise. If allowed to settle closer to the coast, the immigrants could secure the “auxiliary provinces.” He suggested

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<sup>143</sup> Anastacio Bustamante, 17 January 1822, *Archivo General de la Secretaria de Fomento (AGN)*, “Colonización: 1821-1834,” Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin.

that the government take certain precautions while also sweetening the deal for the settlers. The government could prohibit immigrants from holding office for a specified length of time, while also exempting them from paying taxes for ten years and allowing them to bring their slaves.

Austin quickly filled his initial colonization grant for three hundred families. As news of his colony swept through Louisiana and Missouri, interest grew, and by May 1822, only about six months after he had established his first colony and less than a year after he had arrived in Texas, Austin made a formal request for permission to settle eight hundred more families. He couched his words in effusive praise for the empire and its leader. “[P]articipating in the sentiments of joy manifested by the nation at the recent political change, I respectfully approach his Imperial majesty, and offer my congratulations on the happy consummation of the independence of Mexico, by the election of the Hero of Iguala, the Liberator of his Country to the Imperial throne,” Austin began. He went on to assure the Emperor that the his colonists

[L]ook to the Sovereign Congress as the pure fountain from whence those blessings are to flow which will diffuse peace, industry, improvement, intelligence, and happiness over this new born Nation. We raise our eyes to him, whose virtues have elevated him to the station he merited, as the Father, who is to distribute those blessings to his People, with a firm, impartial, and benevolent hand.

And he expressed the hope that his settlement and the request to bring still more families would “be deemed a sufficient proof that I come to this Empire in good faith, and with a



firm determination to be obedient to the established authorities of the Government, and a wish to be useful to the nation so far as I am able.”<sup>144</sup>

Yet, despite Austin’s declaration of loyalty and promises to serve the new empire, Bustamante remained skeptical and initially suggested that the proposal be suspended.<sup>145</sup> Austin himself acknowledged that a lack of administrative presence was a severe problem in some parts of Texas, threatening the “social pact that should unite us” among some settlers. “[T]he laws and regulations that should rule and govern, do not exist here, and this fault of great consideration has caused disorder and confusion,” he wrote to Iturbide in a separate letter. “[T]he most industrious and dignified settlers will abandon the country and retire to Louisiana [without] laws that protect industry and punish crime.” He warned that “anarchy and disorder” would visit the region, just as it did “for any country that lacks fundamental policy and laws that are the fundamental basis of the happiness of the people.”<sup>146</sup>

But Austin continued to assure federal leaders of the purity of his and others’ intentions. In a letter to Lucas Alamán, he informed the famous centralist that his father’s relationship with “the Spanish nation” dated back to 1798 when he became a citizen of Louisiana “and enjoyed the confidence and protection of that Government until the cession of that province to the United States.” Even as he complained of the lack of judicial presence on the frontier, he requested an extension of citizenship to himself and

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<sup>144</sup> SFA to Emperor Agustín de Iturbide 13 May 1822, *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Bustamante to Iturbide, 12 September 1822, *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> SFA to Iturbide, date unknown, *Ibid*

his colonists, assuring Alamán that they wished to render “advantages and riches of this heretofore deserted and uninhabited portion of the great Mexican Nation.”<sup>147</sup>

With Austin’s urging, and no doubt to allay some of their own concerns, national leaders decided they needed to draft an imperial colonization law, which was finally issued on January 4, 1823. Bustamante played an active part in its drafting. Article 1 stipulated that “The government of the Mexican nation will protect the liberty, property and civil rights, of all foreigners, who profess the Roman Catholic apostolic religion, the established religion of the empire.” The document then went on to stipulate clear terms on which land was to be distributed and maintained. Empresarios (or those who introduce at least two hundred families) were to inform the executive “what branch of industry they proposed to follow, the property or resources they intend to introduce” and any other “particulars they may deem necessary.” Immigrants were expected to immediately introduce themselves to the ayuntamientos of the towns in which they intended to settle “in conformity with the instructions of the executive,” so that local officials “may designate the lands corresponding to them.” The amount of land distributed was to be highly regulated depending on the stated occupation of each colonist, usually either farming or stock raising. Settlers should be permitted to select plots in the order in which they arrived in the country with natives of Mexico getting the first pick - a stipulation that was no doubt designed to encourage the settlement of Mexicans. If empresarios failed to “populate and cultivate” the lands contracted to them

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<sup>147</sup> SFA to Lucas Alamán, date known, *Ibid.*

within twelve years, then they would lose title and if a colonist failed to cultivate his land after two years, it would be presumed that he had renounced his right to it, and the ayuntamiento could grant it to someone else. Such stipulations guarded against speculation and ensured the primary aim of the colonization program – to populate and develop the region. Colonists were exempt from all taxation of their products for six years, and would be subjected to only “half tithes” for the six years following that.<sup>148</sup>

The National Colonization Law issued on April 18, 1824 retained most of the stipulations of its imperial predecessor except that it left to state legislatures the right to form their own colonization laws so long as they did not conflict with the national law. Accordingly, the State of Coahuila y T exas issued its colonization law the following year. It extended the length of time that foreigners were exempt from taxation to ten years after their arrival, forbid settlement within twenty leagues of the United States, and awarded twice the amount of land to foreigners who married Mexicans.<sup>149</sup>

By the middle of 1825, Austin had successfully filled 297 land grants from the Mexican government. Most members of this group of settlers – commonly referred to as the “Old Three Hundred” - were men like himself who had fallen on hard times and were disillusioned with the nation of their birth. They came overwhelmingly from the Trans-Appalachian South – states like Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Arkansas and Louisiana. They were also highly mobile, often having lived in two or more states before finally

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<sup>148</sup> “The Imperial Colonization Law,” 4 January 1823 in Ernest Wallace, David B. Vigness and George B. Ward eds., *Documents of Texas History* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2002), 47-48.

<sup>149</sup> “The National Colonization Law,” 18 August 1824, *Ibid.*, 48.

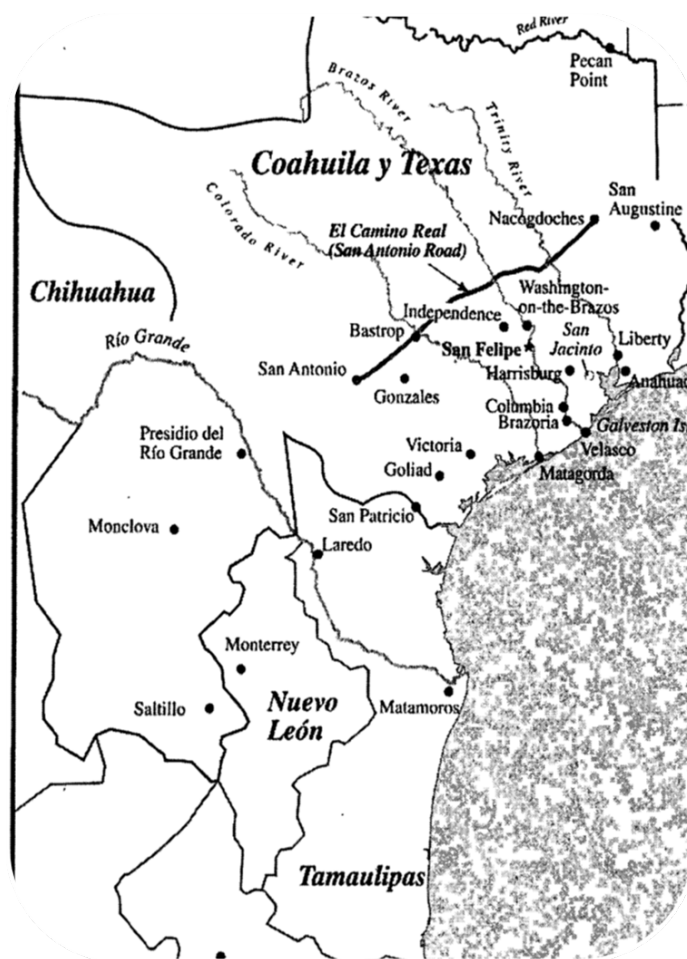
settling in Texas, so that many of those who were not from southern states originally, lived there at least briefly before settling in Mexico.<sup>150</sup>

Later immigrants were somewhat more regionally diverse, but not considerably so. Of those who arrived after July 1825, approximately seventy percent came from the South and nearly half came from the border areas of Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana and Arkansas Territory. The rest came from other parts of the United States (chiefly New York and the western regions of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois), from Europe (mainly Germany), and other parts of Mexico itself. And as with the Old Three Hundred, these immigrants were overwhelmingly agrarians looking for their own land and a fresh start. Despite commonly held assumptions that most of the immigrants were fugitives or vagabonds, it appears the typical Anglo-American immigrant to Texas in the 1820's was a married man in his early thirties from a frontier southern state who worked as either a farmer or stock raiser.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Stephen F. Austin, Villamae Williams ed., *Stephen F. Austin's Register of Families* (Baltimore: Genealogy Publishing Co., 1984).

<sup>151</sup> This conclusion is based on my own synthesis of the statistics cited in the Register.



In March of 1825, a year that saw an explosion of immigration, Bastrop, the sole representative from Texas, convinced the Coahuila state legislature to turn the *empresario* system into state law. “Application is made to me daily to receive and settle more families, as colonists, some of which have already arrived here, others are on the road and have written to me,” Austin informed Texas Governor Rafael González.<sup>152</sup>

The state government was happy to comply. In fact, it granted a total of twenty-five such

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<sup>152</sup> SFA to Governor Rafael Gonzalez, 4 April 1825, Eugene C. Barker, ed., *The Austin Papers (AP)*, Vol. I, Part II, (Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1924, 1928), 1065-67.

contracts that year, although the majority never came to fruition. But a few recipients did manage to establish a permanent residence with sizeable communities in areas surrounding Austin's colony. The most determined and successful empresarios tended to be other norteamericanos, among them Robert Leftwich, Frost Thorn, Green De Witt and Haden Edwards.<sup>153</sup>

After some congressional debate over whether or not it should be an independent state, Texas became a department of Coahuila that year. Together the two provinces composed the State of Coahuila y T ejas, with a political chief – a kind of subgovernor – who resided at B exar. Coahuila y T ejas was divided into a series of municipalities ruled by governing councils or ayuntamientos, each one headed by an alcalde who operated as a kind of mayor, judge, and sheriff. Federal and state officials, distracted with the numerous responsibilities of establishing a new republic, were happy to allow the colonies a significant degree of self-government and in fact requested that *empresarios* take care of whatever problems might arise under their jurisdiction themselves so as not to burden the authorities. Austin took these words to heart.<sup>154</sup>

In addition to the stipulations outlined in the Colonization Law, immigrants were also expected to form militias. Militia service was expected of all able-bodied men throughout the republic, but it was deemed particularly crucial in the Eastern Interior Provinces where Indian raids and foreign incursions remained a reality. One of the

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<sup>153</sup> Greg Cantrell, Gregg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 174-5; Fehrenbach, T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000), 146-147.

<sup>154</sup> Fehrenbach, 142-44

Mexican government's chief motives for recruiting these settlers, after all, had been to gain their help in subduing or defeating Indian marauders. Establishing militias to this end was one of the immigrants' first lines of business, right after taking an oath of allegiance. And Stephen Austin wasted no time. On June 24, 1824 he issued his first formal battalion orders "In conformity with the decree of the Superior Government of the Mexican Nation."<sup>155</sup>

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The militia's significance to Anglo-American political tradition dates at least as far back as the seventeenth century. During the early republic it acquired particular significance as a bulwark against political tyranny. Edmund Morgan has written that the notion of popular sovereignty rested on "the righteousness, independence, and military might of the yeoman farmer, the man who owned his own land, made his living from it and stood ready to defend it and his country by force of arms." Most believed there was no better defense for a society than the armed strength of its independent, property-owning male citizens, and no better guarantor of democracy.<sup>156</sup>

However, from the US nation's inception, federalist leaders pointed to the militia's inherent inefficiency and unreliability in making the case for a regular army. As one historian explains, central to the "competing visions of the military was the tension between those individuals who espoused a parochial republicanism and sought to restore

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<sup>155</sup> SFA, "Organization of Militia Battalion," 22 June 1824, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 838-9.

<sup>156</sup> Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*, (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1988), 153-73, quote on pg 154.

virtue and unity to American society,” and “an increasing number of individuals who were willing to embrace a vision of society and politics similar to that of James Madison.” One of the most vocal proponents of the standing army was Alexander Hamilton, whose followers were among the first to advance the notion that a national army, not the militia, was in fact a modern republic’s best form of defense. They argued that a standing army would be more effective for frontier defense, which required more or less constant deployment. They also pointed out that it would facilitate the new nation’s commercial development by allowing citizens to focus on production uninterrupted by military obligation. Finally, they combated concerns regarding the threat of political corruption by arguing that there would remain a partial and still operative militia that could effectively check the attempts of a despotic leader to monopolize violence. However, between the ratification of the Constitution and the War of 1812, Federalists’ demand for militarily effective institutions confronted concerns about the sanctity of the constitutional order.<sup>157</sup>

Opponents feared that it would aggrandize the executive, and that only the independent, yeoman soldier could effectively defend the republic. Even as the notion of the militia as the chief source of military might was losing ground on the federal stage, a vibrant popular effort to preserve it - principally through military academies and other

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<sup>157</sup> Lawrence Delbert Cress, *Citizens in Arms: The Army and the Militia in American Society to the War of 1812*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) quote on page xiii.



privately funded institutions - emerged.<sup>158</sup> As Amery Ellen Rowe explains, the militia was understood as “an extension of the community from which it came and had to be recognized as such by that community.” It required a community “that respected higher authority, yet demanded the right to control its own affairs, and had the necessary consensus, manpower and resources to do so.” Whether or not the militia decided to respond to a government call ultimately depended on “the community’s assessment of the crisis.”<sup>159</sup> Thus, the militia served as a powerful reminder of a community’s ultimate right to self-government.

As Kentuckians sprinkled into Missouri after the War of 1812, they modeled their new militia companies after those of their home state. Many of these militias were so localized that they were more often used in personal rather than national conflicts. The Austins themselves were hardly strangers to the tendency of local leaders to employ their own militia. When Thomas Jefferson appointed Major Seth Hunt commandant of St. Genevieve District in 1804 as part of the president’s attempt to form “a strong centralized militia organization that would serve as the arm of federal authority while inculcating loyalty to the United States and its institutions,” Hunt was immediately drawn into a bitter territorial dispute between Moses Austin, who in fact maintained his own personal militia during this time, and his primary mining competitor, John Smith T. On July 4, 1806, the latter launched a full scale assault on Austin’s forces at Mine à Breton in an

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<sup>158</sup> John Dwigins, *The Military Establishment and Democratic Politics in the United States, 1783-1848*, (Ph.D. Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 2012).

<sup>159</sup> Mary Ellen Rowe, *Bulwark of the Republic: The American Militia in Antebellum West*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), vii-xiii.

attempt to steal his cannon. When local observers ruled the fight a draw, the men were compelled to turn to the courts to resolve their dispute, but the fact that the “mineral wars” took place at all, without any official interference or discipline, illustrate the power and independence of local militias in the face of federal centralization efforts.<sup>160</sup>

Historians have long assumed that only in the Anglo world did the militia carry such a close association with republican values. “Though the citizen soldier was never a uniquely American figure,” writes Rowe, “in the British North American colonies he came to represent a powerful set of ideas, drawn from the British tradition but enhanced and elaborated in America.” The militia constituted “the supreme expression of civic values in a traditional, communal and agrarian civil society.”<sup>161</sup>

Recently, however, historians of Spanish America have identified militia as a component of Hispanic republican democracy as significant as suffrage. Hilda Sabato writes that “The conviction that citizens should be in charge of the defense of the republic both from internal and external enemies, and that leaving it in the hands of a professional army opened doors to corruption goes back to classical times.”

Unsurprisingly the militia was one of the cornerstones of the 1812 Constitution, which deemed it the most effective defense against monarchical absolutism. The new republics of Spanish America therefore attempted to reestablish the institution in connection with the new definition of the body politic. In Mexico, founders debated abolishing the army

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-30.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-x.

all together due to its poor state and the young nation's general lack of funds. But proponents of a national army insisted that it was necessary in light of threats of foreign invasion and the constant wars with northern Indians. Legislators finally decided to implement an army of 20,000 men in addition to a well-organized militia. As in the Anglo-American case, militias in Mexico were seen as one of the primary guarantors of democracy where "the use of force was considered legitimate against a government that abused power." And, as Manuel Chust points out, "With the establishment of the federal republic, the civic militia would be configured as an armed civic battalion of the states against the centralist or conservative tendencies of the executive branch and some of its officers." But because of Mexico's particularly precarious international position, faced with threats of invasion from both Spain and the United States, the militia served "a double role, as a national force against potential invaders, especially Spaniards, and, within its boundaries, as an armed political force capable of defending liberal principles."<sup>162</sup>

Perhaps nowhere else in Spanish America was the militia tradition as strong as it was in the Mexican North. Beginning as early as 1713 and as part of the empire's efforts to secure the region, the Viceroy ordered landowners to form their own militias to help

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<sup>162</sup> Hilda Sabato, "The Republican Experiment: On People and Government in Nineteenth Century America," presented at Annenberg Colloquium, University of Pennsylvania, April 2012. Cited with permission; Manuel Chust, "Armed Citizens: The Civic Militia in the Origins of the Mexican National State, 1812-1827," in Jaime E. Rodríguez O., ed. *The Divine Charter: Constitutionalism and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), quotes on page 239 and 244.

defend the region against Indian and foreign incursions.<sup>163</sup> In 1772 the commandant general of the region ordered that they receive formal military training from professional soldiers stationed at nearby presidios. Despite irregular pay and constant lack of supplies, the *compañía volante* (volunteer company) enjoyed a special prestige on the frontier, and many settlers preferred that it, rather than the regular army, defend their municipality.<sup>164</sup> As nearby presidio soldiers integrated into neighboring communities, the militaristic culture of the region intensified, and a distinct regional identity began to emerge, one that Arizpe himself spoke of in his remarks to the Cortes in which he described a population of men who “being obliged to serve not only as militiamen but even as common soldiers” demonstrated “an extremely commendable character of integrity, honor, and subordination.” He went on to describe how Texans had, on at least one occasion, been “forced to subsist on snakes, rats, and even the leather of their saddles” while fighting foreign intruders along their empire’s border with the United States. Despite such hardships, there were “no other desertions than that of the cook of the second in command, who in reality was not a son of those provinces.”<sup>165</sup>

Thus both the United States and Mexico experimented with a kind of dual military force that involved both a standing army and a militia. Yet, while some national leaders in the US began calling for replacing the militia with a standing army due to the former’s supposed inefficiency and unreliability, in Mexico, the militia held a far more essential

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<sup>163</sup> Andrés Tijerina, *Tejanos and Texas Under the Mexican Flag, 1821-1836*, (College Station: Texas A & M University, 1994), 79.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>165</sup> Arizpe, “Report to Congress,” 16-17.

role when it came to the preservation of the republic. This was especially the case on the frontier where, in 1826, the federal government required state and local governments to recruit local citizens to replace the traditional presidial cavalry companies as they were being disbanded. Citizens were ordered to form militia companies of their own to operate under local command and for local service, completely distinct from the regular army.<sup>166</sup>

Austin himself received permission to “create a solid base of authority in his colonies” so long as he agreed to organize his colonists into a national militia force. He was appointed lieutenant colonel and granted full responsibility for maintaining “the good order[,] prosperity and defense” of his colonies.<sup>167</sup> In December, 1823, Austin began formally organizing the militia.<sup>168</sup> His colonists elected Robert Kuykendall as their captain. The Kuykendalls were like many members of the original three hundred families who settled in Austin’s colony – frontier southerners, who had not only fought in some of the most significant battles of the Revolutionary War and War of 1812, but who lived their lives in an almost constant state of warfare, whether it be with the British or their Indian allies along the US frontier.<sup>169</sup>

While there are few families that could match the Kuykendalls’ militia experience and prowess, many of the early Anglo-American immigrants to Mexico came from a long martial tradition that had, at varying times, brought them into conflict with the British,

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<sup>166</sup> Tijerina, 83.

<sup>167</sup> Baron de Bastrop to Colonists, 4 August 1823, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 677-78.

<sup>168</sup> Tijerina, 87.

<sup>169</sup> Gifford E. White Papers, “Kuykendall Family,” Folder 242- 243, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Archives, San Antonio.

the Indians, and ultimately the US federal government as it sought to relocate displaced Indian groups such as the Choctaw onto lands claimed by Anglo settlers.<sup>170</sup> Yet militia service was not merely a way of life for such people, it was how they defined, achieved, and secured their relationship to the state. It also embodied the principles of extreme local autonomy that many believed were the cornerstone of republican democracy. This was no truer than on a hostile frontier where waiting for orders from a superior could be deadly. The task of defending settlements against Indian incursions fell squarely on the shoulders of frontier residents, whether Anglo or tejano and frequent appeals for federal troops were denied. Understandably, many tejanos saw in their Anglo-American neighbors skilled and experienced allies against the powerful Indian tribes like the Comanche.

Yet, while Austin and his militia captains were ready and eager to organize local companies, they were slower to place them under national authority. As one historian of early Texas points out, Anglo settlers only “haltingly achieved their mandatory quotas of militia squadrons” after “repeated threats” by Governor José María Viesca. Even then “the new militia organization existed only “on paper,” and “the governor had to remind them of their duty to comply with the law.”<sup>171</sup> While this might suggest a tenuous sense of loyalty to Mexico and Mexican authorities, Austin’s behavior was in fact not so different from what occurred in Missouri twenty years prior when the Jefferson

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<sup>170</sup> Marshall Early Kuykendall, “J. Hampton Kuykendall, 1815-1880,” Kuykendall Papers, Folder 243.

<sup>171</sup> Tijerina, 89.

administration attempted to consolidate its power over frontier militias. These men were more than willing to form local militias to defend and protect their country, they were reluctant to relinquish control over them to the federal government – whether it be Mexico or the United States.

The tension between these men's individual interests and those of their nation, between local authority and federal, was ever present in Mexico just as it had been in the North. In both instances, the decision to form a militia in defense of the country rested on the consensus of the community and was issued on a case by case basis. Austin was ever mindful of this in his early writings to government officials who consistently urged him to form militias promptly and declare war on local Indians immediately. As much as Austin wanted to serve his adopted nation, he also knew he must honor the localistic spirit of the militia tradition. More importantly, however, he did not wish to threaten colonists' delicate position by inciting Indian recrimination. Observers noted that the Indians did not seem to target Anglos the way that they did Mexicans. It's possible that Anglo settlers, even as they declared loyalty to Mexico, wished to perpetuate the notion that they were a separate people, unaligned with Mexico so as not to invite the aggressions of the Karankawa or the Comanche. In his "Referendum on Indian Relations," Austin promised, if again ordered to declare war on the Indians, to "lay the subject before the inhabitants of each militia district for their consideration, opinion and

advice, the course determined on by the majority shall be adopted.”<sup>172</sup> Thus Austin was faced with the dual task of serving and appeasing his adopted country as well as honoring the tradition of community consent and decision-making in militia activities. While some might see this as nothing more than Austin speaking out of both sides of his mouth or attempting to compensate for a lack of commitment from his settlers, he was in fact honoring the very republican principles that had attracted him and other norteamericanos to Mexico in the first place.

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While it certainly had its benefits, the empresario program aggravated a set of long-standing administrative challenges for the new republican government. Obviously, if Mexico was going to expect these men to pledge allegiance and risk their lives for their adopted country, it had to deliver on its end of the bargain. Yet, as more and more immigrants flooded across the Sabine, keeping track of them and making sure they both adhered to the duties and received the benefits of Mexican citizenship, proved increasingly difficult in a region that had always suffered from limited administrative presence.

Land grant disputes between older more established settlers and new arrivals were common. In April 1825, Green DeWitt, another immigrant from Missouri, received a land grant for 400 families to settle just south of Austin’s colony. But when they were

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<sup>172</sup> SFA, “Referendum on Indian Relations,” 29 September 1825, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1208-1211.



forced to move further down the coast after an Indian attack in the middle of 1826, it brought them into conflict with Martín de León, who had mistakenly been granted land that overlapped with Dewitt's. As a native Mexican, De León received preferential treatment and the Dewitt colony was forced to return to its original site just west of the Colorado.<sup>173</sup>

In February of 1824, another such dispute arose involving Edmund Quirk, himself a United States immigrant who had gained admittance about a decade prior when the Spanish Empire briefly relaxed its immigration policy. Quirk accused a group of more recent immigrants of encroaching on his land along the Trinity. They responded by lodging a formal complaint against him and requested that the state government reclaim his land and grant it to them. Quirk was an absentee landowner, they insisted, of the very kind that the Spanish and subsequent Mexican government had hoped to guard against. While holding land, he had done little to improve it, and was now attempting to evict those who had. “[C]ountries where a few persons are allowed to monopolize large quantities of lands are more liable to feel those evils,” they argued, referring to their very motivation for coming to Mexico. “An exclusive right to the possession of the soil and its productions is the only agent that aids universally and constantly upon men and prompts human industry.” A system that awarded land ownership to he who developed

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<sup>173</sup> Fehrenbach, 147.

and improved it – “so that one may work for himself and not for another” - was, they claimed, the chief aim of any democratic republic.<sup>174</sup>

The lack of governmental presence in the Far North, therefore, was as much a problem for recent immigrants as it was for the Mexican government itself. The petition went on to insist that immigrants wanted from “lack of any government” and that, as a result, “almost all this time they have been very unhappy not knowing their obligations as citizens of this government, and conversely those of the government towards its subjects.” Far from wishing to evade the Mexican state, as some officials suspected, they pressed their eagerness “to conform in everything with the constitution of this government” including forming a militia “for the defense of the Province in case of any invasion.” They concluded by insisting that “We, as subjects, take a particular, personal interest in the prosperity of the Mexican Government and “respectfully request Your Excellency to please command that the mail (if it is possible) pass as far as this District by which means we should be entirely able to cooperate with your wise vigilance.”<sup>175</sup>

The government’s immediate response to virtually all of these complaints was to advise colonists to be patient and obedient, assuring them that it would “watch over your interests and protect your rights” and that “If the government of the nation is not yet fully and finally organized, the causes which have produced the delay are well known.” José Antonio Saucedo advised the petitioners in the meantime to listen with full “attention and

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<sup>174</sup> “Petition of the Americans Residing At Nacogdoches,” 16 February 1824, Folder 242, Asbury Papers; Also found in Robert Bruce Blake Papers, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

confidence” to Colonel Austin “whose authority is from the supreme powers of the nation to which you now voluntarily belong.”<sup>176</sup>

Not all the colonies expressed their frustrations as civilly as those on the Trinity, however. The region in and around Nacogdoches had long menaced Spanish authorities, and it would do the same to their Mexican successors. Situated on the border with Louisiana, it had been the site of illicit trade and settlement for decades by men who appeared more interested in evading US authorities than declaring loyalty to Mexico. Residing there were a diverse group of settlers – some legal, some illegal – that included Anglo-Americans, French, Spanish, and a large number of Native Americans, namely a group of Cherokee recently displaced from the North. In 1825, Haden Edwards received a contract to settle 800 families in the region. When he arrived there in September, he demanded that the pre-established settlers produce titles to their land or face eviction in order to make way for his own colonists. In reference to the Edwards colony, however, Saucedo insisted that they had “arbitrarily established themselves . . . with the damage to the owners and old residents.” He further warned that “if they wish to appropriate them by force they defame themselves entirely and lose the concept of being able to be admitted by the Mexican Government.”<sup>177</sup>

On November 13, 1826 the commanding officer of the Nacogdoches militia, José Antonio Sepulveda, wrote to the political chief of Texas informing him of the Edwards

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<sup>176</sup> Jose Antonio Saucedo to Colonists, date known, Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Jose Antonio Saucedo to Don Juan Seguin, July 21, 1826, Nacogdoches Archives, Asbury Papers, Folder 229.

rebellion. He warned that “the Province of Texas would be lost to the country if the Almighty did not open the eyes of the Superior Government, and induce them to send troops for its protection.” He claimed that the “rebellious American rogues,” aimed to ally themselves with local Indians “to ensure their assistance in overthrowing the authorities of our government.”<sup>178</sup>

Such news renewed Mexican leaders’ long-established doubts regarding the intent of many Anglo-American immigrants, especially those who settled closest to the border. J.E.B. Austin, Stephen’s cousin then residing in Béxar, reported that regional leaders “treated [the petition] with much contempt.”<sup>179</sup> Many accused them of having settled arbitrarily, and insisted that it would serve Mexican interests better if they moved closer to the interior. Bastrop confirmed these sentiments and warned Austin of the impression that his fellow empresarios were forming in the minds of Mexican leaders, specifically the fear that they might “one day attempt to separate and unite with their native land.” Such apprehensions, according to the Baron, had “made quite a sensation in Mexico.”<sup>180</sup> But letters from some of the settlers of that region reveal a highly factionalized group whose grievances primarily rested with local leaders charged with administering the government’s laws and regulations.

Austin began receiving letters from Anglo-American settlers complaining chiefly of an alcalde named James Gaines who, they claimed, was responsible for preventing the

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<sup>178</sup> José Antonio Sepuveda to Political Chief of Texas, 13 November 1826, Blake Papers.

<sup>179</sup> JEB Austin to Austin, 15 May 1824, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 792-3.

<sup>180</sup> Bastrop to SFA, 27 April 1825, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1082-84..

formalization of their land grants, excessive taxation, and other offenses. Gaines, they insisted, “if suffered to pursue with impunity, the course which he has adopted,” would ultimately “render the Americans in this section of country odious to the Mexican nation.” In other words, it was not Mexico they had a problem with. “The people are willing and anxious to obey the law properly administered,” assured one settler by the name of John A Williams, “But it is mortifying to the feeling of an American to stoop to arbitrary sway.” Williams insisted that “I attribute none of our present difficulties to any person but James Gaines and his understrappers.” Tellingly, he asked Austin to appeal on his and other settlers’ behalf to the Mexican authorities in order to rectify the situation. “I hope sir that you will have the goodness to inquire into our condition minutely; and make such statements to the proper authority” as to “afford us the protection of person, property, and civil rights, which the Mexican Nation has promised.”<sup>181</sup>

The government’s response, however, was not what they hoped for. Article 7 of the national Colonization law declared unlawful any settlement of foreigners less than twenty leagues from the US border. By then, however, hundreds of immigrants were firmly established as was the cotton economy they had introduced to the region, drawing them ever closer to the United States. They were joined by the Cherokee who had opposed Article 1 of the 1825 state colonization law stipulating that all immigrants convert to Catholicism.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> John A Williams to SFA 19 July 1826, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1379-80.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

Tensions reached a climax during the elections for *alcalde*, when battle lines were drawn between the older settlers who supported Samuel Norris, and the disgruntled group of Anglo-Americans who supported Edwards' son-in-law Chinchester Chaplin. When Norris' supporters declared Chaplin's election fraudulent on grounds that most of his votes came from non-citizens, he ignored their protests, seizing the archives and assuming his duties as *alcalde*. When Saucedo declared the election in favor of Norris and ordered Chaplin to step down, Chaplin declared that he only took orders from the state capital in Saltillo, dismissing Saucedo's authority as a local leader without access to regular troops. He then threatened that "oceans of blood will be spilled" if he failed to send in the regular army. Edwards' taunt not only revealed his disregard for the *jefe's* authority as a regional official, but also his ironic disregard for the power of the militia who would eventually be his downfall.

In July, Benjamin Edwards, Haden's brother, wrote that he "found everything in disorder and confusion in this section of the Province." Each day seemed to produce "new excitements against the civil authority here, in consequence of proceedings and decisions, believed to be incompatible with a republican government, and contrary to the fundamental principles of the constitution of the country." Edwards seemed to suggest that his brother was the victim of arbitrary censure "without any inquiry into the truth or falsehood of the accusations" against him. "It cannot be," continued Edwards, "that the fundamental principles of a free constitution, cemented by the blood of thousands is thus early trampled under foot, and its most sacred principles violated in the persons of

Americans.”<sup>183</sup> Gaines himself did not elaborate on the sources of confusion in his own letter to Austin, but he did report the degree of discontent and what it might mean: “I am led to believe something like a revolution has been aimed at and probably yet on foot.”

Refusing to surrender, on November 22 the Edwards brothers and their allies seized Norris and Texas Militia Captain José Antonio Sepulveda and tried them for oppression and corruption in office. They accused the men of “Misrepresenting to the Governor of this State the conduct and character of the American Emigrants,” and “painting them in colors most calculated to rouse the jealousy and resentment of the Spanish Government.” They stated that they had been “induced by the promises of the Mexican government, as well as by the beauty and fertility of the soil, to emigrate from their native land, the birthplace of freedom,” and that all they were guilty of was practicing “the republican ideas which have been instilled into them by their fathers in their own native country.”<sup>184</sup>

But Norris offered a very different account in his letter to the Political Chief. He claimed that he and Captain Sepulveda had been arrested and imprisoned by a group of “American ruffians,” some of whom were not even Mexican, but resided “on the other side of the Sabine.” However, they were released once the rebels heard that “Lieutenant Manuel Santos had assembled twenty four citizens and a few Indians.” They nonetheless informed the men that they “should no longer hold any office here,” seized the local

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<sup>183</sup> BW Edwards to SFA, 21 July 1826, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1380-86.

<sup>184</sup> Impeachment Proceedings, 21 November 1826, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1511-16.

archives, and appointed one of their own, Joseph Doste, as alcalde. Norris declared that the event amounted to “a total contempt for the legal authorities” and feared that “a large portion of our country is lost to us if some assistance does not arrive shortly.”<sup>185</sup>

Indeed, Texas officials arrived shortly thereafter. They sided unequivocally with Norris and the Military Commander of Texas called him a “downright imposture” for claiming to have been appointed military commandant by state authorities so that he might “commit various excesses which have been reported to the Political Chief of this Department by the Alcalde of Nacogdoches.” Edwards’ actions and the reports they received from local leaders like Norris confirmed Mexican leaders’ worst fears about Anglo settlers. “This class of men who know no law but their rifle,” declared the commander, rule that interior wilderness, still sparsely populated. They are now beginning to insult our public officers with impunity; and I much fear that they will endeavor to render themselves independent of Mexico.”<sup>186</sup>

He was right. Later that year, the allied group of Anglo settlers, Cherokees and other indigenous groups signed a formal declaration of independence. They agreed to form the Fredonian Republic which would consist of two distinct halves, the northern part of Texas for the “Red people” and the southern part for the “White people.”<sup>187</sup> At this point, they transferred their grievances from their local leaders to the Mexican Republic, insisting that “the government of the Mexican United States,” had “by repeated

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<sup>185</sup> Samuel Norris to Military Commander of Texas, 28 November 1826, Robert Bruce Blake Papers.

<sup>186</sup> Military Commander of Texas to the Commander of Coahuila, date unknown, Folder 299, Asbury Papers.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.



insults, outrages and oppressions reduced the white and red immigrants of the United States of the North now settled in the Province of Texas.” They accused it of having lured them there “by promises most solemnly declared, and most vilely inforged,” and that they now faced “the disagreeable alternative of either submitting their free persons to the yoke of the embecile, faithless, and despotic government, (erroneously called a republic) or to take up arms for the defence of their inalienable rights.”<sup>188</sup> Reports began to flood in of the rebellion as those unsympathetic to it arrived in Austin’s colony. One citizen of Nacogdoches declared in a sworn affidavit to seeing “an assemblage of armed men . . . for the purpose of going to war with Mexico” and “a flying flag in said town of Nacogdoches the colors of which were white and red.” The next piece of information must have been particularly unnerving for Mexican authorities: “[H]e also stated that the rebels were in Expectation of aid and assistance of several hundred men from the U. States of the north whose arrival were looked for shortly.”<sup>189</sup> A correspondence from the rebels themselves confirmed the severity of these reports. Benjamin Edwards wrote that “We have concluded a treaty with the chiefs and representatives of twenty-seven tribes of Indians; and if I am not deceived, we will, in six months make this perfidious government shake to its centre.”<sup>190</sup>

In their attempt to gain support from other Anglo immigrants, the Edwards brothers appealed to a common Anglo-American identity. Rather than speaking of their

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<sup>188</sup> B.W. Edwards, H.B. Mayo, Richard Fields, John D Hunter, 21 December 1826, Folder 243, Asbury Papers.

<sup>189</sup> Affidavit of John C. Morrison, 11 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1574-75.

<sup>190</sup> B.W. Edwards to \_\_\_\_\_, 12 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1575-77.

“adopted nation” as Austin had, Benjamin Edwards reminded the inhabitants of Pecan Point outside of Nacogdoches that they were all “children of the same mother country.” Characterizing the immigrants as “Americans in a foreign land, groaning under the galling yoke of injustice and oppression,” he reminded them that “Our fathers in their struggle for liberty contended against the giant of the world. We have to contend against a corrupt and imbecile Government.”<sup>191</sup> Benjamin used a similar appeal in his letter to Col. James Ross of Austin’s Colony: “You and I sir, are strangers; but you are an American, and so am I. [T]he time has arrived when that proud title, I trust, will be a sufficient passport to the bosom of every man, who claims *freedom* as his birthright.”<sup>192</sup>

Their appeals met with opposition from Austin himself, who suggested that the rebels had betrayed both their Mexican and Anglo-American identity. “I am compelled to say with all the frankness of an old friend that you are wrong,” Austin wrote to one Buttil Thompson. “I cannot believe that you have so far lost your senses as to think of open opposition to the [Mexican] Government.” Yet it was not just Mexico these men had turned their backs on. “[N]either will I believe that you have so far forgotten the land of your birth and the proud name of *American* as to disgrace that name by associating yourself with persons, and advocating a cause unworthy of it.” For Austin, honoring one’s American identity meant remaining obedient to a nation that had demonstrated its commitment to the preservation of America’s original promise. It also meant avoiding

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<sup>191</sup> B.W. Edwards to James Ross, 25 December 1826, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1545-56.

<sup>192</sup> B.W. Edwards and H.B. Mayo to Inhabitants of Pecan Point, 25 December 1826, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1542-1545.

an unholy alliance with Native American groups, even one as “civilized” as the Cherokee. “Great God, can it be possible that Americans, will so far forget the country of their birth, so far forget themselves, as to league with barbarians and join a band of savages in a war of murder, massacre and desolation,” he declared. Austin concluded his letter by encouraging the rebels to disband their militia and formally express their “entire submission and obedience to the [Mexican] Government.”<sup>193</sup>

In another New Years’ letter to a different Nacogdoches leader, Austin reiterated the same sentiment: “As an American I feel a lively and warm interest in everything that concerns Americans, and as a Mexican I am bound by my duty, honor and every obligation that a man ought to hold sacred, to be faithful to this Government and to the true interests of this nation.”<sup>194</sup> For Austin, there was no contradiction between his American heritage and his Mexican citizenship. While the rebels saw themselves as Americans in a foreign land, Austin saw himself as an American at home in a land more committed to fulfilling American values and ideals than the United States was. While granting that the rebels probably did have cause for grievance, he insisted that they had “taken the wrong method of seeking redress.” Furthermore, they were wrong to think that they would find any support among the other settlers. “The people of this colony are unanimous,” insisted Austin, “I have not heard of one man who is not opposed to your violent measures and there is not one amongst us who will not freely take up arms to

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<sup>193</sup> SFA to B.J. Thompson, 24 December 1826, *AP*, Vol. I Part II, 1538-41.

<sup>194</sup> SFA to John Sproul, 1 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1555-1556.

oppose you and sustain the Govt.”<sup>195</sup> Indeed, in an effort to distance themselves from the insurgents, other colonies publicly renounced the rebellion and confirmed their loyalty to Mexico. In a correspondence to Saucedo, Austin expressed sympathy towards the insurgents’ original grievances, but renounced their ultimate actions. “From what I could learn of that occurrence, it would seem, that the principal cause was the hatred of those people toward [G]aines and Norris, and not any ill feelings against the Government.” With a more impartial administrator, he assured Saucedo, “no difficulty need be apprehended on the part of the inhabitants.”<sup>196</sup> Accompanying the letter was a formal “Resolution of Loyalty” from the inhabitants of his colony who had “no hesitation in declaring that they view the attempt of the Nacogdoches party to declare the independence of and call in the Aid of Indians to wage war against a peaceful inhabitants of Texas with the most decided disappropration.” They further declared themselves “ready to rally around the standard of the Mexican nation and sustain its Govt and Authority by force of arms whenever called upon.” They asserted that “they are satisfied with the Govt of their adoption and that they are gratified for the favours they have received from it and have full reliance on its justice and Magnanimity.” As a testament to the sincerity of their claims, they promised to “take up arms in its defense whenever necessary to do so.” They concluded by further assuring the Superior Government “of

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<sup>195</sup> SFA to Buttil J. Thompson, 1 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1556-57.

<sup>196</sup> SFA to Saucedo, 4 December 1826, *AP*, Vol. Part II, 1528.

our firmness and patriotism in defense of the liberty honor and Rights of the Mexican Nation to which we have the honor to belong.”<sup>197</sup>

Similar resolutions came from the District of Bravo which declared that “We are Mexicans by adoption and as such are willing to Turn out when called on to quell the Enemies of the Government” and offered their “services in support of said Government on this or any similar occasion if required.”<sup>198</sup> Dewitt’s Colony similarly resolved that “[A]s adopted children they have full confidence and faith in the equity, justice and liberality in the Federal and State Governments of their new parent” and they hoped that Mexico would distinguish “between the honest, industrious and peaceable American emigrants, and those of bad character, whom we consider as refugees and fugitives from justice.” Like Austin, they renounced the insurgents’ behavior as un-American and looked upon them “with contempt and disgust,” insisting that “they are unworthy the character of Americans.” The inhabitants of Dewitt’s colony concluded by pledging their “lives, and our fortunes” to Mexico, “our much beloved and adopted Country.”<sup>199</sup>

While Austin may have had a flexible identity, the nation to which he claimed loyalty was consistent and absolute. At the end of the day, he was a Mexican, and it appears that other Anglo colonists felt the same. “I will befriend you all as far as I can consistent with my duty to the Government,” he wrote to the rebels, counseling them to surrender and humble themselves to the Mexican government, “but I am a Mexican

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<sup>197</sup> “Resolution of Loyalty: District of San Felipe, 6 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1575.

<sup>198</sup> Resolutions of Loyalty: District of Bravo, 9 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1573-74.

<sup>199</sup> Resolution of Loyalty of Diwitt’s Colony, 27 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1594-95.

Citizen and officer and *I will sacrifice my life before I will violate my duty and oath of office.*”<sup>200</sup>

On December 28<sup>th</sup>, José Antonio Navarro announced to the citizens of Nacogdoches that, in response to their calls, the government would send troops to maintain order. Mindful of the reaction that this might cause, he assured them that it was not an invasion and to dismiss reports to the contrary.<sup>201</sup> In fact, colonists appeared to welcome Mexican troops and quickly formed a nearly two hundred man volunteer militia to assist them in suppressing the rebellion. Even a good number of the restive population proved less than fully committed to the cause. As Peter Ellis Bean reported, “the People is very much divided[,] there is not more than 30 [A]mericans of the Rebel Party.”<sup>202</sup> One resident of Nacogdoches explained in his appeal for amnesty following the rebellion that Nacogdoches had “Been Left Intirely to the management of a few Ignorant and Designing men . . . who wished to show their power and acted with more Tyranny Then Ever was, Exercised under the king of Spain.”<sup>203</sup>

While Austin’s appeals held sway with most of the Anglo colonists, he failed to convince a few of the rebels. Having attempted conciliation, the Mexican government turned to force, dispatching two hundred of its troops to suppress the rebellion. It also called upon the Anglo militia for assistance. They were more than ready to comply. Just

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> José Antonio Navarro to inhabitants of Nacogdoches, , 28 December 1826, Spanish Archives Transcripts, Blake Papers.

<sup>202</sup> Peter Ellis Bean to SFA, 31 December 1826 *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1553-55.

<sup>203</sup> Buttil J. Thompson to SFA, 17 February 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1602-04

as he had done in his appeals to colonists to fight the Indians in the name of Mexico, Austin addressed the interdependent relationship between immigrants' individual self-interest and that of their adopted country when he appealed to them to help suppress the Fredonian Rebellion:

I have made no official call but merely appeal to you as men of honor, as Mexicans, and as Americans to do your duty – our interests sometimes conflict with our duty, but I am happy to say that in this instance they are the same - it is our duty as *Mexicans*, to support and defend the government of our adoption, by whom we have been received with the kindness and liberality of an indulgent parent,- it is our duty as *men* , to suppress vice anarchy and Indian massacre – and it is our duty as *Americans* to defend that proud name from the infamy which [the] Nacogdoches gang must cast upon it if they are suffered to progress

Here, Austin appealed not simply to colonists' dual identity as both norteamericano and Mexican, but also to their manhood in his efforts to link their interests as independent propertied men to their duty as Mexican citizens. In so doing, he attempted to remind settlers that in Mexico, unlike in the United States, their individual interests and state interests were one in the same, “for without regular Government, without law, what security have we for our persons, our property, our characters and all that we hold dear and sacred?” The answer was clear. Devotion to the state was essential to republicanism. The rights and privileges of a republican government could not be guaranteed if the integrity of the nation was violated. If it was, then “we at once embark

on the stormy ocean of anarchy, subject to be stripped by every faction that rolls along, and must finally sink into the gulf of ruin and infamy.”<sup>204</sup>

Tellingly, the commander of the loyalist militia was none other than John A. Williams who had earlier petitioned the Mexican government to honor his and other’s claims to land settled along the Trinity. Indeed, the most convincing evidence of settlers’ unflagging loyalty to Mexico and lack of support for the rebellion, was their swift and organized, although ultimately anticlimactic, suppression of it. Williams himself wrote that “As soon as the inhabitants were generally informed of the measure which had been taken to put down the rebellious party, they flocked to us from all quarters in defense of their country.” Their patriotism “far surpassed my most sanguine expectation.” Upon learning of the militia’s approach, Edwards evidently fled across the border to the United States, at which point, “a party was dispatched in pursuit of them,” but they only caught two. “The result of these just measures and fortunate reinforcements from different quarters, has, in my opinion, settled the fate of the rebellious party.” The next day they were joined by a detachment under Col Bean and another from Austin’s Colony. “At this time there is every prospect of immediate tranquility in the neighborhood,” Williams reported. One hundred eighty-seven men enrolled as ready for duty and “manifested every disposition to serve their country.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> SFA to Citizens of Victoria, 1 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1558-59.

<sup>205</sup> John A. Williams to the Military Commander in Texas, 5 February-14 May 1827, Nacogdoches Archives, Folder 237, Asbury Papers.



Fields and one other insurgent leader were killed in the conflict, the rest of the accomplices were taken prisoner and eventually expelled from the country. By the time the dust had settled over Nacogdoches, J.E.B. Austin reported that the insurgents were “treated with a degree of lenity by the Mexicans they had no right to expect from the nature of their crimes” and which “would not have been shewn them in their native country.”<sup>206</sup> Rather than compromising Anglo immigrants’ relationship with Mexico, the event cemented it by both allowing settlers to demonstrate the degree of their loyalty to their adopted country and permitting Mexico to prove itself an effective though magnanimous parent. As Stephen Austin himself put it in a letter to his friend Samuel May Williams, “the Mexican character stands higher here now than it ever did before.”<sup>207</sup>

On February 9<sup>th</sup>, Samuel Kinney wrote to the Military Commander describing the state of affairs in Nacodgoches following the rebellion. He relayed the request of the militia commander that an armed force continue to be kept in that quarter. “It also seems to be a general wish of the inhabitants here, that a portion at least, of the [Mexican] Troops should be quartered somewhere in that neighborhood. He also “delivered” nine individuals “charged with having belonged to the late faction” by the militia captain, albeit without proof that they “acted as principles in the late affair.” Regarding the recent rebellion, Kinney concluded by stating that he believed it to be “completely suppressed,” but warned that “nevertheless as much confusion still exists” and recommended

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<sup>206</sup> J.E.B. Austin to Mrs. E.M. Perry, 23 February 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1605-06.

<sup>207</sup> SFA to SM Williams, 4 March 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1610-11.

stationing Troops “nearer the frontier than Nacogdoches” to “prevent any irruption from designing persons from the U.S. of the North.” He concluded his letter with the appropriate “Union and Mexico.”<sup>208</sup>

By April 1827, Bustamante reported that he was glad to hear that “complete tranquility” had been restored to the region and that “the honor of our Government and the Mexican flag is still unsullied.” He implied that the rebels had “enticed” the Cherokee into rebellion and suggested rewarding the loyal Indian tribes by inviting them to settle “wherever they may live happy” and directed Saucedo to solicit their future help in “the pacification of the Comanche.”<sup>209</sup>

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Despite the ready participation of nearly two hundred men armed and prepared to suppress the Fredonian rebellion, the historic tension between the obligation to protect one’s country and the obligation to protect oneself did emerge, particularly among settlers who were living within close proximity to certain Indian groups. As Thomas M. Duke, captain of the Bay Prairie militia wrote:

I was truly distressed at the contents of your letter [informing of the rebellion]. I feel as I believe every man in the Prairie does a sincere wish to be of every service in our power for the support of the government but situated as we are in the Prairie it is not in our power to give much aid to the government at this time. [T]he smoke from the Karankawas is seen from my house every day.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Samuel Richard Kenney to Ahumada, 9 February 1827, Blake Papers.

<sup>209</sup> Bustamante to Saucedo, 7 April 1827, Blake Papers.

<sup>210</sup> Thomas M. Duke to SFA, 3 January 1827, *AP*, Vol. I, Part, 1559-60.

When men had to choose between protecting their nation and protecting their property and families they almost always chose the latter, a testament to the strength of the very impulse that had attracted them to Mexico in the first place – individual and local autonomy.

While Austin understood perfectly the interdependent relationship between individual interests and national interests, not all frontiersmen did, a fact about which Austin often complained bitterly. “[A]mong the ignorant part of the Americans independence means resistance and obstinacy right or wrong - this is particularly the case with frontiersmen,” he wrote, in whom “a violent course with such dispositions might have kindled a flame that would have destroyed them and the settlement entirely.”<sup>211</sup> While resistance and obstinacy did not necessarily characterize most immigrants’ attitudes towards their adopted nation, isolation and a privileging of one’s self-interest above all else often did. This kindled flame would burn consistently for another decade, flaring up every time immigrants felt that the federal government threatened local autonomy or stood in the way of its citizens’ pursuit of their own interests. But for now, Mexico rested safely under the protection of its armed male citizens.

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<sup>211</sup> SFA to B.W. Edwards, 15 September 1825, *AP*, Vol. I Part II, 2101-05.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**“Each Citizen a King Like unto Adam”**  
**Religion and Slavery in Mexican Texas**  
**1824-1832**

In the summer of 1831 a peculiar scene took place at Abner Kuykendall’s ranch about twenty miles north of San Felipe de Austin. At least one hundred members of Stephen Austin’s colony were baptized and re-married as members of the Roman Catholic Church in accordance with their new nation’s constitutional stipulation that anyone seeking Mexican citizenship formally adopt the Catholic faith. A colonist who helped facilitate the event later described the chaos and comedy of several hundred immigrants getting re-baptized and re-married as Catholics:

I immediately issued orders for a general parade. During this time, however, the brides and grooms, being used to married life did not feel that intense interest that is common for young expectants, and they had become scattered and separated, so that it was with much difficulty they could be paired, and a complete hurly-burly commenced. “ ‘Have you seen anything of my wife?’ ‘Have you seen anything of Jim?’ ‘I can’t find him.’ ‘Have you seen anything of Polly?’” All was hurry-scurry, and one hour at least was spent before they were ready to fall into line; and even then one poor woman had to march without her husband for find him she could not.<sup>212</sup>

He claimed he comforted the woman by telling her that if her husband “did not come in time, she could certainly have another.” The Mexican federal government assigned

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<sup>212</sup> Unknown immigrant quoted in “Marriage Customs in Early Texas,” Eugene Barker Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

Father Michael Muldoon, an Irish priest, to travel to the Anglo colonies and perform the necessary sacraments. The colonists themselves, for the sake of expediency, opted for a mass ceremony of sorts. The site of a Roman Catholic priest, much more the experience of being baptized and married by one, must have felt unfamiliar to say the least for these lately Protestant Anglo-Americans, born and raised in a society decidedly hostile to Catholicism. Reports concur, however, that Muldoon's "sage appearance and seemingly good manners caused him to be kindly received by the colonists," as a "necessary evil which they could not well avoid." With everything arranged, the padre proceeded to baptize and then marry the colonists *en masse*, much the way his Spanish predecessors had done to the Indians centuries prior. The converts then followed the ceremony with a "splendid barbeque" and "all the necessary exhilarating libations abundantly provided so as to make it a day of felicity."<sup>213</sup> If the new converts were at all resentful of the obligation, it was not evident.

Both traditionalist and revisionist historians have tended to see early nineteenth-century Anglo and Mexican culture as incompatible and even antagonistic due to differences in religion, slavery and racial ideology. "[I]n the broadest sense the [Texas Revolution] resulted from a clash of cultural traditions," writes Randolph Campbell in his pivotal work on early Texas, "Anglo-Americans were simply too different from Hispanic-Americans." Historians of Mexican Texas such as Arnaldo de León largely concur. De León writes that Anglo settlers' attitudes towards the Mexicans they

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid.,

encountered “ranged from xenophobia against Catholics and Spaniards to racial prejudice against Indians and blacks.” Mexicans were thus “doubly suspect as heirs to Catholicism and as descendants of Spaniards, Indians, and Africans.” The southern character of most Americans who immigrated to Mexico, according to de León, was the primary reason for their hostility. “From the Southern and frontier-oriented culture [these settlers] had acquired a certain repulsion for dark-skinned people” that they simply transferred to Mexicans, whom they believed “had descended from a tradition of paganism, depravity, and primitivism.”<sup>214</sup> Historians have consequently tended to see Mexicans, not Anglos, as the primary assimilators.<sup>215</sup>

But Anglo immigrants, in fact, demonstrated a remarkable willingness to adapt to Mexican strictures. Furthermore, far from being the primary factor contributing to their antagonism, it was precisely these early immigrants’ “southernness” that attracted them to Mexico and facilitated cooperative and close relationships with the local Mexican population. As it turns out, American southerners and Mexican northerners shared more in common with one another than they did with many of their respective compatriots in the American northeast and Mexican center. Both groups came from intensely patriarchal agrarian traditions that embraced some type of racialized forced labor. This, of course, came at a time when Americans in the northeast were beginning to reject slavery

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<sup>214</sup>Randolph P. Campbell, *Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 48. Arnolfo de León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Towards Mexicans in Texas, 1821-1900*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983). For earlier examples of the “culture clash” thesis see T.R. Fehrenbach *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (Boston: De Capo Press, 2000), Chapter 10, 152-173.

<sup>215</sup> Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

and many Mexican national leaders already had.<sup>216</sup> Similarly, as women in the northern United States were beginning to claim their own sphere of domesticity and religion, many southerners would have more readily identified with the traditional social order of rural Spanish America than that of the American northeast.

The extent to which Anglo-American immigrants were willing to adapt to Mexican laws regarding religion and slavery not only demonstrates their commitment to becoming Mexican and appeasing their adopted country, but suggests that Anglo-Americans and Hispanic-Mexicans were not as rigidly antagonistic as historians have assumed. In fact, they were surprisingly cooperationist. Finally, it was Anglo-Americans, not Mexicans, who did most of the cultural adjusting in the years leading up to the Texas Revolution, not the other way around. This changed, however, as Austin and his allies began actively recruiting slaveholders in an effort to develop and enrich the region. Such individuals, most of whom arrived in Texas between 1825 and 1834 on the guarantee that their human property would remain secure, complicated Texas' relationship with the rest of Mexico and forced Austin and his allies to more seriously quarry exactly what type of society they envisioned Texas becoming.

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Of all aspects of Mexican culture and constitutionalism, there was none so seemingly at odds with Anglo-American tradition and sensibility than established

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<sup>216</sup> Andrew R.L. Cayton makes a similar observation "Continental Politics: Liberalism, Nationalism, and the appeal of Texas in the 1820's, *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2004) where he writes that "Under challenge in the United States, patriarchy remained supreme in Mexico," 317-18.

religion. America, of course, was founded on the principles of religious freedom, Mexico was not.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, the Mexican Federalist Constitution, despite being one of the most liberal republican constitutions of its time, stipulated that all citizens declare loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, many prospective immigrants from the North met such policies with derision. “No feature in any government could be more abhorrent to men born in the land of liberty, and matured in the arms of universal toleration, than religious restraint,” wrote one prospective immigrant.<sup>218</sup> Given the intense American aversion to established religion, especially Catholicism, such reservations are not surprising. What is surprising is that they were not expressed more often and that Austin himself did so little to allay them, much less bring them to the attention of Mexican authorities. Despite Mexico’s strictures on religious expression, immigrants continued to come in droves. Furthermore, hundreds of Anglo-American immigrants made the decision to convert to Catholicism as a prerequisite to becoming Mexican citizens, in contradiction to their norteamericano heritage. Howard Miller, one of the only scholars who has written on this topic, explains that, unlike their forefathers who had “fled religious persecution for a land in which they hoped to find religious freedom,” Anglo-American immigrants to Texas left “the ‘land of liberty’ for one

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<sup>217</sup> William Lee Miller, *The First Liberty: Religion and the American Republic* (New York: Knopf, 1986). Philips Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). J. Lloyd Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 340-80.

<sup>218</sup> James T. Dunbar and Others to SFA, 12 December 1821, *Stephen F. Austin Papers (AP)* Vol. I, Part II, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924, 1928), 447.



dominated by the church most closely associated in the nineteenth-century American mind with religious intolerance.”<sup>219</sup>

This truth was not lost on many prospective immigrants. Austin fielded numerous letters from Americans eager to come to Mexico but concerned about its religious restrictions. “The most interesting subjects to the people here appear to be that of Slavery and Religion” stated one immigrant from Alabama.<sup>220</sup> Another from Kentucky inquired similarly, “[W]ill the settlers be allowed to worship their god agreeable to the dictates of their minds, etc, or will they be compelled to acknowledge the Catholic religion as the supreme religion of the land.”<sup>221</sup>

Mexico was a Catholic country, but by the 1820’s the Church itself had seen better days. As J. Lloyd Mecham explains, the state of the Catholic Church in Mexico during the apex of Mexican federalism – was “politically weak, economically poor and dependent on the state.” Yet the clergy were a formidable constituency within the independence movement and one that had to be appeased if the new nation was going to enjoy any degree of legitimacy or success. The Plan de Iguala, which had been drafted by both royalist and liberal forces, specifically stated that only the Roman Catholic faith would be tolerated, and that all the rights and privileges of the clergy would be protected. The Church enjoyed considerable authority and influence under the conservative Iturbide regime and, at the time of his abdication, possessed one-quarter of the nation’s wealth.

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<sup>219</sup> Howard Miller, “Stephen F. Austin and the Anglo-Texan Response to the Religious Establishment in Mexico, 1821-1836, *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 91, p. 291.

<sup>220</sup> Richard R. Royall to Stephen F. Austin, 23 August 1825, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1183-85.

<sup>221</sup> Elijah Noble to Stephen F. Austin, Part 1, 29 June 1822, *AP*, Vol I, Part I, 528.

This was largely due to the decline in the number of clergy after independence.

According to Mecham, “Independence during creole leadership only served to aggrandize the Church in wealth and prestige.” Over the next three decades, its wealth would increase until it became the most powerful institution in the country.<sup>222</sup>

But the Church’s impact was not the same everywhere. It was considerably less palpable on the frontier where there was a notable lack of clerical presence, sometimes contributing to a degree of secularity that scandalized more pious observers. Indeed, when Father Mariano Sosa visited Béxar in 1810, he complained of “numberless evils against religion, society, and good order,” reporting that “the generality of [bexarenos] are dissolute, without morals nor Christianity,” and a few seemed “to doubt or misbelieve the priests and rather follow the fatal precepts of bad men.” He reported that “much is the disregard for the 6<sup>th</sup> command of God, that fathers and daughters, brothers and sisters are living in the most damning intercourse.” Not surprisingly, the padre cited the bexarenos’ poverty as the primary reason for their apparent lack of religiosity. It contributed to their inability to construct “proper partitions” between the rooms of “parents and children,” he claimed, and to the tendency of married women to “sell their bodies.”<sup>223</sup>

Yet, despite this evident lack of religiosity in certain aspects of their daily lives, historians insist that tejanos did demonstrate a firm commitment to their nation’s

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<sup>222</sup> Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, p. 344.

<sup>223</sup> Padre Mariano Sosa, Curate of Nacogdoches to the Governor of Texas, 26 May 1810, Bexar Archives also found in Buquor Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

established faith, overwhelmingly supporting and accepting the Church's privileged place in Mexican society. In 1821, Béxar residents joined their compatriots in swearing allegiance to their new nation and its Catholic faith in an elaborate ceremony in the town plaza. For tejanos, as was the case with other Mexicans, being Mexican meant being Catholic. But this apparent religiosity was also informed by a regional specificity that often meant avoiding certain obligations such as mass and payment of tithes. However frontier Mexicans chose to practice their faith, they had no problem accepting it as their country's established religion. When in 1825 Mexico decided to permit states to write their own colonization laws, rather than eliminating religious intolerance so as to attract more North Americans, Coahuila y Tέjas specifically stated that the rights and property of foreigners would only be honored if they became Catholics. By 1832, state legislators were demanding proof of every male immigrant's formal adoption of Roman Catholicism.<sup>224</sup>

This, of course, was easier said than done in a region where there was almost no clerical presence. One immigrant from Texas stated that he saw a Mexican priest only once during his time in Mexico – he was observing a cockfight.<sup>225</sup> The striking lack of clergy created quite a predicament for Austin's colonists who wished to finalize their citizenship by converting to Catholicism. As one immigrant wrote, "The only legal marriage in the colonies was that performed by a priest of the Catholic Church – and

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<sup>224</sup> Timothy M. Matovina, *Tejano Religion and Ethnicity, 1821-1860*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), Chapter 2.

<sup>225</sup> "Memoir of Major George B Erath, Erath Family Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

there were no priests!”<sup>226</sup> One way that colonists dealt with this issue was to engage in marriage by bond, in which they registered with the *alcalde* and then waited to have their marriages formalized when a priest came to town which, in some cases, took years. But at least some colonists viewed priests in a spiritual as well as administrative capacity. Indeed, among the complaints that the Fredonian Rebels lodged against their *alcaldes* was “Endeavoring to suppress the public celebration of religion by refusing to admit a Roman Catholic priest to perform public worship.”<sup>227</sup> Father Muldoon’s relationship with the colonists is difficult to assess, but it appears that he enjoyed a fairly cordial one to say the least among the older settlers such as the Kuykendalls and the Austins. This group often referred to themselves as “Muldoon Catholics” expressing a conditional affiliation with the Church dependent mostly on their personal relationship with Muldoon.<sup>228</sup>

Regardless, the significance of the Church to their adopted country, namely its relationship to the state, and the profound way in which this differed from the church-state relationship in the US, was not lost on many immigrants, some of whom, unable to make the venture to Kuykendall’s farm, were nonetheless eager to be converted. “I have understood that yourself and Padre Muldoon will shortly pay a visit to the Fort Settlement where the neighborhood will assemble for the purpose of marriages and christening,” wrote one such gentleman. He explained, however, that he would not be able to attend, “Owing to the extreme indisposition of myself and the helpless situation of my family.”

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<sup>226</sup>Unknown in “Marriage Customs.”

<sup>227</sup> Impeachment Proceedings, 21 November 1826, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1511-16.

<sup>228</sup> “Captain Abner Kuykendahl of Austin’s Colony,” Kuykendall Family Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio.

He therefore requested that Father Muldoon “call at my home on the way down.”<sup>229</sup> To say the least, colonists understood and accepted their adopted country’s terms of citizenship, as unfamiliar as it must have felt to them, and took an active role in seeing that they conformed to it. This, of course, is not to say that they were enthusiastic or even dutiful Catholics, but, then again, nor were many of their tejano neighbors.

While plenty of prospective immigrants expressed apprehensions at the establishment clause, there is virtually no evidence of opposition once they arrived. “I wish to know what the feelings of the Government are at this time upon the subject of religion,” wrote one such individual, “Will it wink at liberty of conscience and permit good and worthy inhabitants to peaceably assemble and worship their God in the way most agreeable to their feelings.” Yet, immigrants rarely expressed such concerns once they arrived. Perhaps those who had the strongest reservations decided not to emigrate, or perhaps most were content to enjoy a kind of *de facto* freedom of religion in which they were willing to conform publicly to Catholicism so long as they could practice their own faith in private. For other immigrants, the concern was as much economic as it was spiritual. “Will Religious toleration be allowed the Emigrants from the United States, so far as to be exempted from the payment of tithes to the established Church,” wrote one individual, “And to think and act for themselves in matters of conscience? Provided they do not interfere with the Catholic Religion, and with fidelity support the laws of the land,

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<sup>229</sup> Thomas Barnett to SFA, 15 June 1823, *AP*, Vol. II, 666-67.

as citizens ought to?”<sup>230</sup> They expressed a characteristic desire for autonomy when it came to matters of religion, just as they did for almost everything else. Their desire to be left alone to worship as they wished in the privacy of their own homes was part of their consistent desire for personal and political autonomy generally. And just as common as enquiries about Mexico’s established religion, were those about its climate, geography, politics and economy. All in all, immigrants demonstrated a surprising willingness to compromise with their adopted country on this most fundamental of Anglo-American principles, agreeing overwhelmingly to become at least nominally Catholic. They must have figured that the cost was worth it, or perhaps the government guarantee of religious freedom was not as fundamental to antebellum Americans as many have assumed.

Miller argues that, while demonstrating a surprising cultural flexibility, their decision was ultimately a pragmatic one. Preferring religious tolerance, Austin strategically avoided the religion issue, for fear that it would compromise his colony’s relationship with Mexico, while making sure that his colonists satisfied the state’s stipulation that they formally proclaim the Catholic faith.<sup>231</sup> Indeed, to the extent that Austin himself may have had reservations regarding Mexico’s established Church, he almost never expressed them and he was unequivocal about making sure that prospective immigrants understood that Mexican citizenship meant at least formal adoption of Catholicism. “I wish the settlers to remember that the Roman catholic is the religion of

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<sup>230</sup> Hugh B. Johnson to SFA, 29 November 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 283-4.

<sup>231</sup> Miller, 286-8.

this nation,” he wrote, “we must all be particular on this subject and respect the Catholic religion with all that attention due to its sacredness and to the laws of the land.”<sup>232</sup>

But at least some immigrants did not just tepidly accept Mexico’s religious strictures. It appears that at least some actually preferred them, rejecting the notion that religious freedom was necessarily preferable. It was, in fact, their experience of the antebellum religious environment that led them to these conclusions. If there was one benefit to established religion, it was that it stifled the religious fanaticism and competition that plagued the North, and that Austin himself abhorred. Austin had been educated at Lexington’s Transylvania University, one of the nation’s most liberal institutions. Indeed, it had been his father’s wish that he receive such an education “lest he become a bigot.”<sup>233</sup> In a letter to his sister, Austin expressed his strong distaste for religious fanaticism and his own desire to make Texas a haven from it. He wished to

form a little world of our own where neither the religious, political or *money-making* fanaticism, which are throwing the good people of our native country into all sorts of convulsions shall ever obtain admission? Some philosopher, or dreamer, has called man a *bundle* of habits. I think he would call the North American of the present day a *bundle of extremes*.<sup>234</sup>

Austin’s intolerance for religious “extremes” is particularly evident in his descriptions of the few beligerent Methodist colonists who made their way to Texas,

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<sup>232</sup> SFA to the Colonists, 6 August 1823, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 679-81.

<sup>233</sup> Moses Austin to \_\_\_\_\_, date unknown, *AP*, Vol. I, Part, 95-6; also found in Miller, 292-93.

<sup>234</sup> For a study of antebellum religious society see Jon Butler *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). SFA to Mary Austin Holly, 19 July 1831, *AP*, Vol. II, 674-77.

continuing to practice their faith despite the religious strictures, and whom he accused of poisoning the other immigrants' relationship with Mexico.

[I]f [the Methodists] are kept out, or would remain quiet if here for a short time we shall succeed in getting a free toleration for all Religions, but a few fanatic and imprudent preachers at this time would ruin us – we must show the Gov't that we are ready to submit to their laws and willing to do so, after that we can with more certainty of success hope to have our privileges extended.<sup>235</sup>

Indeed, Austin did hope to one day see Mexico adopt the same commitment to religious freedom that the United States had. But he also sought to spare his adopted country from the kind of religious antagonism that plagued the North, something which, according to him and some of his fellow immigrants, was potentially even more stifling to liberty than an established church.

But no one forged a more convincing defense of Mexico's establishment clause than Ira Ingram, another early immigrant and close friend to Austin. "The Roman Catholic is the religion, and the established religion of this government," wrote Ingram to his uncle, a Protestant minister back in the US, "-and every settler in the colonies is obliged to take an oath to support the constitution of the Government which protects his life, liberty, and property and guarantees to him the right of the pursuit of happiness." For Ingram, established religion, ironically, offered ex-patriated Americans a freedom that they could not enjoy in the land of their birth. "[I]t exempts us entirely from the shameless strife and animosities, too often the offspring of a well meant zeal for the cause

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<sup>235</sup> SFA to Mrs. James F. Perry, 17 December 1824, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 991-2.



of true religion, and invariably the handmaid of intolerant fanaticism,” wrote Ingram in May of 1830, after Austin’s colony had been established for about seven years. “We hear no ravings and see no rompings of indecorious and indecent exhibitions under the cloak of religious assemblage, either by night or by day; no sanctuaries or pathetic by unholy intention and desires for we have no sanctuaries but private ones, and here all are perfectly free to worship as they please.” Far from limiting religious expression, Ingram argued that Mexican policy enhanced it by stifling the religious competition and animosity of which Austin complained. “Why, then, it will be natural for you to enquire, have an established religion?” Ingram continued, attempting to explain the logic of Mexico’s founders. “The reply to this enquiry, and it is the best of all good reasons, because the Mexican Nation, at the adaption of the Constitution of the general Governants, knew no religion but the one they adopted.” Ingram correctly argued that there were vocal advocates for freedom of religion in Mexico such as existed in the US, “a few really intelligent and liberal minded patriots,” who were “obliged to concede something to the physical mass of the nation to secure their political independence.” Religion was their compromise - “A nation freed from the bondage of centuries, on the cheap condition of being permitted to retain a Name! Where is the patriotic citizen and philanthropist, who does not exclaim, on hearing this, Victory!”<sup>236</sup> In a nation where the majority of its citizens were Catholic, extending religious freedom did not feel like

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<sup>236</sup> Ira Ingram to Roswell Ingram, 29 May 1830, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Archives, San Antonio.

liberty. If anything, it might be interpreted as oppression, especially if it opened the door to extremist expression as was occurring in the North. Thus, in Ingram's mind, the decision to make Catholicism the state religion was not so much an expression of disinterest in or opposition to religious freedom by the founders, but motivated by their desire to achieve independence and democracy for their country, given the specifics of its society and culture.

Furthermore, an establishment clause could, and did, serve to unite an otherwise extremely ethnically and geographically diverse nation, thereby avoiding something far more cataclysmic than the lack of religious freedom. Given that Catholicism was one of the few things uniting Mexico's population at this time, Ingram insisted that, in order to avoid civil war, the legislator must consult at least some of "the prejudices of the people. He must moderate, modify, remove, or subdue them." These prejudices "were so many Gordian knots, which must be untied – they cannot be cut." While Ingram acknowledged a preference for religious freedom from an ideological standpoint, Mexico's challenge was achieving a coherent, unified and peaceful nation. Otherwise, an attempt "to overleap" might end up leading the people "captive to the temple of reform" and bring on "the whole apparatus of war."<sup>237</sup>

Ingram wholeheartedly defended Mexico's founders, stating that, despite his own ideological preference for disestablishmentarianism, he would have made the same

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<sup>237</sup> Ira Ingram to Roswell Ingram, 15 February 1832, Ingram Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

decision. “Yes, - with all my prejudice in favor of religious freedom about me, and with all its imperfections clinging to it, I should have voted for the present constitution, persuaded that it was the best, all interests reconciled and all predilections surrendered that the circumstances of the world permit.” The Mexican founders’ decision was right for their country, and Ingram’s declaration that he would have done the same demonstrates not only a strong defense of their decision but a strong personal identification with Mexico. Adopting Catholicism was a small price to pay for the privilege of being Mexican. “[W]e have and daily enjoy more to create our deepest gratitude toward the Government of our adopted county, than any other people on earth,” he concluded.<sup>238</sup>

Yet, Ingram remained fully optimistic that Mexico would, sooner rather than later, abolish its establishment clause and embrace religious openness. “From all that I can learn, I have but little doubt that “Free Toleration, on the subject of religion, if it has not already been adopted by this Government, very soon will be.” But he cautioned against embracing the change too quickly, before “the mass of the nation is prepared for its adoption,” warning that

there is some reason to apprehend danger from doing, or attempting to do too much. Perhaps there is more danger of this than that too little will be done. If the majority of the nation are unprepared for so great a change, it may produce a violent reaction. This might be followed by the loss of everything. But if the

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<sup>238</sup> Ira Ingram to Roswell Ingram, 29 May 1830, Asbury Papers.

mass of the nation is in reality favorable to the change, no great, or general, inconvenience can arise.<sup>239</sup>

If Mexico was going to achieve its democratic promise it had to reflect the wishes of its people, rather than imposing change on them. Perhaps above all, Ingram's words demonstrate a profound cultural and political relativism, crediting Mexico's leaders for their wisdom and prudence: "The wise statesman whilst he is diffusing light, will conform his measures to the prejudices, the customs, and even to the whims of the nation, whose happiness is committed to his keeping." Good leaders, according to Ingram, "must prepare innovation at a distance that it may not appear innovation." Indeed, such accommodation did not negate the possibility of future change, quite the opposite. "If this has been done in Mexico then toleration will succeed," Ingram assured, "because it will receive the popular sanction. But if it has not, blood will again flow, to atone for the rash and premature reform."<sup>240</sup> Ingram remained ever conscious of the challenges that Mexican lawmakers faced in uniting such a diverse nation, and insisted that Mexico's unique character should dictate its political course. His logic is not only surprising for an American of his time in its virulent defense of one established faith, but it also demonstrates a profound sensitivity to Mexico's unique historical context, and a nuanced understanding of what democracy meant or could mean to different nations and peoples.

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<sup>239</sup> Ira Ingram to Roswell Ingram, Ira Ingram Papers, 28 May 1830.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

This was an attitude profoundly different from the unrelenting commitment to Anglo notions of freedom and democracy that some of his contemporaries expressed.

Ingram's sentiments are nothing short of remarkable, especially considering that they came at the very moment when the separation between church and state was becoming solidified in the United States of the North. Indeed, it had been fears of Catholic authority and intrusion that prompted many Protestant Americans to embrace separation as a respectable American principle and uniquely American right. This no less was a time when Protestant leaders especially began to combine their long-standing prejudice toward Catholics with modern fears of ecclesiastical authority and its imposition on personal and individual freedom. Catholicism became linked in the nineteenth-century Protestant American mind with all that was un-American. Most specifically, it was the Church's ability to stifle religious dissent that Americans most loathed - something which, by the 1830's, it did with only a fraction of its former vigor.<sup>241</sup> But Ingram's and Austin's words present a surprising exception to this hostility, and what's more, an acceptance of a system that they had been trained to abhor. Indeed, what their words seem to suggest is that the existence of an established Catholic Church in Mexico was precisely what ensured liberty – whether religious or otherwise.

Of course, as Ingram observed, Mexican leaders were by no means uniformly opposed to disestablishmentarianism, and in fact many preferred religious tolerance.

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<sup>241</sup> For American anti-Catholicism see Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, "A Theologically Liberal, Anti-Catholic, and American Principle."

One such individual was Lorenzo de Zavala, the Yucatán native who served as Vice President of Mexico under the liberal Vicente Guerrero regime, which replaced Iturbide in 1824. One of the clergy's most hostile critics, Zavala's attacks had less to do with any commitment to religious or spiritual freedom than with discontent over the clergy's economic domination. Educated in Europe, Zavala travelled extensively throughout the United States of the North. He proved to be a great admirer of that country's political system, particularly republicanism, and not least of all its commitment to religious liberty. Speaking of American Protestant ceremonies, he wrote, "Compare this religious festival to those that we have in the [Mexican] republic, which are more or less like those of Spain and all of Italy, an hour or two in the temple, where the people take very little part in the religious feelings that should occupy them in those circumstances." Catholic worship, with its formalized Latin mass, recited "without coherence, without conscience, and without divine comfort" lost "all its effect because of the absolute lack of communication between the priesthood and the people." Zavala particularly disapproved of the way the Church both emulated Europe and seemed to perpetuate its elitism. But he saved his most vitriolic criticism for the Church's evident economic exploitation of the Mexican people,

Ah! The pen falls from the hand in order not to expose the civilized world a hoard of idolaters who come to deliver into the hands of lazy friars the fruits of their year's work to enrich them, while they, their women and children have no clothing, not even a bed. And the Spaniards, our fathers, have dared call this religion!!!

Zavala's criticisms were characteristic of his federalist allies, whose attraction to American religious freedom was primarily based on its insurance of political freedom and economic liberty. "The American people are most religious, even to the extent of being fanatic in some places and congregations," he agreed with Austin, "but worship is entirely in the hands of the people. Neither the general government nor that of the states intervenes in any manner." But it was the democratic spirit of religion that he seemed to admire most, "They name their ministers, support them, and exercise over them the authority that a company would have that pays their workers." In the Catholic system, however, "bishops are appointed by the Pope, and the people receive these or not as they please. The Episcopaleans, when they have a vacancy, meet to name their prelates. For Zavala, the way the Church hierarchy functioned and its relationship to the Mexican people seemed to contradict the very democracy that he wanted for Mexico. Thus, he, like most Mexican liberals, was less concerned with the limits that an established church placed on spiritual freedom - he acknowledged the fanaticism that plagued the United States - than he was with the effect it had on the economic and democratic welfare of the country.<sup>242</sup>

In this regard, Zavala shared much in common with men like Austin and Ingram with whom he would eventually become quite close - a desire to see the Catholic Church

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<sup>242</sup> Lorenzo de Zavala *Journey to the United States of North America*, John-Michael Rivera ed., (Houston, 2005), 31-37, 72-77.

enjoy a circumscribed privilege. They did not object to it being the only legitimate faith in Mexico, so long as it did not interfere with their economic, political and spiritual liberties. It was less the existence of an established religion that these men objected to, as it was its impact on the freedoms of Mexico's people and the ways in which the church's relationship with the state lent itself to the very kind of state privilege that Austin criticized among economic elites in the North. They found their utopia in Texas where Catholicism existed as the only publicly recognized faith, but the church's power itself remained severely limited and often completely absent. This removed existence guaranteed the spiritual freedom these men craved while avoiding the political and economic injustice they despised.

As much as Americans like Austin and Ingram accepted and even admired Mexico's religious laws, they remained ultimate defenders of the principle of religious freedom. Austin himself was quick to note the deleterious impact of established religion when he travelled to Mexico City, where he suspected the confederate system would be opposed "by those miserable drones [who] are the enemies of liberty, of human happiness and of the human race." Of the Mexicans, he had to admit, "there never was a people so dreadfully priest ridden and enslaved by superstition and fanaticism as the great part of this nation." Yet, like Zavala, his criticism was of the clergy's corruption more than anything - "[They] literally suck the blood of the unfortunate people." But, like his friend Ingram, he remained optimistic, "will the great god of justice and of truth, will the lights of the age, permit such horrible abuses to exist much longer? No - Mexico has recovered



her civil liberty - she will soon assume her rights in full, and bursting the chains of superstition declare that *man has a right to think for himself.*"<sup>243</sup>

As much as he resented the Catholic and centralist impulses most evident in Mexico City, Austin was certain that Mexicans would one day see the light - that the inherent superiority of a confederate, secular system of government would triumph and, when it did, Texas would be its inspiration. "The Government is yet unsettled though there is now no doubt of its being a federal republic" he wrote, and "the Roman Catholic is the established religion to the absolute exclusion of all others and will so continue for a few years, but the natural operation of a Republic will soon change that system." But until Mexico did embrace religious toleration, Austin felt it his responsibility to see that the immigrants under his authority accepted the religious dictates of their adopted country. "[P]rivate worship will never be enquired into, but no public preaching or exhorting will on any account be permitted, and I should feel myself compelled to silence any preacher or exhorter who would attempt it within my jurisdiction."<sup>244</sup>

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Historians have disagreed widely over slavery's place in early Texan society, economy and politics. While Eugene Barker and Lester G. Bugbee have argued that slavery was peripheral to the establishment of Texas and that men like Austin only

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<sup>243</sup> SFA to J.E.B. Austin, 20 May 1823, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 644-5.

<sup>244</sup> SFA to \_\_\_\_\_, 20 October 1823, *AP*, Vol. I, Part I, 703-4.

tenuously supported it,<sup>245</sup> more recent studies insist that it was as entrenched in Texas as it was in any other part of the antebellum South. Pointing out that on the eve of the Civil War the proportion of slaves in Texas was the same as that in Virginia, Randolph P. Campbell argues that slavery was as strongly established in “the newest slave state, as it was in the oldest slave state in the Union.”<sup>246</sup> Others have gone even further to argue that slavery was the main impetus for Anglo-American immigration to Texas and its eventual secession from Mexico. One such scholar writes that slave-based agriculture “served as the foundation for the exodus of Americans into Mexican territory during the 1820s and 1830s.”<sup>247</sup> But such an observation overlooks the complex and winding course that slavery took in Texas, especially during the Mexican period.

Striving for a more nuanced understanding of slavery’s place in Texas history, Sean Kelley argues that Texas constituted a “borderland plantations society” in which slavery existed in a “statutorily grey area” whereby it was “perpetually contested” and “punctuated by clashes, negotiations, and tactical advances and retreats on each side.” Kelley points out that, while freedom was technically more attainable for Texas slaves than it was for those in the North, the harsh, unfamiliar and even violent environment that they encountered rendered, what he calls, a “borderlands paternalism,” whereby slaves

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<sup>245</sup> Eugene Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin, Founder of Texas, 1793-1836: A Chapter of the Westward Movement of the American People* (Cokebury Press, 1925; reprint, Da Capo Press, 1968). Lester Bugbee, “Stephen F. Austin’s Views on Slavery in Early Texas,” *The Texas Magazine*, 2:13 (May 1897).

<sup>246</sup> Campbell, *Empire for Slavery*, 2.

<sup>247</sup> Andrew Torget, *Cotton Empire: Slavery and the Texas Borderlands, 1820-1837* (Ph.D. Diss. University of Virginia, 2009), quote page 2.

and masters developed a codependent relationship and slaves opted to stay with their masters rather than escape into the harsh unknown.<sup>248</sup>

While environmental and political stresses no doubt complicated the traditional master-slave relationship, I would argue that it also served more as a nexus of compatibility, rather than antagonism, between Anglo southern immigrants and their adopted country. The nature and function of chattel slavery certainly changed, but it was also confirmed by Mexicans themselves. It is true that the republic formally outlawed slavery upon its founding in accordance with a long antislavery tradition dating at least as far back as Bartolomé de las Casas. Yet, it is equally important to note that many Mexicans, especially those on the frontier, not only came from slaveholding families themselves, but supported and lobbied on behalf of Texas slaveholders, believing as they did, that slavery offered the best opportunity for Texas to thrive economically. Meanwhile, many Anglo-American immigrants, especially Austin and his earlier cohort, demonstrated a profound willingness to work within the Mexican legal system, whether to gain slavery's admission or to abandon it in favor of Mexican forms of compulsive labor, namely debt peonage. Indeed, even when it came to this most southern of institutions, many Anglo-American immigrants were willing to adapt to Mexican law and tradition. This meant that, ultimately, it was slaves themselves who would reveal the

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<sup>248</sup> Sean M. Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios: A Plantation Society in the Texas Borderlands, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2010), 5, 92.

limits of this compromise and the limits of Anglo immigrants' willingness to conform to the strictures of their adopted nation.

Slavery, in fact, had deep roots on the frontier where New Spain permitted and protected the enslavement of people of Indian and African descent beginning in the early sixteenth century. On the farthest margins of the empire, Indian and African slavery existed as a form of compensation for those who agreed to settle there and in a form quite similar to the kind of chattel slavery found in the American South. As Ramón Gutiérrez explains, the ownership of Indian slaves determined a man's honor-status and, by the nineteenth-century, race became the dominant way of defining social status in the north, creating a structure similar to that of the antebellum South: "[M]uch of what it meant to be honorable [in nineteenth-century northern New Spain] was a projection of what it meant to be a free, landholding citizen of white legitimate ancestry, and by contrast what it meant not to be a slave, an outcast, or an Indian."<sup>249</sup> Slavery in New Spain, as in the American South, was understood and justified in terms of a man's exclusive right to control his dependents. Eighteenth century laws placed children and servants alike under the complete control of their fathers or masters as demonstrated by a 1783 Nacogdoches law that prohibited children from renouncing or blaspheming their parents, and placed servants "under the economic and civil authority of their masters whom they must respect

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<sup>249</sup> Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico 1500-1846* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1991), pp. 180-206, quote p. 206.

as they would their parents,” prohibiting them from “leaving or seeking employ from another” until their terms of service were up.<sup>250</sup> Thus Mexicans were used to a system that placed servants under the same kind of absolute submission that children were expected to demonstrate toward their parents. While this was no southern-style chattel slavery, to say that northern Mexicans were unfamiliar with compulsive labor would be incorrect.

The patriarchal household gained pre-eminence in 1776 with the Caroline Pragmatic, which deprived the Church of its formerly exclusive rights over marriage, effectively expanding parental control so that “the patriarchal household became the natural and analogical symbol of good government. As a father exercised his authority and domination within the household over wife, children, servants, and retainers, so the king viewed the state as his private domain.” The Church and state helped maintain patriarchy by supporting this.<sup>251</sup> As one historian explains, religious authority within the family was a cornerstone of patriarchal control. Men were often compared to monarchs and rulers, and women to subjects. Furthermore, the latter’s perceived sexual vulnerability, something which reflected on men’s honor, dictated that women be cloistered within the home.<sup>252</sup> The Mexican patriarch was one who “completely controlled his wife’s legal acts, property and person, being able to claim her domestic services, obedience and sexual fidelity (although the double standard granted him sexual

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<sup>250</sup> “Criminal Code, Nacogdoches, 1783,” Bexar Archives, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>251</sup> Gutiérrez, 315-327, quote p. 319.

<sup>252</sup> Richard Griswold del Castillo, *La Familia: Chicano Families in the Urban Southwest 1848 to the Present*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 26-29; Gutiérrez, 46.

freedom); he made all important decisions to enforce his will upon its members using whatever means he deemed necessary.”

Given the preeminence of patriarchy in northern Mexico, it made sense that filial and kinship terms used to refer to slaves derived from “authority relationships within the household, particularly a father’s right to rule over wife, family, and thralls.” Indeed, Mexican slaveholders, just like their southern counterparts, “often characterized relations with slaves as governed by the same rules that governed family” and “A patriarch’s natural law authority over his family gave him the right to correct and punish an erring wife, child or slave.”<sup>253</sup>

While the urban North was beginning to embrace the notion of separate spheres for men and women, the mainly agrarian societies of the American South and Mexico continued to see the male-headed household as the central organizing component of society. Women as well as children, slaves and servants where they existed, remained firmly under the control of the male household head. This system acted as an equalizing force in the Old South by allowing all white property-owning men the same legal protection and privilege. “Unlike the newly privatized middle-class homes of the urban northeast, from which so-called ‘productive’ labor had been largely expelled by the 1850’s,” writes Stephanie McCurry, “yeoman households were the locus of production as well as of reproduction and consumption.” Anglo Southern settlers encountered and

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<sup>253</sup> Gutierrez, Chapter 5, p. 181, 185.

perpetuated this social order in their new home.<sup>254</sup> As Lorenzo de Zavala described it, Texas was a place where “Each citizen is a king like unto Adam.”<sup>255</sup>

It should not be surprising, therefore, that Anglo colonists, just like their tejano neighbors, used the language of filial relationship to justify their ownership of other human beings. “Those inhabitants respectfully represent to your sovereignty that the Slaves introduced into this establishment were not brought here for the purpose of Trade or speculation,” Austin wrote in his 1824 Petition Concerning Slavery, “neither are they Africans but are the family servants of the emigrants and raised by them as such from their infancy.”<sup>256</sup> Austin and the other colonists hoped that, like its imperial predecessor, the Republic of Mexico would allow Anglo settlers to immigrate with their slaves despite the fact that its founders opposed the institution in principle.

Mexican independence raised questions for slavery primarily because so many revolutionaries voiced strong philosophical oppositions to it. Regardless, a small number of modest slaveholders were among the early immigrants to Texas. Josiah H. Bell brought three slaves in addition to his wife and two sons, and Jared E. Groce brought ninety bondsmen, allowing him to establish a cotton plantation on the Brazos River, the produce of which he sold to customers in the Mexican interior. On May 13, 1822, Austin issued the first of a number of memorials to the Mexican Constituent Congress in which

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<sup>254</sup> Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds, Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Chapter 6, p. 210.

<sup>255</sup> Lorenzo de Zavala to SFA, 17 September 1835, *Papers of the Texas Revolution*, John H. Jenkins, ed. (Austin, 1973), Vol. 1, 453-4.

<sup>256</sup> SFA to Federal Congress, “Petition Concerning Slavery,” 10 June 1824, *AP*, 827-8.

he expressed his and other colonists' desire to bring their slaves with them and receive land for them. Mexican lawmakers responded by attempting to strike a compromise between their desire to develop their northern frontier and their own philosophical opposition to slavery. The result of their efforts was Article 30 of the Imperial Colonization law which allowed emigrants to bring their human property with them, but strictly forbade the purchase or sale of slaves within the empire and stipulated that any children of slaves born in Mexico had to be freed when they turned fourteen years old.<sup>257</sup> Austin was pleased with the limited way in which slavery was permitted in Texas and was able to use such allowances to reassure prospective colonists – especially those moderately wealthy southern agrarians that he most hoped to attract, even if he had to censure some of the information he gave them. “I found it necessary to be extremely cautious in writing about your grant or the guarantees you could give settlers as to slavery laws, etc. –,” wrote Joseph Hawkins, “My prudence was well timed – If things are as you desire, we can now secure a population of a different cast[,] one which would prosper in any Country.”<sup>258</sup> But Austin knew that such legislation was only a temporary comfort and that few slaveholders, no matter how appealing Mexico was, would feel confident leaving a country where their right to human property was specifically protected for one where it was so precarious. Austin set to work trying to negotiate for more favorable legislation. “The principle difficulty is slavery,” he wrote to one prospective immigrant,

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<sup>257</sup> Randolph P. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989), 16.

<sup>258</sup> Joseph H. Hawkins to SFA, 23 July 1822, *AP*, Vol I, Part I, 532-3.



“this they will not admit.” But Austin hoped to convince the legislature to amend it “so as to make them slaves for life and their children free at 21 year.”<sup>259</sup>

Things got more complicated with the establishment of the Mexican Republic and Federal Executive’s immediate decision to emancipate all slaves. Austin and his colonists reacted by issuing a swift petition reminding the Executive that the slaves introduced “were intended to aid in clearing the land and establishing their farms which these Colonists could not have affected without them,” given the shortage of labor on the frontier. They insisted that slaves had been brought there “As a necessary part of the Capital required by the desert state of the Country to establish their farms and Ranches.” Furthermore, they reminded Mexican leaders that many of their “friends and Relations” who had visited the country earlier to select land and build their homes were “now on the road bringing their slaves with them relying on the Colonization law under which Austin’s establishment is formed. They would “be totally and forever ruined if on their arrival here after so much fatigue labor and expense in removing they are to lose their slaves.” They concluded their petition by pleading “that your sovereignty may take their Case into Consideration and declare that the slaves and their descendants of the 300 families who emigrate to the Establishment formed by the Empresario Stephen F Austin in this province shall be slaves for Life.”<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> SFA to Edward Lovelace, 22 November 1822, *AP*, Vol I, Part I, 554-555.

<sup>260</sup> SFA to Federal Congress, “Petition Concerning Slavery,” 10 June 1824, *AP* Vol. I, Part I, 827-8.

In their efforts to gain exemption from the federal decree, Austin and other Anglo colonists solicited the aid of their *tejano* neighbors. Indeed, not a few *tejanos* owned slaves themselves and aggressively supported and assisted Anglo efforts to formally legalize the institution in Texas. Erasmo and Juan Seguín, two of the most noted and powerful *bexarenos*, did not only own slaves, but saw in slaveholding colonists an unprecedented opportunity for Texas to escape the poverty and destitution that had plagued it since the Mexican War of Independence. At one point, Seguín even traveled to New Orleans to learn about the cotton trade so that he might establish his own in Texas. He, like Austin, was a firm believer in the capacity for a southern style economy, replete with chattel slavery, to bring prosperity to Texas. If permitted in Texas, Seguín believed, slavery would attract men of means who could make the region prosper as it never had before.<sup>261</sup>

There is evidence, specifically from James Austin's correspondences during his stay in San Antonio, that Seguín was not alone among *bexarenos* in his support of slavery. "I have had much conversation with Saucedo and others on this subject," wrote James to his older brother in reference to the slavery question, "I see no reason why you should apprehend the abolition of the Slaves of the 300 families; the thing is decided with regard to that point – *those slaves are guaranteed to the settlers by the Law of Colonization and they cannot be deprived of them* – this is the opinion that prevails in this place." The

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<sup>261</sup> Juan Seguin, , *A Revolution Remembered: Memoirs and Selected Correspondence of Juan N. Seguín*, Jesús F. de la Teja, (Austin: Texas State Historical Society, 2002).

Baron de Bastrop, who had helped Austin convince Mexican authorities to grant him a colonization contract and Texas' sole representative in the state legislature, was one of the immigrants' most strident supporters when it came to slavery. "If a favorable slave law is passed it will be attributed in a great measure to the *unremitted* exertions of the Baron" wrote James.<sup>262</sup> In another letter he instructed his brother to "Try and keep the slaveholders from going until they hear the result of the slave question, - Tell them they are safe yet," he assured him, "- and there is but little doubt but part of the laws will be favorable" for "The Ayuntamiento of this place have made as *Warm* a Representation in favor of it as you have."<sup>263</sup> Ultimately, however, everyone knew that the question depended on the decision of the Mexican federal government which stood firmly committed to abolitionism.<sup>264</sup>

What the Constituent Congress ultimately decreed was not general emancipation of all slaves, but rather a prohibition of all "Commerce and traffic in slaves proceeding from any country and under any flag whatsoever." American slaveholders chose to interpret this language to mean that they could introduce slaves to Mexico, they just could not sell or purchase them as merchandise. For the time being, slavery was safe in Texas, or so it seemed.<sup>265</sup>

But Mexico's generally anti-slavery stance made it difficult for Austin to recruit the very class of people that he most wanted. "Nothing appears at present, to prevent a

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<sup>262</sup> James E.B. Austin to SFA, 22 August 1826, *AP*, Vol I, Part II, 1430-34.

<sup>263</sup> James E.B. Austin to SFA, 3 September 1826, *AP*, Vol I, Part II, 1445-46.

<sup>264</sup> James E.B. Austin to SFA, 23 September 1826, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1461-62.

<sup>265</sup> Campbell, 16-17.

portion of our wealthy planters from emigrating immediately to the province of Texas but the uncertainty now prevailing with regard to the subject of slavery,” wrote James H. Phelps on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1825. He specifically referred to rumors that Mexico forbade the introduction of “negro property” and that it subjected “the persons so offending to the severest penalties, and also an immediate emancipation of thos[e] slaves now belonging to the citizens of the province of Texas.” Phelps asserted that “If this be a fact, it will check the tide of emigrating *spirits* at once: and indeed it has had its influence already.” Phelps concluded by emphasizing the need to check the circulation of such misinformation as “That portion of the Mexican Republick is becoming every day more and more an object of interest with this portion of the United States,”<sup>266</sup> meaning the slave South. Austin and others had to effectively dissuade prospective immigrants of Mexico’s commitment to anti-slavery. Regardless of their unflagging interest in Mexico, many could not convince themselves to immigrate to a country that did not permit them to keep their human property.

On March 31, 1828, Austin came up with a way to get around Mexico’s anti-slavery laws by requesting that slaves be admitted under the country’s current system of debt peonage. It was approved two months later. Under this new system, slaveowners had to take their slaves before a notary public in the United States and draw up a contract stipulating that each bondsman wished to accompany his master to Texas. Although technically not enslaved once he entered Mexico, he owed his master for his value plus

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<sup>266</sup> James A Phelps to SFA, 16 January 1825, *AP*, Vol. I, Part II, 1020-21

the cost of travel which he would theoretically pay for with his own labor. Within a few years, slaveowners began employing indenture contracts to bring in bondsmen.

Campbell argues that such contracts allowed slaveowners to keep their slaves “as firmly in servitude as if they had never left the United States.” For several years debt peonage served as the answer to slaveholders’ concerns.<sup>267</sup>

Indeed, indentured servitude offered an appealing way to avoid the slavery issue altogether and comforted many potential immigrants. “The intelligence I immediately made public, and am induced to believe it will be of great service to this Country,” wrote a fellow colonist and close associate of Austin’s in reference to the generous state law, “It has made a material change in the feelings of many valuable Emigrants.”<sup>268</sup>

But in truth, indentured servitude was not as secure as chattel slavery since it technically permitted slaves to exercise their legal power. “The intent to have slaves is even more disguised under the manner in which the [Mexican] government guarantees the contracts the colonists might have in North America with salaried workers,” observed General Manuel Mier y Téran in his 1828 tour of Texas. A close reading of such contracts reveals that they were in fact designed to replicate slavery, typically binding servants for ninety-nine years of service such as the contract between D. Sancifer and “Clarisa a Girl of Color.” It declared the two “bound to each other” for ninety-nine years “if she shall so long live, during said time she obliges herself to serve his successors or

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<sup>267</sup> Campbell, 23.

<sup>268</sup> Frost Thorn to SFA, 22 July 1828, *AP*, Vol. II, 74-5.

assigns as a good, honorable, diligent, and faithful servant . . . hereby denouncing and disclaiming all her rights.” Clarisa’s owner was bound to provide her “with good and sufficient meals, board, and lodging and medicine and attention in case of sickness,” and if she became disabled, “to support her in a “decent and comfortable manner.” While some contracts stipulated a mutual obligation between owner and servants, others portended an instructional purpose. One such contract bound nine young men of color, all of them under twenty years old, to James Morgan “to learn the art and mystery of farming and planting,” and seven women “to learn the art and mystery of housekeeping and a seamstress.”<sup>269</sup>

Whatever their specific terms, servitude contracts, by their very nature were riddled with loopholes. Terán reported that some servants, realizing “that their labor was worth more,” sought to have their contracts dissolved upon arrival in Texas. According to him, Mexican courts often sided with the petitioners in such cases, to the alarm and no doubt grave disappointment of their masters.<sup>270</sup> There are actually only a few cases of Mexican courts overturning such contracts, but that was enough to prompt Anglo slaveholders to question how safe their property rights were in their adopted country.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> “Indenture Agreement,” 20 December 1833, in Dr. W.E. Howard Collection, Dallas Historical Society Archives; Indenture Agreement, 20 April 1831, in James Morgan Papers, Rosenberg Library, Galveston. Also cited in Campbell, 24.

<sup>270</sup> General Manuel Mier y Terán, *Diary Kept by General Manuel Mier y Terán on his 1828 Inspection of Texas*, Jack White ed., John Wheat trans., (Austin: University of Texas, 2000), 57.

<sup>271</sup> There are several cases of Mexican authorities in Béxar freeing or honoring the freedom of escaped slaves, see the case of Peter, Bexar Archives, 23 May 1832; The case of Phil, 8 January 1823; case of Tomas Maque, 15 December 1832. For evidence of the Mexican authorities prosecuting Anglo-American slaveholders for harming their slaves and subsequently granting the slave freedom see the case of Elias Lloyd, Bexar Archives, 13 May 1828, 8 July 1828.

In addition, Mexico's increasingly aggressive anti-slavery federal legislation continued to deter prospective immigrants who realized that in the right hands, it could have detrimental effects on their right to human property.

Problems reached a head in the Fall of 1829 when federalist president Vicente Guerrero issued a blanket emancipation decree. Ramón Músquiz, the political chief of San Antonio and a pro-slavery advocate, withheld publication of the decree and instead wrote a letter to Governor Viesca asking that he appeal for Texas' exemption. Músquiz pointed out that such a law was unconstitutional because it violated Texan slaveholders' property rights. Besides, they could not help develop the region "without the aid of the robust and indefatigable arms of that race of the human species which is called negroes, and who, to their misfortune, suffer slavery." Finally, Músquiz argued that to suddenly liberate those now in bondage would present a serious threat to public order. Governor Viesca agreed and issued a formal request to President Guerrero for Texas' exemption, something he argued he would have done even without Músquiz's request because of Texas' special need for slaves. In addition to this concern, Viesca worried about the implication of such a decree on the behavior of slaveowning Texans, since strong feelings result when men are "in danger of being ruined, as would happen to many of them whose fortune consists entirely of slaves."<sup>272</sup>

Viesca's fear was warranted. Before he could obtain the exemption, the decree somehow made its way into the hands of the alcalde of Nacogdoches and caused near

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<sup>272</sup> Ramón Músquiz to Governor of Coahuila and Texas, 25 October 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 273-75.

panic. But Austin once again counseled calm and insisted that if Músquiz and Viesca failed in their efforts, the people should employ the channels of the Mexican political system, appealing to their constitutional rights. “The constitution must be both our shield, and our arms, under *it*, and with *it* we must constitutionally defend ourselves and our property,” he wrote.<sup>273</sup> Indeed, Austin consistently expressed full confidence in the ability of the Mexican legal system to protect the seemingly unique interests of American colonists.

In the meantime, however, Anglo slaveholders and their tejano allies scrambled to prevent news of the decree from circulating, lest it create confusion and concern. Hence, Músquiz’s immediate advice was to suppress publication of the decree “because it may alter the tranquility of this population” if they knew that “the President of the Republic has just abolished slavery in the whole Nation.”<sup>274</sup> Particularly in light of events such as the Fredonian Rebellion, it is understandable why Texan leaders would want to prevent news of this from spreading to the Anglo slaveholder population.

As colonists attempted to censure the news and keep calm in the colony, tejano leaders set to work trying to convince federal leaders of the destructive potential of their recent declaration and attempted to gain exemption from it. Músquiz agreed with Austin regarding the unconstitutionality of the decree and that “it is beyond the extraordinary faculties laid out in the Law of the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, and is most offensive to the

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<sup>273</sup> SFA to John Durst, 17 November 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 288-89.

<sup>274</sup> Ramón Músquiz to SFA, 29 October 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 278-80.



sovereignty of the states.”<sup>275</sup> Other tejanos agreed. “From the moment that the Géfe político of this place told me about the decree abolishing slavery,” Jose Antonio Padilla wrote, “I gave my opinion with the strength and good faith that it merited; that there should be no obedience nor compliance, because it is unconstitutional; and directly attacks the right of property.” Padilla gave his word that he would “oppose with all my strength the publication and compliance of a law so tyrannical, cruel, illegal and monstrous.”<sup>276</sup>

Meanwhile, Gov. Viesca addressed a lengthy and formal letter to the Minister of Relations reminding him of Texas’ exceptional circumstances and warning him in no uncertain terms that such a decree, if put into effect, would surely ruin the state of Coahuila y T́ejas. While expressing admiration for the desire to liberate all men from a state of bondage, he asked “what is the philanthropy of liberating men whose condition will be reduced to one even more obscure and barbaric.” Even “the most civilized nations on the planet have not been able to destroy the institution of slavery.”<sup>277</sup>

The news they anticipated arrived not a day too soon. Terán replied in late December, clarifying that T́ejas y Coahuila *was* in fact exempt from said decree “so long as there is no more introduction of slaves.”<sup>278</sup> Almost as quickly as panic had set in, it was allayed. Austin received a warm congratulations from Músquiz “for this success of

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<sup>275</sup> Músquiz to SFA, 11 December 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 303-04.

<sup>276</sup> Jose Antonio Padilla to SFA, 26 November 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 293-94.

<sup>277</sup> Jose Maria Viesca to Minister of Relations, 14 November 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 286-88.

<sup>278</sup> Teran to SFA, 20 November 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 290.

such importance for this department particularly and for your colony that was in eminent danger of being ruined.”<sup>279</sup>

Relieved at the news himself, Austin made haste to express his gratitude to the one man whose efforts he did not doubt had caused Texas’ exemption. “I do not have words to express my recognition and gratitude to you for this act to such great importance to Texas and for your efforts in making it known,” he wrote to Terán, assuring him that its enforcement would have resulted “in the ruination of many people, the loss of confidence in the government and the abandonment of this particular part of the republic to the barbarians.” Austin concluded his letter with a characteristic guarantee of Texans’ faith in their adopted country. He assured him that “never was there the least threat to good order in this colony concerning the September 15 decree because these inhabitants rested with the justice and good faith of the government that they have adopted.” He insisted that “it never crossed their minds that it was the idea of the government to deprive them of any part of their property.”<sup>280</sup>

The damage had been done, however, when it came to prospective immigrants. Mexico’s inconsistent policies and colonial leaders’ inability to prevent such news from reaching Anglo colonists or potential colonists in the North was already having deleterious effects on the inflow of slaveholding immigrants. “[W]e have been led into an error by a proclamation of the Mexican president as to the liberation of slaves,” wrote

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<sup>279</sup> Músquiz to SFA, 24 December 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 303-04 .

<sup>280</sup> SFA to Teran, 29 December 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 306-07.

Richard Ellis, a close associate of Austin's tasked with recruiting colonists. "Perhaps he only meant bound servants such as has been by the civil law for 200 years, but you know such is the sensitive feelings of the slaveholders on that subject, that the least agitation will deter them from emigration, and I really begin to believe with you that it is shortly to be a great evil among us."<sup>281</sup>

The damage had been done when it came to slaves as well. The federal decree not only emboldened slaves by signaling that Mexican authorities supported abolition, it provided them with a critical loophole with which to achieve their freedom. Records indicate that by 1830, slaves knew that entering Mexico changed their legal status and at least a few of them attempted to take advantage of Mexico's complicated and ever changing legislation to secure their freedom. Tomás Maque, for example, petitioned on behalf of himself and several other slaves, requesting that they be set free because they surpassed the maximum age (fifty years) that Mexican law permitted one to be enslaved. Evidently having failed, Maque appealed to Mexican courts again two years later in an attempt to obtain his freedom. He claimed that his former owner was deceased and, being that he was on Mexican soil, this made him a free man. The courts agreed on the grounds that "his master Elias Loyd is dead and died in the prison in Rapid, Louisiana one of the Northern states." The alcalde of Béxar thus declared Macque "totally free," that "he

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<sup>281</sup> Richard Ellis to SFA, 30 January 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 328-29.

may circulate freely outside of the slavery in which he was held” and “enjoy the rights of freedom that the State Constitution provides for all Mexicans.”<sup>282</sup>

A similar case occurred in April of that same year when Peter, a former slave from Austin’s colony escaped to San Antonio with his son in search of freedom. Peter and his son Tom appealed to the alcalde of San Antonio, demanding their “protection” and “claiming the laws that favor them.” According to the alcalde, Peter “demanded that he and his son be declared free and that the declaration of freedom be extended to include the rest of his family that was still held by his owner.” The fact that slaves were aware of Mexico’s tenuous support of slavery and figured that they could appeal to Mexican federal law to obtain their freedom, no matter what the circumstances, must have been extremely disconcerting to Texan slaveholders.<sup>283</sup>

But what was at least as disconcerting to Mexican authorities was the way in which Peter’s master reacted by entering San Antonio and kidnapping the men before the courts could determine their status. The offense evidently enraged Músquiz who, despite his own support for slavery and personal experience growing up in a household with slaves, was incensed at the settlers’ disregard for Mexican authority. “[S]candalized by the audacity with which [B]rown and his criminal companions have violated the law, have scoffed at the enforcing authorities, and have grossly sneered at public punishment,”

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<sup>282</sup> 25 May 1830, “Thomas Maque,” 15 December 1832, Béxar Archives.

<sup>283</sup> “Peter,” 23 May 1832, Béxar Archives.

he ordered the immediate pursuit and arrest of the kidnappers.<sup>284</sup> Furthermore, Músquiz argued that

The crime committed by [Henry] Brown and his accomplice is of such a nature and scope that it tramples over the laws of a hospitable country that has received them in her bosom regarding them as adoptive sons, and they return the favour by making a mockery out of the authorities charged with preserving the security of this town and of the entire department.<sup>285</sup>

Although instances like these were extremely rare, they did illuminate the tension that emerged between some immigrants' status as slaveholders and their Mexican citizenship.

Perhaps due to this very tension, Austin himself expressed reservations about slavery even as he worked tirelessly to guarantee its safe presence in Texas. His primary concern, however, had to do with what slavery might mean for the racial future of the region. "The idea of seeing such a country as this overrun by a slave population almost makes me weep –," he wrote to Richard Ellis, expressing an opposition that had more to do with slavery's deleterious effects on whites. "It is in vain to tell a North American that the white population will be destroyed some fifty or eighty years hence by the negroes, and that his daughters will be violated and butchered by them." In this regard, Austin's opposition to the institution was far more Jeffersonian than abolitionist. He acknowledged the pragmatic necessity of slavery to establishing the colony. "[I]n the

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<sup>284</sup> Ramon Músquiz to the Governor of the State, 3 June 1832, "Government Records," John W. Smith Papers, Folder 312, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio.

<sup>285</sup> For more on Músquiz, his view of Texas slaveholders and the case of Peter specifically see Andrés Reséndez, "Ramon Músquiz: The Ultimate Insider," Jesus F. de la Teja ed. *Tejano Leadership in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas*, (Texas A&M Press: College Station, 2010), 129-45, Músquiz quoted on page 136.

beginning of this settlement I was compelled to hold out the idea that slavery would be tolerated, and I succeeded in getting it tolerated for a while by the Gov't." Yet, he clarified that he had done so "to get started for otherwise it would have been next to impossible to have started at all."<sup>286</sup> But Austin ultimately feared the consequences that it would render, especially as Mexico and its laws emboldened Texan slaves.

Austin, however, primarily embraced Mexico's anti-slavery policy because of what it meant for the political future of Texas, which he hoped to maintain as untouched by federal authority as possible – especially that of the United States of the North. "Slavery is now most positively prohibited by our Constitution and by a number of laws, and I do hope it may always be so." If slavery is admitted, he argued, "Texas will become what all slave countries are and of necessity must be[,] destitute of physical force and dependent on some other power even for the preservation of its internal tranquility." Ultimately, Austin knew that admitting slavery would drag it ever closer to the United States of the North, where it was, for the time being, constitutionally protected. Slavery, as Austin well knew, could not survive under state exemption alone, it had to have a large and strong federal structure to support it, which simply did not exist in Mexico and most likely never would. While slavery would no doubt make Texas economically productive and independent within Mexico, he feared that it would draw it ever closer to the political and cultural embrace of the North.

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<sup>286</sup> SFA to Richard Ellis, 16 June 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 421-23.

Things worsened for the prospects of both slavery and immigration in the spring of 1830, when the liberal Guerrero regime was overthrown by conservative centrist Anastacio Bustamante. Concerned that the growth of slavery in the north was drawing the region closer to the United States, one of Bustamante's first acts was issuing a decree which prohibited further immigration from the United States all together. Conceding that emancipation would not help national security, the decree allowed settlers to keep their slaves in bondage but insisted on strict enforcement of rules forbidding their importation. Meanwhile, immigrants continued to sprinkle in, some of them bringing slaves with them, thereby violating the law twice.<sup>287</sup>

Yet Austin continued to see Texas' promise resting with Mexico, not the US. He thus continued to insist that all slaves were technically free once they entered Mexico. In a separate letter to Ellis, he wrote, "I am of the opinion that Texas will never become a Slave state or country. I will be candid with you on this point, and say that I hope it never may." While Austin admitted his initial advocacy of slavery, he made clear that he looked forward to the day when it was no longer necessary in Texas. "In the commencement of this settlement I was in favour of the limited admission of slaves," he wrote, "My reasons were, the difficulty of procuring hands in the beginning for the necessary purposes of farming, and the necessary of holding out inducements that slaves might be brought, in order to give the settlement a start, and to draw emigration." However, he insisted that "The reasons for a partial toleration of this evil, have now

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<sup>287</sup> Campbell, 27-8.

ceased, and the true prosperity and happiness of Texas require; that an everlasting bar should now be interposed [on] the further introduction of slaves.”<sup>288</sup> Indeed, as late as June of 1830, Austin was still insisting that Texas resist becoming a slave state, remaining in accordance with Mexican federal policy. “Article 13 of the constitution has determined the question regarding slaves and there is no doubt that we neither can nor should introduce a slave class,” he wrote, although they were permitted to bring in “domestic servants and some field workers.” Those that they introduced, would eventually gain emancipation in conformance with the article, he explained. “Now that I better understand the law, it does not appear a bad one,” Austin concluded, “The prospect of politics offer hope for peace and union throughout the nation.”<sup>289</sup>

He expressed satisfaction that Mexico’s debt peonage laws were sufficient to meet Texas’ labor needs and, significantly, an element of optimism about what the state’s acceptance of such would mean for the overall cohesion of the republic. After having worked to gain Texas an exemption from Mexican federal law so as to continue to attract the demographic of settlers that he wanted for the country, Austin would never abandon his fundamental aim of seeing Texas remain a country free of slaves. Slavery had been a “necessary” and temporary evil that he now hoped would be replaced by a system of indentured servitude that was not only less severe but more in line with the Mexican federal constitution. Yet even as he called for an end to slavery, Austin made it clear that

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<sup>288</sup> SFA to Richard Ellis, 16 June 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 421-23.

<sup>289</sup> SFA to Piedras, 28 June 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 431-32.



Texas was to be a white man's republic. He was happy to report that "Measures have been taken to exclude free negroes and mulattoes" whom he called a "worse nuisance than slaves." If Texas was prudently managed, he argued, it would "be saved from the overwhelming ruin which mathematical demonstration declares must overtake the slave state." He even predicted that Mexico might serve as a kind of refuge for the white population of the North from the demographic effects of slavery, so that white Americans might not be "driven to the frozen regions of the north."<sup>290</sup> If anything, Austin envisioned Texas as a haven from slavery, not an extension of it. Fear of the racial consequences of slavery loomed large in Austin's mind as it did for many American southerners, especially in light of the Haitian Revolution. "I sometimes shudder at the consequences and think that a large part [of] America will be Santo Domingized in 100, or 200 years," he wrote in a separate letter, "The wishes of my colonists have hurried me into this thing – but I am now in for the question and there is no retreat, for my rule is to go ahead after once coming to a decisive resolution on a matter of such consequence as this."<sup>291</sup>

However, prospective immigrants, particularly of the type that Austin wished to recruit, could not be so easily convinced to abandon the only system of forced labor they had ever known and the only one that allowed them the power and control that they felt they needed to secure their workforce. Samuel Rhodes Fisher, who immigrated to Texas

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<sup>290</sup> SFA to Richard Ellis, 16 June 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 421-23.

<sup>291</sup> SFA to SMW, 16 April 1831, *AP*, Vol. II, 645-47.

in 1830 and eventually settling in Matagorda, stated that he, like Austin, “detest[ed] Slavery,” but was nonetheless “firmly persuaded that the free admission of slaves into the State of Texas, authorized by act of our legislature, would tend more to the rapid introduction of respectable emigrants than any other course which could be pursued.” Fisher also seemed less convinced that the kind of southern style agriculture that they hoped to introduce to Texas could be as readily accomplished with any other kind of compulsive labor. “Our rice and sugar lands require that kind of labour [slavery]” he wrote. Yet even Fisher called for nothing more than “a temporary introduction of slaves,” and limiting “the period of admission to 5 years, or to any other number that you deem expedient.”<sup>292</sup> Indeed it appears that most colonists were slightly less eager to let go of slavery than Austin himself was, even if they agreed on its ultimate undesirability. “[Th]at you are in favor of a free population is no surprise to me, believing that every reflecting man of equal intelligence must be so,” he wrote, “but I was not prepared to know that your determination was so decided as you have expressed it at the *present juncture*.” Fisher, who was from Pennsylvania, reminded Austin that “[M]ost of your colonists are from Slave-holding States – they have enrolled themselves in your register under the firm conviction that slavery would be tolerated, and that they would be secure in the ownership of those brought by them.” Texas was rapidly becoming “southernized,” but it would be hard to achieve a southern economy without southern style labor. “From your proximity to the southern states, and from the favorable

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<sup>292</sup> S. Rhoads Fisher to SFA, 14 August 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 462-65.

feeling already pervading her citizens, Texas may fairly anticipate a population from that quarter, more speedy and more numerous than from the northern and Eastern,” Fisher wrote, “[D]o you believe that cane and cotton can be grown to advantage by a spare white population?” he asked Austin pointedly. But as far as he knew, “there is no country in the world where these articles are grown unless by the assistance of Slaves.”<sup>293</sup>

Texas therefore had two options - “we must either abandon the finest portion of Texas to its original uselessness or submit to the acknowledged, but lesser evil of Slavery.” Fisher proposed allowing admission of slaves for five years after which point “the law of permission be then repealed and one substituted, making their introduction under any pretense *highly penal*.”<sup>294</sup> As much as Fisher did not like slavery, he insisted it was a temporary evil that Texas had to adopt for at least its first few years. Indeed, in his correspondence with Mexican officials, just as he had in letters to his fellow colonists, Austin insisted that Texas ultimately did not need slavery to thrive. In a December 1830 letter to Piedras, Austin wrote that “there should be no change in the law nor article 13 of the state constitution and slaves should be converted to free persons from the moment that they enter the territory . . . it appears to me that all negroes are servants and cannot be anything else, and they should be admitted as such.”<sup>295</sup>

As Austin continued to declare his commitment to a “free” Texas, Mexican officials remained more concerned with the unity and cohesion of their young republic

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<sup>293</sup> S Rhoads Fisher to SFA, 23 August 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 469-71.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> SFA to Piedras, 7 December 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 551-52.

than ensuring slavery remain outlawed. “[R]egarding the introduction of slaves,” wrote Terán, “my opinion is that if they are allowed in Texas they need to be permitted in all the states that have coasts and require much labor to cultivate, otherwise it is a privilege.” Dismissing the claims that Texans faced inordinate obstacles in the establishment of their economy, Terán cautioned patience. “[T]he admission of slavery would undoubtedly rapidly augment the production of Mexican coasts,” he admitted. But it would also “bring with it a means of promoting that which no country wants to use the government to prevent,” Terán wrote, most likely referring to slave insurrection and the likely need for a large central military to suppress it.<sup>296</sup> While Terán acknowledged slavery’s undeniable benefits to developing the region, he, like Austin, feared its consequences. Yet his primary concern remained national cohesion. “[S]lavery should be permitted in all the states along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico; if one is allowed then they all should; and vice-versa,” he wrote in 1831, as Mexico was facing serious social and political turmoil surrounding the competition between federalists and centralists. “I am persuaded that sooner or later slaves will be admitted, for this I am convinced that the coasts of Mexico will not prosper without them.” However, in this time of “political convulsions,” Terán believed that “there should be no question of this topic.”<sup>297</sup>

Thus, the desires of the early colonists and some national officials in Mexico City were by 1831 not so far apart. Both acknowledged the benefits and risks of slavery, and

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<sup>296</sup> Teran to SFA, March 1831, *AP*, Vol. II, 635-36.

<sup>297</sup> Teran to SFA, 3 April 1831, *AP*, Vol. II, 639-41 .

both parties wanted to, above all, secure and preserve Mexican peace and unity. While pretty much everyone agreed that Mexico needed some form of compulsive labor, they could not readily agree on which one, and by the middle of 1831 the question was still unresolved. “Negreos can be brought here under indentures, as servants, but *not as slaves*,” wrote Austin, “This question of slavery is a difficult one to get on with. It will ultimately be admitted, or the free negroes will be formed by law into a separate and distinct class – *the laboring class*.” Whatever their technical status, he argued, “The law must assign their station, fix their rights and their disabilities and obligations – something between slavery and freedom, but neither the one nor the other. . . Which is best? Quién Sabe? It is a difficult and *dark* question.”<sup>298</sup>

Uncertainty regarding the future of slavery, however, inspired anxiety among many prospective immigrants, especially when the state of Coahuila y T ejas issued a decree in April 1832 stating that all “servants and day laborers” thereafter introduced by foreigners would remain slaves for no more than ten years after their entry. More than established religion, time and again prospective immigrants expressed concern about Mexico’s commitment to abolition and what it would mean for prosperity and success in their adopted country. Even as they praised Mexico for its abundance of natural resources, economic opportunities, and superior political system, they seemed to believe that only slavery could render the fruits of such opportunity. Richard Ellis of Tecumsia, Alabama, for example, did not mince words when it came to admiration for Mexico and

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<sup>298</sup> SFA to Mary Holley Austin, 19 July 1831, *AP*, Vol. II, 674-77.

what it had to offer, from its natural resources to its government. “[I]ndeed frankness and candor impels me not to withhold from you the expressions of the opinions and thoughts that have so repeatedly obtruded themselves on my mind,” he wrote, “(that is) that every family ought to bless his happy star that conduced him to a country blessed with the finest soil in North America, with plenty, health, peace and happiness.” Ellis expressed his certainty that “if they act wisely (as I hope and trust they will) they will foster and cherish the Government they live in, which will be the certain means of preserving their estimable rights” and “sure protection of their property.” Ellis confirmed that conditions were every bit as bleak in his part of the United States as they had been when the Austins first established themselves in Mexico, “there are hundreds of thousands of families who do not own a foot of land nor do they have any hope of ever doing so.” Yet he believed that the success and happiness of these families in Mexico ultimately depended on their ability to protect the property they had – especially their property in slaves.

[I]n short time since my arrival at home I have ascertained beyond question that 40 or 50 families would emigrate with me next fall to your country if they could introduce their slaves, many of them are large holders of that description of property; and I consider it a duty I owe myself as well as you to assure you that I should move to your country next fall if I can with safety bring mine.<sup>299</sup>

Ellis concluded by assuring Austin that “I feel a deep interest in the prosperity of your country.” For many slaveholders, their decision to immigrate to Mexico was ultimately dependent on their ability to bring and keep their human property. “Our most valuable

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<sup>299</sup> John Brown to SFA, 17 April 1833, *AP*, Vol. II, 950.

inhabitants here are our own negroes,” wrote another prospective immigrant from Alabama, “They are an important species of property here and our planters are not willing to remove without they can first be assured of being secured to them by the laws of our Government.”<sup>300</sup> Even as they showed some flexibility when it came to religion, this was less the case with slavery. “The most interesting subjects to the people here [appear] to be that of Slavery and Religion,” wrote another gentleman, “the latter being a constitutional matter I have no expectation of as early a change[.] But would like to know what is the present state or prospect relative to the admission of slavery.”<sup>301</sup> Another one of Austin’s associates then in the North wrote, “Nothing appears at present, to prevent apportion of our wealthy planters from emigrating immediately to the province of Texas but the uncertainty now prevailing with regard to the subject of slavery.”<sup>302</sup>

Yet, despite their uncertainty, settlers continued to come to Texas. By 1834, on the eve of the Texas Revolution, slaves would constitute about 10% of the overall population - approximately 2,000 individuals - over four times their number in 1825. Almost all of the slaves in Texas were in the Anglo municipalities, although some tejanos owned them as well.<sup>303</sup> However, throughout the early part of the 1830’s, the fate of slavery, and consequently the future of Anglo immigration to Texas, hung in the cross hairs. But slavery was just one issue that Mexican leaders had to grapple with as they

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<sup>300</sup> Charles Douglas to SFA, 15 February 1825, *AP*, Vol. II, 1046-49.

<sup>301</sup> Richard R. Royall to SFA, 23 August 1825, *AP*, Vol. II, 1183-85.

<sup>302</sup> James Phelps to SFA, 16 January 1825, *AP*, Vol. II, Part II, 1020-21.

<sup>303</sup> Juan N. Almonte, “Statistical report on Texas, 1835,” trans. Carlos E Castaneda, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXVIII (1925), 177-222.

struggled to integrate and modernize their sprawling young republic, especially their sparsely populated and still underdeveloped northern frontier, which it seemed everyday was drifting more and more out of its grasp.



**CHAPTER 4**  
**“The Strongest Arm of the Mexican Republic”**  
**Commerce, Culture and the Challenge of National Consolidation**  
**1828-1833**

In April 1828 Mexican General Manuel Mier y Terán arrived in San Antonio de Béxar as head of a Boundary Commission appointed by the new administration of Vicente Guerrero to assess and document conditions in Mexico’s Far North. Of particular concern among Mexico’s leaders was their nation’s security along its border with the United States, particularly in light of the growing number of Anglo-American settlers and recent efforts by the US to purchase the region. Among the questions Terán was hoping to address: How effective was the empresario program at populating the region with loyal and productive Mexican citizens from the North? How many were actually there legally and how many were simply squatting? Most important, to what extent did their presence threaten Mexico’s territorial integrity? Leaders in Mexico City were growing increasingly wary of US territorial encroachment and many believed Anglo-American settlers were part of that country’s plan to dominate and eventually acquire a significant portion of Mexican territory.

Their suspicions were understandable. The United States had just elected a president with a demonstrated desire to acquire, as he put it, “all of Spanish North America.” The first sign of this intent had occurred in 1818 when Jackson drove US forces into Florida as part of a plan to jumpstart stalled negotiations between that country

and Spain over the western boundary of Louisiana. Emboldened by Jackson, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams had briefly attempted to convince the Spanish to surrender the entire northwest corner of their empire, thereby permitting the United States to extend its reach all the way to the Pacific. Jackson would ultimately surrender his ambitions for the guarantee of Florida, which he believed was essential to the protection of his country's new southern boundary, and whose transference might be jeopardized by a push for too much. But he would never forget Texas, and almost as soon as he entered the White House, Old Hickory began scheming of ways to regain the territory. Meanwhile, the Spanish and their Mexican successors would never forget General "Andrés" Jackson whose recent election had them gravely concerned. Caught in the middle of the growing tension between Mexican and US authorities were Anglo-Texans themselves, whose growing presence in T<sup>e</sup>jas began to look more and more suspicious to men like Terán.<sup>304</sup>

Meanwhile, Mexico was entering a fragile political phase as its experiment in radical federalism began to falter. Years after achieving independence, the young republic remained bankrupt, and still struggled to restore basic communication and transportation. Travel was slow and cumbersome - roads plagued by bandits and thieves, bridges impassible. Wartime damage throughout the country remained unaddressed. At the heart of Mexico's turmoil was an intense political struggle between those committed

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<sup>304</sup> For Jackson's interest in Texas see Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 305-07, 378-398, quote p. 305.

to the realization of its federalist promise and those who insisted that a more centralized form of government was necessary to achieve a functional and modern nation state.<sup>305</sup>

The struggle between the centralists and federalists played out in a series of coups between 1829 and 1835. The first of these occurred in January 1829 when Congress annulled the election of Gómez Pedrasa and recognized Vicente Guerrero, a federalist. It was Guerrero's regime that sent Terán north to draw and develop a plan for fortifying the boundary line first agreed to under the Adams-Onís Treaty. Specifically, he was to document conditions on the frontier and develop a prescription for bringing the region into the national fold. Until this point, leaders in Mexico City had only vague notions of the Far North. Few had ever been there. In fact, this was Terán's first time travelling so far from his nation's capital, for the one exception of Europe.<sup>306</sup>

What the General encountered in the north was both unfamiliar and unnerving. As the Mexican economy worsened after independence, the United States economy had flourished, drawing Texans, both Mexican and tejano, into the orbit of its burgeoning market revolution, so that by 1826 Texas was importing most of its necessities from the United States. Anglo settlers, and only a handful of tejanos, dominated a trade network

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<sup>305</sup> Christon I. Archer, "Fashioning a New Nation," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. by William H. Beezly and Michael C. Meyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 285-318. Archer writes that "From the interior to the borderlands and within each sector of the population, the independence wars had left the new nation driven by violence, political clashes between those who supported centralized and decentralized forms of government, and incessant controversies over the power to hold the land, tax the people, and wield district or regional demand," 304.

<sup>306</sup> Jack Jackson, "Introduction" to *The Diary Kept By General Manuel Mier y Terán on His 1828 Inspection of Texas*, (Austin: University of Texas, 2000), 1-14; Archer, 327-8.

that threatened to pull the Mexican frontier ever closer to the US. Texans, whether Mexican or Anglo, relied on the North for nearly everything from food to arms.<sup>307</sup>

But this was not the only thing that threatened Mexico's grasp on the northern frontier. Mexican villages experienced an intensification of Indian raids during this time as various nomadic groups began to cash in on the inflow of goods, namely livestock and arms. Indeed, while Mexican leaders blamed much of this violence on increased trade with the US and attempted to regulate and limit it, they came into conflict with local leaders who insisted that the inflow of such goods was necessary to both their survival and self-defense, thereby fueling the disagreement between the northern states and Mexico City over how best to police and protect the border.<sup>308</sup>

Indeed, by 1828 the Mexican North appeared an almost separate nation to an elite creole from the nation's capital. Yet, despite historians' tendency to echo the views of Mexican national leaders in seeing the Anglo presence, and specifically their trade with the north, as critically compromising northern Mexico's relationship with the rest of the country, it is important to acknowledge that many Anglos and tejanos themselves understood it very differently. They understood their trade with the north as a critical

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<sup>307</sup> Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier, Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Chapter 3, quote p. 96; D.W. Meinig, *Imperial Texas: An Interpretive Essay in Cultural Geography* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1969), 23-37. For their reliance on the US for arms see Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousands Deserts: Indian Raids and the US-Mexican War*, (Yale University Press, 2008), Chapter 3.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.* DeLay argues that this trade had been going since the eighteenth century, but became intensified in the 1830's with the increased arrival of settler from the United States. Like Reséndez, he argues that it compromised Anglo-American settlers' relationship with Mexico.

part of the Mexican nation-building project. Far from compromising their young republic, they believed it would enrich Mexico, fueling its infrastructure and strengthening its domestic economy. Just as historians of the US empire have long identified agrarians as the driving force behind antebellum imperialism and industrialization, those who immigrated to Texas were often the most vocal advocates for Mexican imperialism and development.<sup>309</sup> While they may have continued an almost exclusive trade with the United States, they attempted to strengthen their ties with the Mexican interior and saw their efforts as complementing Mexican nationalist aims, not impeding them. Far from drawing Texas closer to the US, they aimed to make it a continental crossroads, linking the American South with northern Mexico, in a way that would make it “the strongest arm of the Mexican republic.”<sup>310</sup>

Their actions, however, often had precisely the opposite effect. As historians have observed, the more Texans pushed the commercial confines of their adoptive nation, the harder it became to keep them within the nationalist fold, especially at a time when Mexico’s central government remained so weak. And the more the federal government attempted to remedy this through importation tariffs and immigration regulation, the more they threatened to alienate those colonists even more. Even as Austin and his allies aimed to help federal officials in their efforts to consolidate and control the sprawling new republic, they decried the federal government’s efforts to regulate trade and police

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<sup>309</sup> William Appleman Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire: A study of the Growth and Shaping of Social Consciousness in a Marketplace Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 49-65.

<sup>310</sup> J. Child to SFA, 26 January 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 323-25.

the frontier as a violation of the very federalist promise that had attracted them in the first place. They wanted Mexico to become stronger, wealthier and more consolidated, but on their terms.

Meanwhile, as more and more US immigrants began flooding into Texas, a generational rift emerged among the settlers there. Whereas earlier settlers such as Austin, Kuykendall, Williams and Ingram were primarily drawn to Mexico for its political promise, a later generation, most arriving after 1830, entered the nation at a time of profound political instability and chaos. This newer cohort did not know Mexico as the federalist Promised Land that their forbears had, nor did they have the same opportunity to familiarize themselves with the country, its people and culture. Therefore, they demonstrated far less faith in the Mexican political process, and their political purview was far more local and less national.

Further north, an increasingly territorially aggressive pro-slavery southern contingency began to cast their eyes on Texas, seeing its absorption as an appropriate extension of their own power. Thus, by 1832, Texas rested strategically, though precariously, at the center of a much larger and more or less coherent geo-political unit committed to regional sovereignty, small central government, free trade and forced labor that struggled, and threatened, to become the most prosperous region in the northwestern hemisphere.

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There were few men in Mexico more qualified to undertake an administrative tour of the Mexican frontier than General Manuel Mier y Terán. The thirty-six year old was a graduate of the National College of Mines, an accomplished mathematician and engineer with a strong interest in the natural sciences. He was a veteran of the war for independence and former member of the nation's first congress before serving as Mexico's Minister of War. When he was not compiling extensive reports on Texas' natural resources and geography, Terán kept a diary where he documented not only those physical aspects of Texas that impressed him, but the culture and habits of the Texans themselves.<sup>311</sup>

Regarding the tejanos, the General described a group of people whose geographic and cultural isolation from the nation's core kept them in a state of stunted civic development, while their exposure to Anglo immigrants rendered them particularly vulnerable to the cultural and commercial influence of the North. "Ciudad de Béxar resembles a large village more than the municipal seat of a department," he wrote, "There is no paved street and no public building." Meanwhile, trade with the norteamericanos, "and the blending in to some degree of their customs" made tejanos "a little different from the Mexicans of the interior whom those in Texas call foreigners and whom they scarcely like because of the superiority which they recognize in them." Tejanos exhibited a kind of hybrid culture which extended to food, dress and even behavior. Terán

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<sup>311</sup> Jack Jackson, Introduction to *Texas by Terán: The Diary Kept by General Manuel Mier y Terán* (Austin: University of Texas, 2000).

observed, for example, that “In their gatherings, the women prefer to dress in the style of Louisiana, and by so doing they participate both in the customs of their neighboring nation and of their own.” Indeed, the prolonged presence of Anglo immigrants in the North drew tejanos closer to American culture and customs while placing a strain on relations with their compatriots in central Mexico, who often perceived them as poor, lazy, and unsophisticated. The further Terán traveled from the nation’s interior, the less Mexican the Mexicans seemed and, at least in his view, the worse for it. Terán saved his most ardent criticisms for those Mexicans near Nacogdoches who, by this time, composed an extreme minority – one in ten – and where Mexican influence was “almost non-existent.” He bemoaned that

the Mexicans of this town consist of what people everywhere call the abject class, the poorest and most ignorant. The North Americans residing in the town run the English school and send their children North for their education, the poor Mexicans neither have the resources to create schools, nor is there anyone to think improving their institutions and their abject conditions.

Particularly discouraging was their lack of work ethic. While he may have saved his most extreme criticism for the Nacogdoches Mexicans, Terán observed tejanos generally to be “carefree” and “very fond of luxury, and the worst punishment that can be inflicted upon them is work.” He criticized the Mexican women of Texas for their indelicacy, noting that “Their very language seems almost to forbid the cultivation of this most beautiful of the Graces,” and the men for being “not well formed in feature or person” and “extremely ignorant in all the advanced arts of civilization, the majority not being able to read.” As a



result, they were “completely the slaves of Popish superstition and despotism [being] distinguished for the knavery and breach of faith.”<sup>312</sup>

On its surface, Terán’s reaction may appear merely the snobbish impressions of a metropole, but the General had practical concerns about what tejanos’ indolence, backwardness and lack of integration meant for the wellbeing and integrity of his country, especially considering how advanced the Anglo population seemed in comparison. The tejano “agricultural industry,” he wrote, “is so wretched that a monopoly over them by the American colonies founded in this department is to be feared.” Tejanos, according to Terán, could not “vie in any respect with those industrious colonists, much more hard working than they.” Upon seeing their agricultural tools, one would have believed “oneself to have gone ten centuries backwards in the elementary and necessary arts.”<sup>313</sup>

Specifically, Terán feared that their inadequacy might be just as evident to Anglo settlers, thereby contributing to their lack of respect for the nation as a whole. “Senor President, I must disturb you in the same way I was disturbed to see the foreign colonists’ attitude towards our nation,” Terán wrote to President Guerrero, “Most of them, with the exception of a few who have travelled to our capital, knowing no Mexicans other than those who live here . . . think that Mexico consists of nothing more than blacks and Indians, all of them ignorant.” An educated, cosmopolitan like Terán hardly seemed

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<sup>312</sup> General Manuel Mier y Terán, *Diary*, 17, 97, 103.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*,

Mexican at all compared to his northern brethren. “In some homes, where they have done me the favor of considering me an educated man, they have told me to my face that it could not be so unless I were French or Spanish.”<sup>314</sup>

Such experiences must have been both humiliating and disconcerting for a proud Mexican nationalist like Terán. Not insignificantly, however, he noted one exception: “This should not be understood as applying to the colony of Don Estében Austin, the only one where they try to understand and obey the laws of the country, and where, as a result of the enlightenment and integrity of its empresario, they have a notion of our republic and its government.”<sup>315</sup> It was in Austin’s colony that Terán was greeted by a woman and her daughter who “spoke Spanish well enough to be understood in conversation.”<sup>316</sup> They lived on a farm owned and operated by the woman’s husband, then in the United States on business. Unfortunately for Terán and others who wished to tighten the federal government’s grasp on the frontier and make a more cohesive nation, colonists like these were becoming less the norm, overwhelmed by more recent arrivals from the North who settled closer to the Sabine, remained unaffiliated with any empresario, and therefore had limited formal connection to Mexico. “This country is the asylum for fugitives from the

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<sup>314</sup> Terán to President of Mexico, 30 June 1828, *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> Terán, *Diary.*, 53.

neighboring republic,” complained Terán, “Foreign agriculturalists settle where it suits them, and they take over whatever land they desire.”<sup>317</sup>

As part of their effort to strengthen their hold on the frontier, Mexican leaders hoped to develop the region’s agricultural economy, something that, by Terán’s own admission, seemed to require an Anglo presence. Most Mexicans, at least as far as he could tell, seemed loath to become farmers. “More than a century after it was colonized the region remains static, and it will never be covered with fields except in more active and hard-working hands. What surer wealth than the products of a flourishing agriculture?”<sup>318</sup> Terán rarely acknowledged the role that decades of Indian depredations surely played in impairing agricultural development, or the fact that even Anglo settlers believed it all but impossible to cultivate the land without the aid of slave labor.

But what Terán did acknowledge was that his country seemed to face a quandary. He and other national leaders wanted to see Mexico’s frontier settled and developed in a way that only foreigners seemed capable of. Yet, no matter how much credit Terán seemed willing to give Anglo settlers for their contribution to Mexico’s agro-economy, he simply could not take their allegiance to Mexico seriously, especially in light of the Fredonian Rebellion. “If it is bad for a nation to have vacant lands and wilderness, it is worse without a doubt to have settlers who cannot abide by some of its laws and by the restrictions that [the nation] must place on commerce. They soon become discontented

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<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-5.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*,

and thus prone to rebellion,” he wrote, seemingly unconvinced that many of these settlers had in fact renounced their loyalty to the United States and declared it enthusiastically to Mexico. “[E]verything becomes graver still if those people have strong and indissoluble connections with a neighboring government.”<sup>319</sup> No matter where they lived or who they declared their allegiances to, as far as Terán was concerned, these were norteamericanos through and through. National identity was far more enduring and permanent to Terán than to someone like Austin. In some ways, Terán’s words should be expected from a member of the Mexican elite, educated in Europe, who had never ventured so far from his country’s interior. Yet, he believed enough in the imperial capacity of his young country to look forward to a day “not far off when the progress of a population such as Mexico’s will spread over its empty lands.” Furthermore, despite all his criticism of tejanos and blame he placed on them for their condition, Terán acknowledged that much of it had to do with the political incompetence of a past imperial regime, and took personal responsibility for improving his new nation in the future: “By now the Mexican settlers of T<sup>e</sup>jas would have settled a quarter of the wilderness, but their history since the time of their first settlements shows that they have suffered numerous misfortunes[,] most of which emanated from government mistakes.”<sup>320</sup> It was these past mistakes that Terán and his allies in Mexico City hoped to remedy, but the task was not an easy one given the shifting and often chaotic political climate of the early Mexican Republic.

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<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

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While the Mexican government was attempting to fortify the Sabine boundary, a couple thousand miles to the northeast Andrew Jackson, the newly elected US president, and his cabinet were plotting a way to push that boundary further south. Indeed, Terán's commission was in large part a reaction to the Jackson administration's recent attempt to purchase Texas, an attempt that only succeeded in raising Mexican suspicion and enmity. In many ways, Jackson's election was a response to precisely those impulses that had spawned US emigration to Mexico in the first place. He ran on a platform of "reform retrenchment and economy" in which he promised to end corruption and return the country to the ideals of the Founding Fathers. Jackson was also an ardent expansionist. Old Hickory had always regarded Texas as part of the Louisiana Purchase and acquiring it from Mexico was an early aim of his administration.<sup>321</sup>

Jackson rejected the notion of open and fluid borders on which the Texan colonists now depended, insisting instead that it was dangerous "to leave a foreign power in possession of heads of our leading branches of the great Mississippi." Like Henry Clay and many frontier leaders before him, Jackson firmly believed that Texas should be part of the United States, as such an acquisition was "necessary for the security of the great emporium of the west, neworleans." Furthermore, "the god of the universe has

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<sup>321</sup> Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy*, 218-19.

intended this great valley to belong to one nation,” by which, of course, he meant the US.<sup>322</sup>

Indeed, for someone like Austin, a man of the West who had long railed against eastern elitism and corruption, Jackson’s election was thrilling. “This day belongs most emphatically to the history of North America,” he wrote in a letter to his friend, one of the only times he ever mentioned US politics since settling in Mexico. “I am of opinion that his administration will in general be very popular and very advantageous to the nation,” he wrote in reference to Jackson’s 1828 tariff that favored western farmers by placing heavy duties on imported raw materials.<sup>323</sup> The dispute over export tariffs on cotton, one that would alienate Jackson’s southern base and lead to the nullification crisis, had not yet occurred. While Austin may have admired Jackson, his words represented a rare expression of interest in the political system of his native country. “I have taken no great interest in the election, tho I have no objection to see Jackson president – Your government is founded on the popular will,” his use of the pronoun revealing that he no longer considered himself a citizen of the North.<sup>324</sup>

Some expatriates had a far more critical view of the new administration. David G. Burnett, a close associate of Austin’s and himself an early settler, called the new

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<sup>322</sup> Jackson quoted in *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, 218.,

<sup>323</sup> SFA to W.C. Carr in Eugene C. Baker, ed., *The Austin Papers (AP)*, (US Government Printing Press: Washington DC, 1928) 4 March 1829, Vol. II, 177-79.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid*; For information on Jackson’s tariff see Remini, *Jackson and the Course of American Freedom.*, 137.

president “deplorably incompetent” and said that his cabinet was “the weakest and most inefficient that this government has ever seen.” He predicted that Van Buren and Calhoun, “will be like two dogs at the bone, pulling different ways and ever growling at each other,” and referred to the president’s “deplorable incompetency.” Of the others, he wrote “Ingham is a second rate man in all things but party zeal, and many believe he has an ‘itching palm’ - [B]ranch the North Carolinian is perhaps worthy of his state, famed for pitch and sweet potatoes – Eaton is probably the most obnoxious of the whole tribe.” However, like Austin, Burnet’s interest in the political state of his native country was minimal. He had renounced it long ago. “These political notions are not readily my own for you will readily imagine that I take little active interest in the strifes of the Country – being a Coahuilatexanian.”<sup>325</sup>

Furthermore, while Texans may have admired Jackson for his commitment to restoring the yeoman’s republic, many were yet unaware of his expansionist designs. When they finally did catch wind of them, they expressed anger and frustration. “They speak here of this matter [transference to the US] as one which in no wise concerns the present population of that country [Texas],” wrote Ira Ingram to another early immigrant during a trip to New Orleans, “– and in fact, as though those now in peaceful occupation of the country, have neither rights nor impartialities to be invaded or consulted, and like sheep and oxen, perfectly passive.” Ingram’s words make it clear that those who

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<sup>325</sup> David G. Burnet to SFA, 10 March 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 179-180.

advocated for US acquisition of Texas were not only profoundly out of step with the desires of Texans themselves, but demonstrated the same elitist disregard for popular opinion that had compelled so many to leave their country in the first place “I have frequently railed them on the subject of their national vanity,” Ingram continued, “and plainly told them in many instances that, altho’ it might suit them very well to regard the population of Texas in no other light than a degraded species of property, nevertheless, there are many among us who viewed the subject in a very different light.” Ingram’s words put the lie to this “national vanity” – the assumption that just about all people, but certainly former US citizens, would want to live under US dominion.<sup>326</sup>

As much as Austin initially relished in Jackson’s victory, he ardently opposed his foreign policy and remained as jaded as ever when it came to the ability of that government to serve his or other immigrants’ best interests. He termed transference to the US, the “greatest misfortune that could befall Texas” because it would throw immigrants “upon the liberality of the Congress of the united states of the north,” making theirs “a most forlorn hope.” Tragically, perhaps, Austin remained woefully unaware that the United States was in fact planning such an extension of its territory, having, as he put it, “too much confidence in the magnanimity of my native country to suppose that the government would resort to that mode of extending its already unwieldy frame over the

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<sup>326</sup> Ira Ingram to Samuel May Williams, March 1830, Ira Ingram Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Archives, San Antonio.



territory of its friend and sister republic.”<sup>327</sup> The notion that the United States would have little interest in extending its reach all the way to the Rio Grande for fear of making the republic too expansive to sustain was commonly held, especially in the northeast. The sectional split over this question was one that even Terán observed. “[T]he opinions of the north and the west of that nation are opposed,” he wrote, “That is, the commercial states want the population to be concentrated, limited to the nation’s land and vast resources. The states of the west, that is, the agricultural states, look to expansion into new and fertile country as the principal means of [promoting] their influence within the entire federation.”<sup>328</sup>

Indeed, in August 1829, only months after the Jackson administration had failed to convince the Mexicans to make the Rio Grande their northern boundary, foreign minister Joel Poinsett received instruction to propose a purchase of the far northern region known as T<sup>e</sup>jas. The President, with the help of Vice President Martin Van Buren, Henry Clay, and a free-wheeling South Carolina land speculator and former Mississippi legislator named Colonel Anthony Butler, hoped to convince them of the mutual benefit of a “natural border” between the two countries. Implicit within this proposal were a host of assumptions that ran directly counter to the sentiments that immigrants had articulated up to that point. The men argued that the US acquisition of Texas would eliminate “collisions” between two peoples of “conflicting laws, habits, and

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<sup>327</sup> SFA

<sup>328</sup> Terán to President of Mexico, 30 June 1828, *Diary*, 97.

interests.” Assuming that the Texans would favour the transfer, they argued that the failure of such a sale would encourage Texans to establish independence on their own, something that would weaken “the bonds of amity and good understanding” between the United States and Mexico.”<sup>329</sup> But when Poinsett presented the offer to Mexican officials they angrily dismissed him and called for his recall.

Jackson appointed Anthony Butler in his place, whom he instructed to proceed with negotiations for Texas. “The acquisition of that territory is becoming everyday an object of more importance to us,” Jackson wrote, “and if any reliance can be placed on the illiberal speculations which they already ascribe to us, in connection with it, a still stronger argument, for the cession can be based upon them.” In reference to the perceived Mexican suspicion that the United States already had troops stationed on the other side of the Sabine, “watching an opportunity for the conquest of that territory,” he wrote, “A conjecture so idle can only emanate from a consciousness of their weakness, and inability to assert their power in that province.” Jackson roundly misinterpreted both the Mexican leadership and the colonists themselves. He greeted Mexican accusations as an effort to “create a negotiation by which they hope to affect a transfer of the country, before the power of disposing of it, is lost by the course of a revolution.” In fact, the Mexican government neither wished to sell Texas, nor did Texans wish to see it sold. Nonetheless, Jackson believed he had devised the perfect plan to seduce Mexican leaders

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<sup>329</sup> Remini, *Jackson and the Course of American Freedom*, 219.

into surrendering the territory. “I scarcely ever knew a Spaniard who was not the slave of avarice,” he told Butler, “and *it is not improbable* that this *weakness* may be *worth a great deal to us, in this case.*”<sup>330</sup>

Not surprisingly, the renewed efforts were an abysmal failure. In addition to souring relations between Mexico and the United States, they threatened to sour relations between US immigrants and their adopted government. Despite Austin and other colonists renouncing US imperial aims towards Texas, it felt increasingly obvious to Mexican leaders that something had to be done to protect their fledgling nation from its increasingly aggressive northern neighbor. This fear was palpable in Terán’s summary letters to national leaders following his tour. “Forgive the amount of reading I have sent you,” he wrote to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs in July 1828, “but I wish to inform you right away about this country and not wait until the day I present my complete observations to the government, because [by then] the time to take corrective action will have passed.” Warning that “if timely measures are not taken, T<sup>é</sup>jas will pull down the entire federation,” Terán elaborated on this theory in his letter to the War Department. Yet, the primary evidence for his suspicions were not so much based on his observations of Texans themselves, as they were of T<sup>é</sup>jas’ geographic proximity to a nation with its own specific history of territorial aggression. “The department of Texas is contiguous to the most avid nation in the world,” he wrote, “The North Americans have conquered

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<sup>330</sup> AJ to Colonel Anthony Butler, 10 October 1829, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, ed. by John Spencer Bassett, (Washington DC: Carnegie Institute, 1929), Vol. 4, 79-81.

whatever territory adjoins them. In less than half a century they have become masters of extensive colonies which formerly belonged to Spain and France and of even more spacious territories from which have disappeared the former owners, the Indian tribes.”<sup>331</sup>

Yet their ability to do so, according to him, rested precisely in what he termed their “silent means,” - their practice of settling sparsely populated regions belonging to other powers, effectively paving the way for eventual acquisition by their own state. “Instead of armies, battles, or invasions – which make a great noise and for the most part are unsuccessful – these men lay hand on means that, if considered one by one would be rejected as slow, ineffective, and at times, palpably absurd.” Yet, there were “without a doubt, some of the most effective means of imperialism. Beginning with “adventurers and empresarios” who “take up their residence in the country, pretending that their location has no bearing upon the question of the government’s claim,” they then

develop an interest which complicates the political administration of the coveted territory; complaints, even threats, begin to be heard, working on the loyalty of the legitimate settlers, discrediting the efficiency of the existing authority and administration; and the matter having arrived at this stage – which is precisely that of Texas at this moment – diplomatic maneuvers begin<sup>332</sup>

Despite all their testaments of loyalty to Mexico, Terán saw the actions of US immigrants going hand-in-glove with the efforts of US imperialists.

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<sup>331</sup> Terán, *Diary*, 178

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

Terán wasted no time in addressing the threat of foreign incursion - misplaced as it may have been. First, he advised greater government authority on the frontier, including relocating Col. Bustamante to T<sup>e</sup>jas “because we need a person whom the foreigners respect.” Most controversial, however, was his recommendation that the government prohibit any more US immigrants from settling in the region. He made sure to specify, however, that established colonies like Austin’s, “should remain and be granted as much freedom as possible in the cultivation of the land, the sale of their products, and the importation of those [products] of prime necessity to them, according to their uses.” This should also entail enforcing a consistent and universal policy towards slavery. “If [the North Americans] are allowed to introduce slaves, the Mexicans of T<sup>e</sup>jas are also permitted to do so,” he wrote. Finally, Terán proposed reserving the eastern part of the state for settlement by ethnic Mexicans: “The transfer of five thousands Yucatecans, or a thousand families, to the banks of the Trinity River in the course of two years is the greatest and most beneficial enterprise for the [Mexican] federation.<sup>333</sup> Something else that the yucatecanos had in common with the Texans was a strained relationship with Mexico City. Indeed, just a decade later, Yucatán would present the same threat to Mexico that T<sup>e</sup>jas did. Such a recommendation reveals not only how out of touch Terán was from those Mexicans beyond his country’s core, but also the extent of anti-centralism throughout Mexico in the early nineteenth century and the challenge that Mexican national leaders faced in trying to hold their country together.

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<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

Terán concluded his letter by remarking on the population of Texas, one that had consistently impressed him as both distinct and peculiar – “a mixture of such strange and incoherent elements that no other like it exists in our entire federation,” among whom were “tribes of savages” and colonists who came from “another, more advanced society, better educated but also more malicious and mistrustful.” The foreigners were composed of “all kinds: fugitive criminals, honorable farmers, vagabonds, and ne’er do wells, laborers, etc.” who “all go about with their constitution in their pocket, demanding their rights, and the authorities and functionaries that it provides.”<sup>334</sup>

Terán could not help but reflect fondly on the pleasant escapism that T<sup>é</sup>jas afforded. As he set off on the next leg of his journey, he admitted he felt

an aversion that must be caused by the dismal situation at the center of my nation. It seems that I am seeing for the last time the tranquility hidden in this immense wilderness, and that I am denying myself this lone refuge in order to plunge into that abyss of passions that causes my country to groan.<sup>335</sup>

But such tranquility and serenity, of course, was the result of Texas’ profound isolation from the country’s chaotic center, an isolation that Terán knew challenged the very existence of his beloved country.

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<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

While Terán was attempting to fortify Mexico's political and territorial integrity, many northern Mexicans – both *tejano* and Anglo – were forging a vibrant transnational economy that depended on loose and fluid borders and aimed to link the deserts of the Mexican north with southern plantations and Caribbean ports. Terán himself observed that inhabitants of Austin's colony devoted “themselves to raising mules, with the idea of shipping them to the French and English Antilles. They say that Jamaica buys 5,000 mules a year.” But this was just the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps no one better articulated what Texas promised to contribute to Mexico's enrichment and development than J. Child who had helped Austin establish his colony and before that had participated in Mexico's war for independence. In 1830, claiming that Texas was “destined to become the strongest arm of the Mexican Republic,” Child called for greater government infrastructure to make his prediction possible. He envisioned “A military lookout post at Fort Bolívar” and “a trading establishment at the head of the navigation on the Buffalo Bayou connecting these establishments with [Austin's] town on this side[,] and securing the trade and attachment of the Indians and whites on the waters of the Trinity.” Child craved greater federal presence, not less. “With this view,” he continued, “let the Mexican government open a land office of San Felipe de Austin with full powers to make indefeasible complete grants of land to actual settlers for a price certain for any quantity not exceeding 640, or 1,000 acres.” Child encouraged greater settlement of both ethnic Mexicans and immigrants from the North, encouraging the government to “invite the Mexican in the interior to come down and settle in texas” and allow more “foreign

immigrants of good character and small capital with industrious habits to settle permanently among them.” If the Mexican government did all this, “my word for in three or four years, we will give a spur to commerce and agriculture, greatly enhancing the price of lands and creating the present drone like apathy that broods over those delightful regions into the busy drum of the beehive come May.”<sup>336</sup>

Settlers like Child in no way saw the steady stream of immigrants from the north and a growing trade with the United States as compromising their relationship with Mexico – quite the opposite. While historians have correctly observed that Texans engaged in a trade network that ultimately had little to do with the Mexican interior, they dreamt of one that would stretch from St. Louis to Chihuahua and from Santa Fe to Havana, making Texas the nexus of a hemispheric network, and contributing in no small part to the Mexican nation-building project. While Jackson envisioned Texas as a kind of frontier buffer for the United States, and Mexican leaders feared the same, Austin and other colonists saw it as a potentially integral and productive part of Mexico.<sup>337</sup>

The reality on the ground, however, was something very different. Throughout the late 1820’s, Texans, both Anglos and tejanos relied almost exclusively on trade with

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<sup>336</sup> J. Child to SFA, 26 January 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 323-25. This falls in line with Reséndez’s observation that, in contrast to national leaders, state and local leaders wanted a “harmonious community composed of different races but united in a common cause for prosperity,” *Changing National Identities*, p. 29.

<sup>337</sup> Reséndez writes that “The colonists imported everything from New Orleans, from house frames, china, and silver ware to shovels and cotton mills. Conversely, they shipped all the products obtained through their toils – primarily bales of cotton, but also cattle and furs – back to the Louisiana markets, thus closing a trading loop that had little to do with the rest of Mexico,” 38. Here I depart from Reséndez somewhat in arguing that although this transnational trade network did compromise northerners’ relationship with Mexico City.



the north. Anglo traders like Samuel May Williams served to benefit, as many tejanos came to rely on them for necessities. Williams had been among one of the first US immigrants to arrive in Texas in 1822 and by 1831 he owned over 4,800 acres of land. He had acquired fluency in Spanish and familiarity with Spanish American politics and culture from spending most of the 1810's in Buenos Aires, working for the city's merchant class. Williams rose to prominence by acting as one of Texas' chief traders with the North, supplying Texans with goods like food, seed and clothing. In January 1830, J.M. Ibarra wrote a letter to Williams requesting seed for his garden for which he aimed to acquire "from many places, the best plants and flowers that I could get" and hoped that, "through your helpful cooperation, I might be able to get plants and flower seeds from Baltimore." In concluding his letter, Ibarra requested that Williams "Give my regards and appreciation for his personality, to my friend Austin" before making one last request for "one pair of half boots of the best quality."<sup>338</sup>

Ethnic Mexicans were not merely the recipients of trade with the north. In San Antonio a group of tejano merchants emerged as well. Chief among them was José Casiano. Born in Genoa in 1791, Casiano established himself as a successful merchant in New Orleans before settling in Texas in 1820. The Casiano Family appear to have owned at least a handful of slaves and some members would later serve in the Army of

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<sup>338</sup> J.M. Ibarra to Samuel May Williams, 23 January 1830, Samuel May Williams Papers (SMWP), Rosenberg Library, Galveston.

the Confederate States. José acted as an interpreter and even helped initiate other tejanos into the Texas-US trade network.<sup>339</sup>

Some less savory characters emerged too. Col. Monroe Edwards, for example, a native of Kentucky, arrived in Texas in 1823. He soon became involved in a scheme to purchase slaves in Brazil, take them to Texas and then funnel them to the United States, thereby taking advantage of the increase in demands for slave labor caused by the North's recent ban on the Atlantic slave trade. It was individuals like this that had Mexican – and US – leaders concerned, as the two countries quickly began jostling for control of the region.<sup>340</sup>

Mexican leaders, however, feared that Texans' increasing commercial ties to the north threatened to draw the region ever closer to the United States' grasp. In an effort to limit and control this trade, the Mexican government placed an import tariff on most goods coming from the north, thus placing a considerable strain on Anglos and tejanos alike. Terán noted bexarenos' frustration with the tariff on northern flour "because in Béxar they eat bread from no other." Texans were also prevented from growing tobacco for sale to the US.<sup>341</sup> Texan leaders reacted by launching a series of appeals to state and federal leaders asking for exemption from the tariff on grounds that it was detrimental to

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<sup>339</sup> Casiano-Pérez Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Archives, San Antonio, TX; Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 99-100.

<sup>340</sup> Anonymous, *Life and Adventures of the Accomplished Forger and Swindler, Colonel Monroe Edwards* (Philadelphia, 1848) 1-36.

<sup>341</sup> Terán, *Diary*, 79.

Texan inhabitants who relied on basic items from the north. Austin insisted that for Texas to be “useful and rich by way of agriculture, it needs foreign exportation and commerce,” the former being “essential to the stimulation of agriculture.”<sup>342</sup>

He was careful, however, to make it clear that trade with the United States in no way compromised Texan ties to the rest of Mexico. Indeed, for Austin and other Texans, trade with the North coexisted with and in fact facilitated Texas’ integration with the rest of Mexico. In a petition to Terán, written June 30, 1828, Austin requested a formal exemption from the import tariff until 1835, permission to raise tobacco for export, and regulation of the coasting trade to permit Texas products in Mexican ports.<sup>343</sup>

While Mexican officials did grant permission for intra-state commerce, they did not have the resources to effectively establish and regulate ports like Galveston which remained closed for years after its establishment.<sup>344</sup> This prompted Austin on July 28, 1828 to issue yet another petition, this one for relief from the National Government’s prohibition against trade with unauthorized ports. Arguing that lifting restrictions on international trade “was to the greater agricultural good of the entire country,” Austin insisted that if his request was granted, Texas would surely become “a rich and important state for the great Mexican federation.” In one such letter to Anastacio Bustamante,

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<sup>342</sup> SFA to Mier y Terán, 24 May 1828, *AP*, Vol. II, 42-45.

<sup>343</sup> SFA to Terán, 23 June 1828, *AP*, Vol. II, 59-66.

<sup>344</sup> Gómez Pedrasa, 17 October 1825, SMWP.

Austin addressed the concerns of Mexican officials by expressing confidence that his colonists themselves would be able to guard the Texas coast against invasion.<sup>345</sup>

On September 8, 1828 Austin wrote directly to the president of Mexico himself for permission to introduce free of duty all articles for the consumption of his colony. He insisted that his suggestions “emanate from an ardent desire to see my country flourish,” and proceeded to explain how Texas’ cotton economy would serve Mexican leaders’ aims of developing and enriching their new republic, most specifically through the development of national infrastructure. “[T]he improvement of roadways and canals and the navigability of the rivers will improve in proportion to the wealth and prosperity of the people and the liberty of the Government of the United states [of Mexico],” he wrote in a letter to the Governor of Coahuila y T  jas. Austin dreamed of Coahuila y T  jas, Nueva Le  n, Tamaulipas and other northern states growing rich on cotton and tobacco production facilitated by “a roadway so first class from Saltillo to B  xar” and “steamboats” along the Rio Grande “carrying cotton and other products to the port of Matamoros.” Yet it was not just Mexico’s infrastructure that would improve. “[T]o promote cotton planting is to give encouragement to all branches of industry, and creates an article of exportation that is necessary to all foreign countries without expense.”<sup>346</sup>

He suggested that Mexico capitalize on the political troubles in the North, and the

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<sup>345</sup> Austin made a series of appeals to various Mexican officials for exemption from the tariff. SFA to Ter  n, 30 June 1828; SFA to Ram  n M  squiz, 28 July 1828; SFA to Ter  n, 20 September 1828, *AP*, Vol. II, 59-66, 78-80, 116-18.

<sup>346</sup> SFA to Governor Viesca, 16 February 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 168-72.

growing resentment between Britain and the United States over the 1828 tariff, by commencing a trade in cotton with the British. “In my opinion, cotton should be the principal product of exportation from Texas.”<sup>347</sup> Texas’ prosperity was intimately linked with that of the rest of Mexico. Cotton was a way to improve not just Texas, but the whole country.

Noting the detrimental effect that the federal trade prohibitions had on Texas, Terán wrote that “For all these reasons, the colonies here are considered to be in a state of discontent, and the empresarios in one of bankruptcy.”<sup>348</sup> Yet, immigrants continued to arrive even after the turning of the political tide in 1828. Furthermore, many of these immigrants, just like Austin, sought integration with the larger Mexican economy and society and, in at least a few cases, even employment by the Mexican government itself. In a letter to Austin written in August of 1828, Samuel Parkman inquired into all aspects of Texas geography and accessibility to the interior: “How far is your colony from the Gulf Coast? Is the country mountainous or level? How large are the rivers Colorado and Brazos? Do they in any considerable degree afford facilities for navigation?” and “What time is required to sail from your colony to the port nearest to the city of Mexico?” were only a few of his questions. After asking about the extent of Austin’s grant, Parkman then asked if the colony “and the country in general” was explored and surveyed. He volunteered himself as an assist in making a map of the country, stating that he was “a

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<sup>347</sup> SFA to Guerrero, 8 September 1828, *AP*, Vol. II, 99-102.

<sup>348</sup> Terán to President Guadalupe Victoria, 28 March 1828, *Diary*, 34.

surveyor and in that business would wish to be employed either in Texas or elsewhere in the Mexican provinces.” Just as much as religion or slavery, prospective settlers expressed interest in Texas’ geography, navigability and accessibility to the rest of Mexico. “I am aware that the number of my inquiries may intrude upon your leisure,” wrote Parkmen, “but you may rest assured that in giving me the desired information you will confer a very particular favor and not only on myself but a very considerable number of my acquaintances who have the idea of emigrating.”<sup>349</sup>

Despite the seemingly constant political chaos emanating from Mexico City, something that Terán often agonized over in his writings, it was the political instability and oppression that they experienced in the United States to which prospective US immigrants constantly referred. “You are already apprised on the unhappy state into which political schism has thrown our republic,” wrote Parkman, “in south Carolina open opposition is threatened to the tariff, yet “how far their threat will be carried into effect we have no idea.” As bleak as Mexico’s political prospects looked, to many the United States looked far worse. “I cannot but hope there is a redeeming spirit in the land which will counteract the effects of military deeds upon the deluded multitude,” Parkman wrote.<sup>350</sup>

Meanwhile, Austin used the opportunity to promote Texas to southern cotton producers. He may have complained bitterly about the import tariff to Mexican leaders,

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<sup>349</sup> Samuel Parkman to SFA, 1 August 1828, *AP*, Vol. II, 85-86.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*

but when he wrote to planters in the North who might consider relocating to Texas in order to escape the anti-southern tariffs in that country, he presented Mexican policies in a very different light. In July 1829, Austin wrote that the tax on imports “causes domestics to sell high and as the restrictive system appears to have become a part of the national policy, fair prospects may be calculated on for the manufacture of many years to come.”<sup>351</sup>

Austin also emphasized the superior climate that Texas offered - one that particularly lent itself to the production of southern crops. “It is true that our climate will not admit of coffee and cacao and other tropical productions,” he wrote, “[but] we can boast of the quality and abundance of our cotton crops and sugar and the other productions of Louisiana and Mississippi succeed very well.” Agriculture was not the only industry that Texas offered: “The pasturage or ‘range’ as we term it is certainly superior to anything I have ever seen in any country, and the facilities for raising cattle, mules, sheep and hogs etc. almost exceeds credibility.” Just as importantly, Texas’ location and terrain meant that growers and ranchers had ready access to Ports in the Caribbean, Europe and throughout Latin America, forgetting that many of these ports, principally Galveston, remained closed. “The facilities of interior navigation are considerable and susceptible of extensive improvements,” he admitted, but “no country is better adapted for the cheap construction of country roads.” It was true that “our harbors

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

will not admit vessels of the largest class,” but they were “sufficiently cheap for brigs and the smaller class of merchant ships.” Additionally, Texas appeared to be more healthful than dank overpopulated port cities like New Orleans. “The climate of Texas I deem to be decidedly superior in point of health and salubrity to the portion of north America at the same parallel,” he wrote, “I think that the practical experience of seven years justifies me in saying that the rivers of Texas are less liable to diseases than any river of the US below latitude 36”<sup>352</sup>

With their superior climate, strategic location and advantageous terrain, Texans made no secret of their hopes to replace the South as the leader in cotton trade and production in the Western Hemisphere. And the current political climate in the North suggested they might see their dream come true. “We shall next year be able to export a considerable amount of cotton and it is considered by many that if the “Tariff system” is continued by the Gov’t of the US a discrimination will be made by Great Britain in the article of cotton which will give to that of other countries a decided advantage over the United States.” Furthermore, with Mexico’s liberal land policy and immigrants’ exemption from taxation for the first seven years after their immigration, “the means of subsistence here can be raised cheaper and no capital of consequence can be required at least for several years to procure land.” Finally, “labor here will produce more than any part of the US within my knowledge.” Indeed, Texans relished at the first hint of

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<sup>352</sup> SFA to Emily Perry, 24, July 1828, *AP*, Vol. II, 76-77.



sectionalism that would eventually rip the United States apart. As southern planters writhed under the tariff, Texan planters basked in the rays of the comparatively liberal trade policies of their adopted government. When Austin did mention the state of Mexican politics, he remained cautiously optimistic. “Our government gets on very well, all things considered,” he wrote, “The federal system was an experiment and a very dangerous one for Mexico because their former habits and ideas as to political subjects.” Austin admitted that “there must be some collisions for a while, but good will grow out of them.”<sup>353</sup>

But the right climate and government were not all that Texas had going for it. Its strategic location, nestled in the northwestern corner of the Gulf of Mexico, accessible from both the interior of the US and Mexico, as well as the Caribbean, meant that Texas was poised to become the hub of a commercial empire that encompassed the entire hemisphere. This was in fact precisely Austin’s plan. “I have it in contemplation to open a road direct from here to Paso del Norte, and Santa Fe, with a view to turn the trade which is now carried on to those places from Missouri, to the Port of Galveston,” he wrote to his cousin Henry in August 1829. “Should you fit out any exploring or other parties to that region I wish you would insert into their instructions to examine whether there is a practicle route through the mountains, east of El Paso, to the open prairies at the head of the Colorado or Brazos.” Austin rightly observed Texas’ central location to any

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

trade network that linked the Mexican interior with the US. “[T]he whole trade of the Chihuahua and Sonora and New Mexico regions must ultimately enter on one of the Ports of Texas.” In fact, Austin was downright arrogant when it came to his plans to make Texas *the* dominant commercial center of that corner of the globe:

I am bold to say that, as a country, taken in the general average it is unequaled by any portion of North America. You will recollect that I have had some opportunity of forming an opinion of this matter for I have seen this continent from Connecticut to the City of Mexico, and have generally been a close observer of localities, soil, climate, and etc., part from the peculiar values of the Mississippi River and the harbors I deem Texas to be of more intrinsic value as a country than all the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and the territories of Florida and Arkansas.<sup>354</sup>

Yet Texans never saw this dream of a transnational economy threatening their relationship with the country that had made it all possible. In fact, Austin took it upon himself to make the first official map of Texas, which he promptly sent to the Ayuntamiento of Béxar and the President of the Republic. He did this service, he claimed, “for my adopted country in allegiance as a citizen” in order “to contribute to the geographical knowledge of Mexican territory, and to present our beloved Texas to the Mexicans and the rest of the world.”<sup>355</sup>

Austin then included a lengthy set of explanatory notes to the map which, it soon became evident, he hoped would illustrate the very concerns he had expressed to

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<sup>354</sup> SFA to Henry Austin, 27 August 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 250-253.

<sup>355</sup> SFA to Ramón Músquiz and Lorenzo de Zavala, 23 July 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 235-240.

Mexican officials: “We need two customs houses in Texas, one in Galveston and the other in Matagorda[,] and a maritime receivership or customhouse on the River Brazos.” The lack of such was a considerable problem since the colonies conducted all of their “jurisdictional commerce” through that river, their “infant state” requiring trade with [New] Orleans.” Austin insisted that “to prohibit or impair this commerce now would be most tragic to this region.”

Yet, he was cautious to make clear that he had no plans whatsoever to see Texas separated from Mexico, no matter who came to inhabit it. “Texas rightly belongs to Mexico, and for the naturalness of its geographic location, of its commercial interests, and its products,” he wrote. Furthermore, he insisted that ultimately, though not yet, even Texas’ trade with the United States of the North would cease and be replaced by exclusive domestic trade with other Mexican states.

The commerce of Texas will not be nor should it be, with the United States of the North but with the neighboring and maritime states of Mexico, and with the islands, and Europe, and consequently it is and will be the interest of Texas to unite with Mexico whatever might be the origin of its population, as long as they are civilized people, illustrious and entrepreneurial.

Significantly, and perhaps surprisingly, Austin saw Texas’ seeming dependence on northern trade as temporary, lasting only as long as it would take for Texas and the rest of Mexico to develop their own internal economies. Austin saw Texas’ commercial relationship with Mexico as ultimately far more important than its commercial

relationship with the US. Conversely, Texas separation from Mexico would result in a loss of “the most productive and secure source of their commerce,” as well as their rights and privileges, “assuming that the Mexican government establishes itself permanently and quietly.”<sup>356</sup>

While Austin looked forward to a time when Texas’s principal trade would be with Mexico and not the North, he knew that first Texas had to establish itself. He therefore requested a few more years of unimpaired trade with the United States, “so as not to impede its progress and speed its development.” Yet, he envisioned a time when all of the northern trade routes would lead to Matagorda or Béxar. “[I]n a few years the commerce of New Mexico, Chihuahua and Sonora that now goes to Missouri should all be concentrated in Matagorda or Béxar,” he wrote. Indeed, Austin aimed to replace American ports like St. Louis with Mexican ones.

One look at the map of Texas shows that the designated port, given the geographical arrangement of those regions for their commerce, is Matagorda. The distance of this port to Santa Fe in New Mexico is less than to Saint Louis . . . and you can buy goods in Matagorda at less cost than in Missouri because there is only one port to the ocean and the other is hundreds of leagues to the interior.

Such a reorientation of the current trade network would, of course, benefit Mexico by reducing the cost of transportation since it would be “entirely contained within the territory of Mexico and by Mexican citizens.” In so doing, Austin hoped to rectify

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<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

Mexico's current extractive relationship with the United States, "Today the inhabitants of Missouri receive all of the benefit, when the origin of the commerce belongs to the Mexicans."<sup>357</sup> Texans consistently saw themselves and their commercial enterprise as forming a critical part of the Mexican national project. Not only were they cautious to work within the legal confines of their adopted country, but they aimed to make themselves an imperative part of it.

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Yet, the challenge of integration extended well beyond trade and commerce. As migrants flooded into Texas in the late 1820's, Mexican administrators struggled to keep track of them, and even to assure that they intended to become loyal Mexican citizens. Many ended up settling along the northern and western border without contracts or formal permission from the government. Regardless, many of them indeed wanted to become Mexican citizens and petitioned the government for recognition and integration. But while earlier settlers identified Mexico's political system as their primary motive for immigrating, later settlers pointed to more pragmatic factors, such as land and protection from Indian raids.

When Spain invaded Mexico in 1829, a group of Anglo-American squatters along the Sabine did not hesitate to defend Mexico, much as their predecessors had done during the Fredonian Rebellion. But their stated reasons for wanting to be a part of that country

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<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

were somewhat different. They lauded Mexico's political system more for its distinction from Spain's, not the United States.' "The fair Goddess of Liberty prescribed and hunted down in the old world, has chosen the continent of America as her favorite residence," they wrote, "and when in their turn she penetrated and pervaded the hearts of the Mexicans . . . we felt the most lively enthusiasm and deepest interest for the successful termination of so glorious a conflict." Since then "we have with pride and joy seen the Mexican politicians and sages forming political institutions, the most enlightened and liberal, particularly as regards foreigners." After praising Mexico for yielding to "that singleness and purity of motive, that devotedness of thought and talent," they pointed to the one thing that they would like in exchange for their service.<sup>358</sup> Buried near the end of their document they explained that

We have, sir, most of us, with much expense and trouble, come a great distance with our families, and to settle in the country, to obtain lands for our children and ourselves, to lay our bones in a soil consecrated by its heroes, and eternalized by the wisdom of its statesmen. We have full confidence that the Commissioner mentioned by your excellency and Promised by the Most Excellent President of the Republic, will come amongst us, and put us into possession of the lands we occupy, agreeable to the laws; we shall rejoice on the day of his arrival.

Does the fact that their demonstrations of loyalty were accompanied by self-interest compromise their integrity? Earlier immigrants had economic motives too, but their identity was more specifically Mexican. This later group seemed to draw on a shared

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<sup>358</sup> A Committee of American Citizens to the Political Chief of the Department of Texas," Buquor Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

republicanism that cast the Old World monarchies, not the United States, as the opponent. Suffice is to say that, unlike the Fredonian rebels or squatter communities more generally, these men aspired to national belonging, with all of its attendant benefits and obligations. They wanted the Mexican government to acknowledge and absorb them, and in exchange they “organized with arms in our hands, and both now and at all times hereafter, tender to Your Excellency,” rendered “our best services in support of the state and general government against all enemies whether external or internal.”<sup>359</sup>

Land title was not the only thing fueling immigration during this period. As Indian raids picked up in the late 1820’s and into the 1830’s, it gave many borderland residents a new reason to claim Mexican citizenship. Disappointed by the United States’ failure to protect them from hostile Indian tribes - and in many cases propelled into conflict with these groups due to the United States’ own Indian removal policies - many turned to Mexico. In 1828 William Rabb petitioned the Governor of Texas for increased protection from Indian marauders and US authorities on the western side of the Red River. “The opinion of the most intelligent men in the country is that we are within the limits of the province of texas, and a melancholy experience convinces us that we do not enjoy the protection of the United States,” he wrote. Identifying themselves as “worthy and industrious inhabitants who have now the misfortune to live under the most oppressive and disgraceful circumstances,” Rabb explained that “The opposite bank of

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

the Red River had, heretofore been under the civil Jurisdiction of the United states which government has, lately, ceded the territory to the Choctaw Indians.” Yet the settlers and late civil officers still continue to live in said territory, and exercise by force their jurisdiction.” As a result, Rabb explained, “We are compelled to pay the most exorbitant taxes” and “we have daily to submit to the most insulting and oppressive abuses.” He complained that the inhabitants of the north bank, “carry on a regular commerce with the Comanches, supplying them with arms and ammunition.” Rabb stated that the inhabitants of this “oppressed territory” would “be happy under your protection, and feel sorely the absence of laws or regulations by which they may be governed.”<sup>360</sup>

In addition to raiding and lack of title, a general sense of lawlessness seemed to pervade especially eastern Texas. In 1829 a group of citizens in Nacogdoches, the region that just two years prior was home to the notorious Fredonian Rebellion, issued a formal request of the Mexican president. They informed him that they had “resided in this province for several years during which time we have been without Government and without a knowledge of what is required of us as citizens of this Republic.” Feeling “sensibly the allegiance due from a citizen of this Government, and the obligation on the part of the Government to protect its citizens from Laws” they requested “a publication and diffusion of the Laws of the country in the English language.” The fact that they could not read Spanish, of course, illustrated the accuracy of Terán’s claim that Anglos

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<sup>360</sup> William Rabb to the Governor of Texas, Ibid.



were rapidly outnumbering Mexicans by this time and no longer felt the same assimilationist impulses – including language acquisition - an earlier generation of settlers had. But they nonetheless sought greater integration into the Mexican administrative fold. They requested that a court be established “according to the custom now prevailing in that section of the country.” They pointed out “the propriety of organizing the Militia for the defense of the Province, in the event of an invasion of this country by Old Spain.” Additionally, they expressed the need for the adjustment of their land claim, which would “attach the people more firmly to your Government.” Lest one suspect that they were only interested in obtaining the benefits of citizenship, they also requested greater communication with and access to the seat of national power “so that we can have it in our power to act in conformity with the wishes of the Government.”<sup>361</sup> Here we see a set of sentiments very different from what the rumors suggested and indeed what most interpretations of early Texas settlers would have us believe. It was the lack of government authority not its excess of which they complained. These people did not seek to avoid the state, as national leaders feared, they craved its embrace.<sup>362</sup>

Yet, not all policies designed with the aim of extending Mexico’s administrative reach were greeted approvingly. Austin and some more established settlers often found themselves defending local government taxation initiatives from immigrants who insisted that the colonization law protected them from such encroachments. Terming its critics

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>362</sup> “Several American Residents in the District of Nacogdoches to the Governor of Texas,” Ibid.

“either ignorant of the law” or “willfully malicious and wish[ing] to create confusion,” Austin reminded colonists that they were in fact exempt from most taxes, but not those “that are laid generally to repel a foreign invasion,” or taxes “levied by the ayuntamiento for municipal purposes.”<sup>363</sup>

When colonists complained about being required to register births and deaths, Austin again jumped to the defense of the government, stating that “The law most positively requires the ayuntamiento to keep a register of births and deaths in the jurisdiction, and to make a return every three months to the chief of the department.” He dismissed the colonists’ complaints. “Strange and incredible as it would appear to any man who possessed common sense that this measure should create discontent and misrepresentation,” Austin insisted that it was in the best interest of every citizen, but especially children, for it secured to them “beyond the possibility of a doubt important privileges as native born Mexicans that someday or the other may be of the greatest advantage to them.” Austin reminded colonists that the benefits of Mexican citizenship came with responsibilities too. He went on to explain that citizens’ failure to comply with the law would only create more expense by requiring a sheriff to go house to house to collect the information. Of the state vagrancy law he wrote that “All civilized countries that I know anything about have a vagrant law – this state has one and it is a very good and just and necessary one.” The “clamour” of discontent compelled the ayuntamiento

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<sup>363</sup> SFA to J. Bell, 17 March 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 183-192.

not to enforce the law, something that enraged Austin who blamed “disorderly and bad men” for instigating discontent. “I regret this state of things exceedingly,” he wrote, “It has caused me to doubt that there is either a want of judgment in the mass of the people to discriminate between a rigid and just execution of the laws and an abuse of them[,] or that there is a great mass of moral depravity which results from restraint or legal control.”<sup>364</sup>

Yet, it was becoming increasingly clear, both to Austin and Mexican authorities, that integration would not be easy. “The civil authority must be sustained by public confidence,” wrote Austin “and if the people are mere puppets in the hands of artful demagogues and clamorous factionists whose interest it is to discredit the civil authorities and throw them into ridicule, where is the security of honest men?” In part, he saw this as a result of Americans’ lack of familiarity with Mexican law - something that he sought to remedy immediately. But for Austin the problem went even deeper - it was in fact an unfortunate cultural characteristic. The people of his colony “lack judgment to discriminate between what is the duty of a public officer, and an abuse of his authority,” and suffered from “a disposition to be suspicious and jealous of ‘men in power.’” Rather than any sign of incompatibility with Mexico, Austin insisted that “the American people of a natural propensity to suspect and to abuse all men who are in office.”<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

Indeed, for Austin, the problem had to do with the particularities of the American character. In another letter to Thomas White written the same month, he blamed such lack of national obligation towards and cooperation with the Mexican government on the “unbounded republican liberty which is enjoyed by all classes in the United States.” In other words, a “jealousy of those in office, jealousy of undue encroachments of personal rights and a general repugnance to everything that bore even the semblance of a stretch of power.” Conceding that such feelings were “correct when properly guided by an enlightened judgment, capable of discriminating between a necessary and rigorous discharge of an official duty and an abuse of it,” Austin insisted that the American people were “somewhat defective” when it came to this ability – “though not more so than the mass of the people – most of whom were in the United States. Thus, there was still hope for the colonists who, Austin insisted, owed their loyalty to a Mexican government, whose policies were so “liberal and indulgent” that they “caused some to doubt their reality.” Austin concluded his letter by delineating between the political situation in Texas versus that unfolding at the country’s center. “The disturbances in Mexico do not affect us here – we have nothing to do with them – all that is necessary here is to keep harmony amongst ourselves – and to work hard.”<sup>366</sup> Norteamericanos, simply put, were difficult people for anyone to govern.

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<sup>366</sup> SFA to Thomas White, 31 March 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 197-99.

Yet, as frontier southerners, it is perhaps just as likely that their behavior was the result of their hereunto limited experience with federal authority – an entity that they perhaps only understood in the abstract. This later generation of settlers did not demonstrate the same political sophistication that those of Austin’s generation did. There were many reasons for this, one being that the Austins were simply more educated and worldly than many of the later settlers. As part of the founding generation of American immigrants to Mexico, circumstances had also required a certain level of familiarity with and trust of the central government. More to the point, however, ideas about citizenship, government, and authority were still nascent in early nineteenth-century Mexico and the United States, especially on the frontier where federal authority often remained inconspicuous. While many frontiers people understood that there was a federal government somewhere that could grant them rights and privileges in exchange for service and loyalty, the precise nature and mechanics of this relationship were still unclear, and, they believed, malleable. This was as true in Mexico as it was in the US and was not necessarily a sign of disloyalty. It was, rather, a sign of the still nebulous and changing relationship between citizen and state in these young republics.

One remedy might be to better acquaint immigrants with the laws of their adopted country. In October of 1829, Austin decided to translate all legislative decisions and have them printed in local newspapers. “The work is very essential,” he insisted, “and there is nothing more necessary and important for the welfare of Texas for reason that

more of the inhabitants do not understand a word of Spanish and it is entirely impossible to govern a people with laws whose existence the masses ignore absolutely.” In many ways, these problems were the result of the success of his own recruitment efforts. As more and more immigrants from the North flooded into the region, they felt less compelled to assimilate or even cooperate with Mexican officials. Many of Austin’s complaints were beginning to mirror those of Terán and other national leaders who called for greater governmental presence and authority on the frontier: “All the difficulties in Nacogdoches has come entirely from the lack of troops and persons of law and chiefs in order to administrate them.” But perhaps most worrisome was that so many people were ignorant of the very laws and constitution that had attracted the first wave of immigrants. “I have not a person of judgment that is well informed about the national and state constitution,” Austin wrote. Yet he claimed to not know of a single person who knew them who did not express himself “entirely satisfactory with them and this is enough in order to prove the importance of the translation.”<sup>367</sup> In addition to greater knowledge of the laws and constitution of Mexico, Austin had to make sure that colonists were taking oaths of allegiance.<sup>368</sup> Only then could they receive formal title to their land. In this way, Austin worked tirelessly to guarantee both Mexico’s national security and the rights of its colonists.

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<sup>367</sup> SFA to José Antonio Navarro, 19 October 1829, *AP*, Vol. II, 271-73.

<sup>368</sup> SFA to Colonists, 12 March 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 339-41 ,

Yet, the precise nature of the colonists' grievances and to whom, exactly, they were directed, remained unclear. A September 1829 letter from Thomas McKinney suggested that colonists' dissatisfaction was limited to local authorities. "I am somewhat astonished at the idea of there being in circulation a report that there was brewing in this section of country any project against the Government[,] for I do assure you that so far as has come under my observation or intelligence there is not such a thing thought of." McKinney clarified that said discontent had more to do with the seemingly arbitrary behavior of particular appointees, not the state or federal government. "As to Col. Piedras," McKinney wrote, "there is the strongest opposition among the people both Americans and Mexicans," who accused him of "being friendly to the Spanish invasion." McKinney insisted that Piedras was "aware of his standing and ready to say as frequently as he has done that it is an unfriendly feeling towards the government when in reality it is nothing more than a just contempt for his baseness."<sup>369</sup>

Indeed, much suspected discontent towards the Mexican government was most likely simply directed at local authorities whom colonists believed to be not just corrupt or incompetent, but disloyal to Mexico, and it may even have been a result of the very bureaucracy put in place to combat it. Far from the center of national power, colonists had little communication or interaction with their own national leaders. As Mexico attempted to draw Texas closer to its national fold, it appointed magistrates with little

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<sup>369</sup> Thomas McKinney to SFA, 9 September 1829, *AP.*, Vol. II, 254-57.

familiarity or relationship with local communities and who often fell into acrimonious relations with them. When colonists had complaints, they took them to these “representatives” who may have very likely misrepresented them to national leaders. Isolated on the frontier, often with limited knowledge of Spanish or Mexican law, colonists had little recourse under such circumstances.

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On April 5<sup>th</sup> 1830, Austin received a disconcerting letter from a Texan trader named Edwin I. Petit, then in New Orleans preparing to return. Petit conveyed rumors, then circulating in the North that “[Mexico] is very unsettled,” and “the States of Yucatan and Tobasco have determined to split off unless a central Government is Established.” Indeed the country was unsettled. Just a few months prior, Guerrero had been overthrown by his own Vice President Anastacio Bustamante. Petit conveyed information based on his own experience at the Port of Vera Cruz. “The present administration are taking some high handed measures,” he wrote, “the commandant of the Marine has been taken from his station and dismissed [from] the service without even the form of a trial.” Furthermore, trade commissions issued to northern privateers under Guerrero had been withdrawn. But the most disturbing news had to do with a new federal law rumored “to stop the Emigration of Americans to Texas.”<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Edward I. Petit to SFA, 5 April 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 357-59.



Termed the Law of April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1830, it was issued largely in response to Jackson's recent efforts to purchase Texas from Mexico and based on the recommendations of Terán in the aftermath of his tour. The mastermind was Lucas Alamán, Mexico's secretary of state who, in his complaint to Congress, began by explaining the particular style of US territorial advancement and what he believed to be the colonists' role in it. "They commence by introducing themselves into the territory they covet," he explained. Then they "grow, set up right, and bring forward ridiculous pretensions." Then come explorers and speculators who excite political unrest and then "the diplomatic management commences."<sup>371</sup>

This, Alamán insisted, was precisely what had occurred in Texas where "the majority of the population is composed of natives of the United States of the North" who "come from all directions to settle upon the fertile lands . . . without previously complying with the requisites of our laws, or in violation of our existing contracts." Meanwhile, "The Mexican population is, as it were, stationary," while the North American "is increasing, particularly from the number of slaves introduced by them, and whom they retain, without manumitting them, as they should do." All of this, Alamán claimed, "has given them a preponderance in Texas which now hardly belongs, in fact, to the Mexican confederacy."<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Lucas Alamán quoted in Edna Rowe, "The Disturbances at Anahuac in 1832," *The Quarterly of the Texas historical Association* (April, 1903), p. 266-68.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*

From Alamán's remarks, one might conclude that the immigration policy had accomplished precisely the opposite of what it was intended to. The remedy, according to the secretary, was a bold federal decree that established a series of garrisons, particularly along its border with the US, formally terminated further immigration from countries "lying adjacent" to Mexico. Additionally, the Law of April 6th put forth a program to encourage the settlement of ethnic Mexican families. While it exempted Anglo colonies "already established," it did not specify Austin's. For many national leaders who looked warily upon the growing numbers of US immigrants to Mexico, the law "provided the opportunity to remedy the infractions and abuses that have been observed." There seemed little room in the national discourse for opposition. "[A]ll good Mexicans," as Alamán put it, "should appreciate this law."<sup>373</sup>

But it was not appreciated. The following month, Thomas Chambers expressed grave concern regarding rumors surrounding the new decree. "The ebullition of public feeling in our quarter is fearful," he wrote, since "The most violent and fatal measures are taking both by the states and general governments in relations to the colonies of this department."<sup>374</sup> In June, Samuel May Williams received a letter from a prospective immigrant in New Orleans. "We in this country [the United States] have many unfavorable reports from Texas," he wrote, "it is universally urged that your Government is too unsettled and Unstable." But the rumored prohibition on immigration was the

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<sup>373</sup> Lucas Alamán to the First Secretary of the State; "Voz de la Patria", *Archivo General de México*. 21 April 1830

<sup>374</sup> Thomas Chambers to SFA, 12 May 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 373.

greatest concern. “[I]t is now reported, and pretty generally believed, that your Congress has forbid farther settlement of Americans in texas[,] and that the Mexicans, Themselves are quite Ripe for a Revolution among themselves.” Such rumors stood to forestall a great number of immigrants who were otherwise eager to move. “[I]f Reports from texas do not become too alarming you will Receive a Very considerable and Valuable population from this Country during the Approaching Winter and Spring,” he assured Williams. But in order for this to happen, prospective immigrants needed some assurance of their own. “We however must believe that Texas settled by Americans must flourish Under the Mexican Government and at some future time may obtain a considerable influence over the General Government.”<sup>375</sup> Again, prospective immigrants did not just want land, they wanted political influence in Mexico. However, given the current direction of political affairs, this did not look likely.

Afraid that the new law would sabotage his recruitment efforts, Austin took matters into his own hands. In a formal letter addressed to the president himself, he pointed out that the object of the law “appears to be the complete destruction of all happiness and prosperity of this colony.” He insisted on its unconstitutionality, declaring that it was in violation of the pre-existing colonization laws of the republic and the state of Coahuila y T  jas “which in direct and positive terms call for and encourage

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<sup>375</sup> Richard R. Royall to Samuel May Williams, 24 June 1830, SMWP.

immigration.”<sup>376</sup> Austin also wrote a formal letter to Lucas Alamán, hoping to remind him of the great benefit that the Mexican nation gained from his empressorship:

It is doubtless well known to Y.E. that I am the first empresario who undertook to form a settlement in the wilderness of Texas, that I have devoted all my time and personal attention to this object since the year 1821. That I have succeeded fully in redeeming a considerable portion of this country from a state of nature overrun by savages in which I found it, and that I have laid a foundation for the permanent advancement and prosperity of Texas by rendering it easy to form new settlements in consequence of the resources which may be drawn from my colony.

Austin reminded Alamán that his “maxim has always been and now is fidelity and gratitude to Mexico.” He then proceeded to express his confusion at such legislation and at the increasing sense of suspicion towards Anglo settlements, seeking to correct them and asserting that “the commercial and agricultural interests of Texas, will be more effectively promoted by remaining under this government than under any other.” He reminded the authorities that the colonists “became Mexicans by choice, they have been faithful to this government since they entered this territory, [and] they wish to remain Mexicans.” The Law of April 6<sup>th</sup>, however, would “have a fatal tendency,” for those immigrants already on their way to Mexico, since they “would be totally ruined and the odium would of necessity fall on the government that caused their ruin.” Austin concluded by assuring Alamán that the immigrants he allowed to enter were “of the very best class,” and that “the acquisition of that population would do more towards uniting

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<sup>376</sup> SFA to President Bustamante, 17 May 1830, *AP*, Vol. 2,

Texas to Mexico and restoring order and tranquility than any measure that could be adopted.”<sup>377</sup>

Interestingly, when it came to whom to blame for the unfortunate turn of events, Austin pointed to the United States, not Mexico. “[T]he excessive noise that has been made in the US papers about the purchase of Texas seems to have had a much greater weight in Mexico than a matter so unimportant ought to have had.” He even suspected a bit of foul play, specifically, that expansionist minded agents in the North might be attempting to incite rebellion in Texas, so as to compel a separation. “[A] train seems to have been laid by someone, to drive this gov’t to such acts as would be most likely to kindle discontent in Texas and at the same time sow the seeds of disgust between the two nations.”<sup>378</sup>

In his letters to Mexican officials, Austin blamed Jackson’s foreign minister, Poinsett, for Mexican confusion and hostility, and did what he could to distance himself from the intrigues of the Jackson cabinet. Austin hardly minced words in his accusations. “[T]he falacies that have resulted can be attributed to the intrigues of Poinsett!” he wrote to Col. Piedras, “For my part, I protest before God almighty that I have never violated the interests of Mexico in the slightest, nor have I violated my duty as a Mexican citizen – I do not believe that it is in the interest of texas to unite with the North.” Austin attempted to clarify his earlier remarks, insisting that he had called for “greater Governmental

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<sup>377</sup> SFA to Alamán, 18 May 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 383-85.

<sup>378</sup> SFA to Thomas Learning, 14 June 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 417-19.

regulations at the local level,” the necessity of which was “evident to anyone who knows anything about Texas.” Austin was clear that his earlier complaints should not be confused with rebelliousness. “In this colony there is not discontent nor has there ever been against the Government, to the contrary all the colonists are satisfied with their situation, but it appears that in Mexico there are other ideas.”<sup>379</sup> Austin insisted that despite his criticisms, he had “entire confidence in the justice and talent of the administration” and considered it “the Savior of Mexico from anarchy.”<sup>380</sup>

Ultimately, Austin’s colony did receive partial exemption from the law. The government decided to lift the ban on future immigration to his colony only, and continued to require that all US traders pay one percent of their profits to the government. This did little to allay settlers’ frustration. Henry Austin wrote that the taxation decree was “in direct contravention of the Constitution.” Colonists expressed clear frustration with a law that sought to “kill the goose in search of the golden egg.” Yet, Henry Austin agreed with his brother that the settlers, despite their frustrations with the new regime, were hardly contemplating turning their backs on Mexico. Of Terán, he wrote that “he has more apprehension of a Grito for centralism in the South and a separation of those northern states which are federal, than of the US or Texas where in fact there is nothing to fear until outrage shall produce difficulty.” What’s more, Henry pointed out that “he counts upon much support from Texas in such an event.” In a letter to Lucas Alamán,

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<sup>379</sup> SFA to Piedras, 12 July 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 447-48.

<sup>380</sup> SFA to Secretary of Relations, 13 July 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 449-451.

Austin argued that, given the recent political turmoil in Mexico, colonists had every opportunity to rebel. The fact that they had not was the best proof that they never would. “[M]any times have I been without the support of any Government as a result of the various changes, revolutions and internal disagreements that have agitated the Mexican nation,” he wrote, “Forgive me sir for alluding to them and ask the question, if my intentions, or the intentions of my colonists were not sane, quiet and peaceful what more favorable opportunity would we have?”<sup>381</sup>

Austin immediately set to work on damage control, publishing an editorial in the *Texas Gazette* explaining the law of April 6<sup>th</sup> and attempting to quell widespread discontent. He pointed out that it allowed Texans “open and unembarrassed” trade with Mexican ports – “the best in the world, for the sale of cotton or other woolen goods.” Despite his own criticisms, he adamantly defended the Mexican federal government. “In short, all that nature and a liberal and munificent government can do has been done,” he insisted, “and nothing is now wanting but capital, enterprise and industry.” Colonists were again reminded that their future prosperity depended on Mexican beneficence.<sup>382</sup>

Austin and Williams took their declarations of loyalty to the press, naming the newspaper they founded together the *Mexican Citizen*. And when it came to the paper’s motto, “*Mexico es mi patria*, would do better, for it will be as much as to say to people abroad ‘we have a country and are proud of it, and we are ready and willing to defend her

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<sup>381</sup> Austin to Alamán, 20 September 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 489-492.

<sup>382</sup> Editorial by Austin in *Texas Gazette*, 3 July 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 437-40.

rights.’” Furthermore, “it will remind our *home folks* whom they belong to.” By the beginning of 1831, the men were satisfied with their efforts. It seemed that they had finally convinced Mexico of colonists’ loyalty to it. “Last spring the idea was very general in Mexico that Texas was the Botany Bay of the US and the Gov’t of the North was secretly encouraging the emigration of bad men and vagabonds, who were destitute of principle, for the purpose of exciting them to rebel against the Govt.” Yet Austin believed he had diverted such a crisis. “This Gov’t now believes that the settlers of *my colony* at least, are men of principle who will respect their oaths of fidelity, and will never forget that they have received fortunes from this Govt and favors which no other Govt ever extended.”<sup>383</sup>

Despite Mexico’s blatantly anti-American stance, immigrants continued to flood into Texas. In fact, records indicate that immigration from the North actually grew after 1830. Whereas between 1822 and 1830, it had continued at a fairly steady stream of approximately 1,000 per year, that number increased to nearly 3,000 per year after 1830, so that Anglo-Texans would ultimately outnumber the ethnic Mexican population by 10 to 1. A temporary lifting of the immigration restriction might have had something to do with this, or the decision to continue to allow only certain colonies such as Austin’s to admit immigrants may have encouraged prospective immigrants to take advantage of such leniencies while they existed. Whatever the case, unlike the first wave of

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<sup>383</sup> SFA to Samuel May Williams, 12 March 1831, *AP*, 611-613.



immigrants, many from this newer generation arrived in the country at a time of profound political instability, as Mexico was beginning to move closer to centralism. They also tended to be more restive than the prior generation, who exhibited a stronger faith in the Mexican political process. This brought them into conflict not only with the Mexican leadership, but with the more established elements of the Anglo-Texan population. Men like Austin and Williams worked tirelessly to encourage immigrants to look to Mexican law to address their grievances, but with Mexico's federalist promise faltering and with growing hostility towards Anglo-Americans, this proved a difficult task among a group of people who showed increasingly less loyalty to both Austin and the country he had sworn to protect.<sup>384</sup>

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Meanwhile, Terán had diligently set to work carrying out his new orders stipulated under the decree. He established military forts at Nacogdoches, Béxar and San Felipe, and one at the mouth of the Brazos he called Velasco. He assigned Col. David Bradburn, himself a Kentucky immigrant, as overseer. Terán also established custom houses at Matamoros and Galveston where he appointed George Fisher, another US immigrant, as customs officer. As the seven years during which immigrants were exempt

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<sup>384</sup> For statistical information on the changing pattern of migration before and after 1830 see Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 111. Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 21-22.

from taxation began to expire, he ordered the collection of taxes on virtually all goods from the North.<sup>385</sup>

While the federal government was attempting to extend its authority into the frontier, the state of Coahila y T  jas, in response to a petition from Austin and seventy-five other men from his colony, had appointed a land commissioner named Francisco Madero to assign formal grants to immigrants who had not yet received them. When Madero arrived in Texas, he established the town of Liberty, began distributing land grants, and commenced elections for alcalde and members of the ayuntamiento. When Ter  n caught wind of these activities, he ordered Bradburn to arrest Madero and halt elections, which Bradburn promptly did to the ire of almost everyone in Texas. Madero reacted by accusing Bradburn of disobeying his “immediate chief” and committing an “infraction of the constitution.”<sup>386</sup> Ter  n, however, sided with his subordinate, insisting that the new decree froze the issuance of more land grants to Anglo-American colonists and that Bradburn was therefore fully within his bounds to imprison him.

Tensions simmered until early 1832 when, shortly after establishing a new custom house at An  huac, Fisher demanded that all ships ported in Galveston clear their papers with him in An  huac before being permitted to leave port. Conditions worsened when Bradburn commenced to close all of the ports except Galveston. The order came on the heels of a series of contraband seizures, and it was the last straw. In an angry letter to

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<sup>385</sup> Rowe, 270.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 271; J. Francisco Madero to Samuel May Williams, 15 March 1831, SMWP.

Bradburn, Austin called such regulations “utterly impracticable” and their execution practically impossible. *You* know your native countrymen,” he continued “and you also know that at this time the people have just causes and very many of them to complain.” Austin warned that unless a more liberal system were adopted, “the country will be totally broken up and all commerce totally annihilated.” Bradburn passed Austin’s letter on to Terán, recommending that “the whole country lying within ten leagues of the coast” be placed “under martial law.” If local authorities resisted, they would face “exemplary punishment.”<sup>387</sup>

The situation came to a head when the schooner Sabine attempted to run the blockade at Velasco after its captain was informed he had to pay a fee and receive permission from Anáhuac before he could leave port. A group of disgruntled colonists who had recently seized the port assisted Brown in his assault. Terán was incensed. “You want the Government to adopt a more liberal policy,” he wrote in his reply to Austin, “You should say what liberality you long for beyond that which you already receive.” The collection of customs duties was a fair and practically universal practice in the Americas, he insisted, “Only in Brazoria is it believed that there is a reason for rebellion.” Not only did Terán refuse to ease restrictions or to replace Bradburn and

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<sup>387</sup> SFA to Bradburn, 30 December 1831, *AP*, Vol. II, 731-732.; Bradburn to Terán quoted in Rowe, 275

Fisher as Austin had requested, but he dispatched Col. Domingo Ugartechea with over one hundred troops to reinforce Velasco.<sup>388</sup>

While admitting that the actions of the colonists were wrong, Austin did agree with their impulse. “All the people here who have anything to lose or who have three grains of common sense oppose separation from Mexico and all disorder,” he assured the general. In a separate letter to the Supreme Government, Austin specifically asked for exemption from the tariff on such items as clothing, tobacco, books, and medicine. While he did not defend the rebellion at Anáhuac, he did blame Fisher for it and specifically asked that he be removed “and replaced by a Mexican.” Regardless of what role Austin himself played in prompting the rebellion at Anáhuac, it no doubt gave him some leverage in negotiating with Mexican authorities.<sup>389</sup>

In May of 1832, a meeting was arranged in Anáhuac to discuss the new impositions. When Bradburn caught wind of it he arrested the leaders and threw them in jail, just as he had done to Madero. When the men were finally released, they immediately began agitating the colonists to demand the release of other colonists whom Bradburn had imprisoned. In mid-June, news of a recent string of federalist victories in the interior under the leadership of General Antonio López de Santa Anna reached Texas. The rebels declared their allegiance to the federalist resistance in a preamble in which

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<sup>388</sup> Rowe, 277; Mier y Terán to SFA, 25 June 1832, *AP*, Vol. II, 799-800.

<sup>389</sup> SFA to Mier y Terán, 5 February 1832, *AP*, Vol. II, 747-753; Ayuntamiento of San Felipe to Supreme Government, 18 February 1832, *AP*, Vol. II, 749-53.

they declared the “determination of Texas to repel further aggressions by the military, and to maintain their rights under the constitution of 1824.” They complained that the present “dynasty” had repeatedly violated the constitution, ignored the law, and replaced civil authority with “military despotism.” They therefore expressed “feelings of deepest interest and solicitude” in Santa Anna’s resistance “to the numberless encroachments and infractions which have been made by the present administration upon the constitution.” They determined to pledge “our lives and fortunes in support of the same and of the distinguished leader, who is now so gallantly fighting in defense of civil liberty.” They invited other Texans to join them, and John Austin, nephew of the founder, headed a small group of men to proceed to Brazoria to collect reinforcements.<sup>390</sup> On June 20, the citizens of Brazoria held a meeting in which they resolved to heed the call to join the federalists, asserting that the existing federal authorities had “evinced a total disregard of the constitution of the country.” It was therefore their duty, they claimed, “to declare our opposition to the ruling dynasty and to place ourselves in the ranks of the supporters of the constitution.”<sup>391</sup>

The colonists then proceeded onto Velasco, one hundred and fifty strong. Father Muldoon made a desperate attempt to avoid bloodshed by first offering himself as a hostage in exchange for the liberty of the imprisoned Texans. When his offer was rebuffed, he then tried to negotiate with Ugartachea himself, but the colonel was resolved

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<sup>390</sup> Quoted in Rowe, 287-88.

<sup>391</sup> “Citizens Meeting,” 20 June 1832, *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar (LP)*, Vol. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1973) 128-9.

to sustain himself against the rebels. “I do not believe that sensible men who have had so many advantages in this land would like to lose them in a day,” the colonel stated, “but if such should be the case, you would find me determined in everything.”<sup>392</sup>

As tensions flared, local leadership attempted to quell ensuing disaster. In a formal address, Ramón Músquiz reminded citizens to direct their grievances “against *measures and not men.*”<sup>393</sup> Yet, the rebellion continued to spread, even into two settlements in Austin’s Colony. This decision would bring the leadership of San Felipe into direct confrontation with the more radical elements of its citizenry, as Williams set to work counseling calm and obedience, and imploring citizens to appeal to Mexico City rather than take up arms. “We admit wrong has been committed, but what Course does our Constitution and our Laws point out for redress of those injuries and wrongs Whether felt by an individual or a Community,” he asked. The answer should be obvious - “An appeal to the Supreme Authorities of the State and Nation.” Just as they had done for the Fredonian Rebellion, Williams and others called on the local militia to help Mexican troops suppress their “poor, misguided fellow citizens” and ward off the evil “that threatens not only those who are unfortunately in arms, but ourselves because if the government be convinced that we are all in rebellion, by harvest time the colony will be filled with troops.” Williams reminded colonists of the magnanimity of their adopted country – “the sacrifices, bounties and benefits” of a Government “that admitted and

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<sup>392</sup> D. Ugartechea to F. Duclor, 23 June 1832, *LP*, Vol. I, 119-20.

<sup>393</sup> R. Músquiz, “Address to the People,” 25 June 1832; Citizens Meeting, 28 June 1832, *LP*, Vol. II, 121-22, 125-27.

encouraged your settlement.” Finally, he drew on a shared sense of national pride as he appealed to longstanding Anglo citizens to convince their newly arrived brethren to lay down their arms. “Are you ready and willing to permit that your Countryman, your friends, your kindred, and your brothers shall hurl defiance at that government, and destruction on your families,” Williams declared, illustrating the significant rift between established settlers and the more restive, new arrivals, who had very different ideas about how best to remedy their grievances. “[O]r will unite as one man, and use those exertions which honorable and high minded feelings suggest, to cause a return to their home and to their duties.” The government “now calls for acts not words,” declared Williams. And while he acknowledged the “pecuniary nature” of the kinds of sacrifice for which he was asking, “they should yield to the more grand and important objects of duty and obligation.” Williams concluded his remarks with a gesture to the future

Let your movements be prompt and rapid, and join and unite with us heart in hand to save the colony, and our fellow citizens, from the impending ruin, and let our children have the happiness in future ages of counting their forefathers as among those who in 1832, Saved the country from the terrible infliction of anarchy and confusion.<sup>394</sup>

Yet it is clear from their own words, that the rebels did not see their actions as in any way in violation of the nation to which they had sworn allegiance. While these men did not heed Músquiz’s advice, they nonetheless saw their efforts as in the service of, not

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<sup>394</sup> Horatio Christman and Samuel May Williams, “Address to the Inhabitants of Austin’s Colony,” 30 June 1832, SMWP

opposition to, the Mexican Republic. Accusing Bradburn of violating the rights “which we, as citizens of the Mexican republic, have considered as the rule of our civil conduct,” they insisted that “it is with deep regret we hear of the necessity of repelling unconstitutional encroachments.”<sup>395</sup>

Arriving in Anáhuac on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, the rebels first approached Ugartachea in peace. When asked about their mission, “they answered that they were members of an assembly which had been formed in Brazoria,” had declared in favor of Santa Anna and his Plan of Vera Cruz, and that they came to invite him to join them. When the colonel refused, they requested passage. When he asked them if their schooner was armed, they said it was but that they only wanted to fight Bradburn not him. If Ugartachea did not consent, however, they had been ordered to “intimidate” him. The colonel refused again, sending the men back to their camp where they prepared for an attack which commenced late on the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup>. The Colonel reported that the rebels cried ““Long live the republic, the constitution and laws! Long live the supreme government!” as they commenced their attack. Once it appeared the Mexican forces had suppressed the rebels John Austin sent word that he wished to speak with the colonel. When the two men met, their greeting was respectful, according to Ugartachea. “We saluted each other, and I greeted many friends, men of prominence in the colony, whom I had not thought would be found among them. We toasted one another, but we respected one another’s

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<sup>395</sup> Citizens’ Meeting, 28 June 1832, *LP*, Vol. II, 125-27.



opinions.” According to the colonel, Austin “praised the bravery of the Mexicans” and assured him that “notwithstanding the fact that I had fought them,” he “did not have an enemy among all the Americans.” The rebels even attempted to persuade the colonel to join them, offering to place themselves under his command. Although the Colonel refused their offer, he had to surrender due to lack of ammunition.<sup>396</sup>

Meanwhile, more citizens renounced the rebels, including the town of Bastrop which, on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, declared “unequivocally that they have ever been, and still continue to be loyal subjects of the Mexican Government.” Furthermore, they were “ready to obey any order, command or requisite that may be deemed necessary.”<sup>397</sup> Austin for his part attempted to present the rebellion as one declared in the name of Mexico and the Mexican Constitution, not in violation of them. “It has been said that the Colonists have insulted the Mexican flag,” he wrote to one Mexican official. “I dare answer that it is false,” he asserted. “[T]hose who have trampled upon the constitution, Laws, and guarantees under the authority of that honored flag are the ones to bear the reproach of the insult, and not the Mexican citizens who resisted such abuses of power.” Texans did not oppose increased governmental presence in the northern frontier, they opposed the way in which it was administered. It did seem that the more the government flexed its

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<sup>396</sup> Report of Ugartechea, 1 July 1832, *LP*, Vol. I, 132-36.

<sup>397</sup> “Citizens’ Meeting,” 2 July 1832, *LP*, 125-27.

muscle, the less the colonists seemed to appreciate it. Yet, while their reaction to the increased military presence was mixed, colonists remained generally obedient.<sup>398</sup>

On July 18<sup>th</sup> the rebels set forth their grievances in a formal address to Col. A.J. Mexía. They claimed that “the causes which impelled us to take up arms, have been misrepresented, or misunderstood,” and attempted to clarify their complaints. “The Colonists of Texas have long since been convinced, of the Arbitrary and unconstitutional measures, of the Administration of Bustamante,” which included the “fixing and establishing” of military posts - the officers of which disregarded “the local civil Authorities of the state”; the “interposition of a military force,” the interference of locally elected administrators; the military commander of Anáhuac “advising and procuring Servants to quit the service of their Masters;” and the “imprisonment of our citizens without lawful cause”.<sup>399</sup>

When Col. Piedras finally arrived in Brazoria he was able to establish a truce with the colonists that included replacing Bradburn, freeing the imprisoned Texans, and reestablishing the ayuntamiento at Liberty. In his own report he admitted, that “wisdom and prudence have not been exercised in that place,” though of Bradburn he stated that “I do not find him guilty of as many abuses as are imputed against him.”

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<sup>398</sup>SFA to J. Mariano Guerra, 10 July 1832; SFA to Gov. Letona, 9 July 1832, *AP*, Vol. II., 815-17, 813-15.

<sup>399</sup> “Address Setting Forth Grievances to Col. J.A. Mexía,” 18 July 1832, *LP*, Vol. I, 142-43.

But events like those which occurred at Anáhuac had a lasting impact on Texas-Mexican relations. While the call for Texan independence remained a long way off, it did reveal a growing cleavage between colonists willing to embrace armed conflict to address their grievances, and those who counseled calm and obedience. While the rates of immigration increased after 1830, the new wave of immigrants expressed far less of the optimism towards Mexico's political future that their forebears had. "I was not deceived in the country, this is certainly a delightful part of the world," wrote James Perry, Austin's brother-in-law and recent arrival to Texas. Terming Texas "the Garden of all North America," Perry wrote that "if full reliance could be placed in the stability of the government and permission for emigrants to settle here[,] it would soon be one of the most pleasing parts of the world." Yet Perry observed that "there appears to be a strong prejudice entertained by those holding the reigns of government against the people of the US of the North," thereby placing himself and other immigrants from the north "in rather an unpleasant situation." Despite such complaints, he remained hopeful. "[W]e still hope to be able to remove their prejudices," Perry wrote, and if Santa Anna succeeds it would "be a very favorable change for Texas." In another letter, Perry wrote that he hoped the late revolution in the Mexican interior, would "be greatly to our advantage. We expect in the course of one or two years that Texas will be made into a distinct state and in that case we will enjoy many advantages over our present situation."<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> James Perry to John Perry, John Perry Papers, 7 May 1832, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas Austin.

Statehood, in fact, was precisely what Austin had in mind. If there was one thing he had learned from the Anáhuac fiasco, it was that Texas needed better representation and greater influence at the federal level. Mexican leaders agreed. Even Lucas Alamán, the leading conservative and author of the Law of April 6th, stated that “Texas cannot flourish and grow without separating from Coahuila and becoming a territory of the federation until it has acquired enough elements to be a state.” He suggested that Austin lobby the state legislature to endorse this idea, pointing out that it was good for Coahuila too. Austin concurred, stating that “The truest interest of this country remains that it should remain united to Mexico *as a State* that can legislate for itself in all local and internal matters.” While Austin warned against getting involved in the turmoil of Mexican national politics, he wanted to see his colony receive more of the rights and responsibilities that came with Mexican affiliation. Despite legislation like the Law of April 6<sup>th</sup>, it appeared that by 1830 that his aims were coming to fruition. In March of that year, Terán promised greater federal protection to both tejano and Texan settlements, something that most of the colonists greeted enthusiastically.<sup>401</sup>

Santa Anna’s federalist victory in spring of 1833 emboldened the push for statehood. Mexican leaders had earlier proposed that Texas separate from Coahuila and become a territory, but Austin rebuffed this offer. “The truest interest of this country remains that it should remain united to Mexico *as a State* that can legislate for itself in all

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<sup>401</sup> Lucas Alamán to SFA, 6 April 1831, 641-42; SFA to Mary Austin Holley, 4 January 1832; Editorial by Austin in *Texas Gazette*, 27 March 1830; *AP*, Vol. II, 732-33, 351.

local and internal matters,” he wrote. Once again, however, Austin had to be cautious lest Mexican officials misinterpret his request. Separate *statehood* was what they wanted, not separation from Mexico. “The general basis which they have adopted and will most rigidly adhere to, is to form Texas into a state of the Mexican confederation,” he wrote in a letter to a correspondent in the north. “They do not wish to separate from Mexico,” he insisted, “and of their own accord never will separate.” If such an “unfortunate event” were to occur “its causes will originate in the mistaken policy of the national Govt. of Mexico in relation to Texas and *not* in the desire or true interests of the people of that country.”<sup>402</sup>

By the middle of 1832, Texans by and large remained committed to Mexico, but their status within it was yet to be determined. “No, sir, the people of Texas do not wish to separate,” he reiterated, and it is not and will not be their interest to do so, unless they should be kicked off.” Mexico’s Anglo citizens would “do their duty to” their adopted government. But they were also ever mindful of “the duty which every man in all communities, owes to himself.”<sup>403</sup> Ultimately, Texans’ loyalty to Mexico depended on that country’s ability to deliver on what they understood to be its own promise to its citizens.

But as Terán, Austin and others were beginning to realize, Texans’ commercial power and influence could only go so far without political power too. As Terán noted,

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<sup>402</sup> SFA to SMW, 16 April 1831; 4 January 1832, SMWP.

<sup>403</sup> SFA to Edward Livingston, 24 June 1832, *AP*, Vol. II, 792-99.

“[The colonists] eagerly await the day when they will enter into the full enjoyment of their political rights and boast of the major influence they will have in the full administration of the state”<sup>404</sup> As for Austin, he continued to believe in the ability of Mexican leaders to repair relations with the colonists that had been compromised by its haphazard efforts to regulate and control the frontier. Yet, if Mexico’s great appeal to prospective immigrants was its system of government, it had to assure them that it was secure.

As Mexico’s experiment in radical federalism seemed more and more tentative, Austin began to play a somewhat more active role in repairing Mexico’s chaotic political climate. In one letter he requested that James Perry “send him copies of the constitution of Columbia, of Buenos Aires and of Chilli, of Peru and what is called the Bolivian code or constitution.”<sup>405</sup> What Austin intended to do with these documents is unclear, but one might surmise that he hoped to use them as comparative models of governance in his efforts to negotiate with Mexican leaders. Not insignificantly, Austin chose the constitutions of other Spanish American countries as his point of reference rather than that of the United States. Likewise, even as he insisted that “prejudices against North American are subsiding in Mexico,” he found it necessary to distance himself from United States leaders who had demonstrated the acquisitive character that Mexicans like Terán most feared, so as to mitigate the “remnants of bitter feeling left among the

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<sup>404</sup> Terán, *Diary*, 79.

<sup>405</sup> SFA to James Perry, 11 July 1830, *AP*, Vol. II, 445-447.

uniformed who believe that Poinsett was the U.S. government and all north Americans were connected with his intrigues.”

The statehood question lended a new tone of optimism by the end of the summer when the citizens of Matagorda held a public dinner in honor of a recent victory over a band of local Indians. At the dinner’s commencement, they made a series of toasts. The first was to “The republic of Mexico – Tho’ not *first*, may she be the *last*, in the constellation of republics, in the new world.” The second went to “The United States of the North – ‘The land of the free, and the home of the brave.’” Then a third gentleman rose and toasted to Texas’ admission into the Mexican union as a state – “May Congress patiently hear, and magnanimously decide her claims,” and to Coahuila “The co-tenant, and co-partner of Texas – May the dissolution and division be friendly, and alike honorable to both.” And then to “Our Country” – by which they meant their adopted one - where “If there be a part where the *institutions* have made the men - there is another portion where the men have *yet to make* the institutions.” And to the cause of “Santa Ana - the constitution, and the laws - Our watchword, and textbook.” Another man lifted his glass “to the internal- improvement-fever of the *North* may it cross the Sabine in a steamboat - travel on a railroad to the waters of the Colorado, and by *Subscription*, raise the wind, and sweep the raft into the Bay of Matagorda.” Then another gentleman took the floor and toasted to “The constitution of Mexico, and sovereignty of the states - May the laws repugnant to either be obliterated in the blood of their legislators and

administrators.” Finally, Ira Ingram wrapped up the exhaustive succession by toasting to the settlers of Texas who “have expelled the savage, subdued and planted the forest” so that “The enemies of their country, may read their future history.”<sup>406</sup>

As 1832 drew to a close, the relations between Anglo Texan immigrants and their federal government might have been strained, but men like Austin remained no less committed to their adopted country. But what to make of the increasing numbers of new arrivals – sometimes hundreds a day – who seemed less aware that there even was a federal government? And what to do about the still turbulent political landscape of Mexico more generally? Would the federalist promise survive? If it did, what would it mean for Mexico’s territorial integrity, especially when it came to the United States? If it did not, what would this mean for the nation, its citizens and their future in it? These and other questions remained unanswered by the end of 1832, but dramatic changes in the nation’s political core were about to determine them.

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<sup>406</sup> “Account of a Public Dinner,” 22 August 1832, *LP*, Vol. II, 146-7.



**CHAPTER 5**  
**“A Distinct Member of the Mexican Family”**  
**Revolution and Realignment**  
**1832-36**

In late 1832, Austin received a letter from an Anglo-Texan colonist named Jonas Harrison, describing a recent convention at which fifty-five delegates from all Texan municipalities except San Antonio had assembled. Emboldened by Santa Anna's federalist insurgency, they had decided to petition the state and national government for a series of reforms including more liberal tariffs, repeal of the ban on immigration from the United States, and separate statehood. The last point had been a longstanding desire for most Texans, and it was an issue that many believed the recent conflicts had made all the more urgent.<sup>407</sup>

Harrison complained that there had been several delegates brazen enough to suggest Texan independence from Mexico. He did not hesitate to express his opinion on this matter. “The idea of a separate distinct and independent government I do not believe exists in the mind of any man of common sense in the district,” Harrison asserted, “Nor do they want to belong to the United States of the North, there are a few exceptions to this last opinion, but not many, scarcely one in ten.” The immigrants, after all, had “come to the country to participate of the benefits of the Mexican Independence, and of their liberal policy in regard to land, and they wish to continue so.” Separation from Mexico

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<sup>407</sup> For information on the August 1832 Convention see Greg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 261-2.

would render Texans “the most oppressed people” and only “invite aggression,” conceivably from the North or hostile Indian tribes. Harrison insisted that a call for greater local representation was not a call for independence. He and others like him understood that freedom was only possible where a state presence existed to guarantee it. “There is perhaps no person more dangerous in the formation of a new government than a mere theorist,” he concluded.<sup>408</sup>

Indeed, throughout the early 1830’s, Texans increasingly complained of the Indian raids, banditry, and general lawlessness that plagued the frontier. From their experiences they had concluded that an overly weak state was as dangerous as an overbearing one. “[We] deprecate the idea of being *independent of the Mexican Republic*,” wrote Harrison, “Their sole wish is to be *dependent on it*, and to afford it all the support and protection in their power – to protect all its rights and interests, and in return to participate of all its benefits and advantages.” If Mexico could only deliver on its promises, not only would current settlers have a reason to renew their fidelity to it, but Mexico might see more “Enterprising” immigrants than ever before.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Jonas Harrison to SFA, 30 November 1832, *Stephen F. Austin Papers (AP)* Vol. II, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924, 1928), 895-96.

<sup>409</sup> Jonas Harrison to SFA, 8 December 1832, *AP*, 899-901.

Few events have dominated scholarly and popular attention more than the Texas Revolution.<sup>410</sup> For over a century, historians have pointed to it as the inevitable victory of one civilization over its opposing and inferior counterpart - of democracy over despotism, of Protestantism over Catholicism, of a superior white race over an inferior brown one.<sup>411</sup> Beginning in the 1970's, revisionists complicated the image of elite white men spreading American democracy, by highlighting the experiences of Mexican Texans, who finally received credit for their contribution to the fight for independence.<sup>412</sup> But such histories, while important, did little to challenge the presumption of Anglo-American political dominance. In fact, they merely confirmed it by showing that, ultimately, everyone wanted to be American.

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<sup>410</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage in Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, eds. *Lone Star Pasts: Memory and History in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), Fitzhugh writes that "the battle on the Texas frontier has been represented in more movies than the fight over Ft. Sumter," xiii. <sup>411</sup> Eugene C. Barker, "Mexico and Texas: A Collision of Two Cultures" (Dallas: P.L. Turner, 1928), 1-5, 143-146. See also *The Life of Steven F. Austin, Founder of Texas* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1925), Chapter 16; T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000), Chapter 8; Laura Lyons McLemore offers an excellent synthesis of this first and earliest group of Texas historians who cited Mexican political, cultural and moral inferiority as the primary cause for the Texas Revolution in *Inventing Texas: Early Historians of the Lone star State* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), Chapter 2. They included such nineteenth-century amateur historians as Mary Austin Holley, Chester Newell and Frederic LeClerc. This view was then extended into academic and popular knowledge by professional twentieth-century scholars such as George P. Garrison, Walter Prescott Webb, J. Frank Dobie, Charles W. Ramsdell, and Eugene C. Baker.

<sup>412</sup> For accounts of the Mexican experience of and participation in the Texas Revolution and a more critical take on the early settlers see Robert A. Calvert and Arnolde de León, eds. *The History of Texas* (Harlan Davidson: Arlington Heights, 1990), Chapter 3 and 4; Arnolde de León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Towards Mexicans in Texas, 1821—1900*, (Austin: University of Texas, 1983), Chapter 1. Andres Tijerina, *Tejanos and Texas Under the Mexican Flag, 1821-1836* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 1994). David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas, 1987), Chapter 2. For a thorough account of the complexity and chaos of the Texas Revolution as well as the varying experiences of different groups see Paul D. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience, 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 1992), Chapter 4.

Most recently, borderlands historians have cast the Texas Revolution as an example of the inherent contingency of early nineteenth century nationalism. Some have pointed to factors like the economic pull of the US or intensifying Indian raids as reasons for Mexico's ultimate loss of the region.<sup>413</sup> Andrés Reséndez correctly observes that the Texas Revolution started out as part of a much larger Mexican movement to reinstate the federalist Constitution of 1824 after Santa Anna's abrupt turn towards centralism. In this regard, it was little different from the numerous other rebellions then sweeping northern Mexico. Indeed, Anglos entered relatively late into a conflict that had long involved tejanos and the citizens of other northern states like Zacatecas.<sup>414</sup> Historians have also been right to point to the profound lack of unity, consistency and organization that characterized the movement.<sup>415</sup>

Yet, while Texans certainly struggled to come to a consensus about what exactly they were fighting for, or even if they should be fighting at all, throughout most of the conflict the dominant aim was decisively *not* independence – it was, rather, for a return to Mexican federalism. However, few historians have taken Anglo Texans' early alliance

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<sup>413</sup> David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1982); Andres Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Greg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). For a synthesis and critique of Texas historiography until 1991 see Walter Buenger and Robert A. Calvert's *Introduction to Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1991), ix-xxxv. Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the US-Mexico War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), Chapter 6; Pekka Hamalainen, *Comanche Empire* (New have: Yale University Press, 2008), "Introduction."

<sup>414</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, Chapter 5.

<sup>415</sup> Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience*, Introduction and Chapter 4.

with Mexican federalists seriously.<sup>416</sup> But when one considers Texans' longstanding commitment to federalism, consistent investment in the Mexican nation-building project, and sustained opposition to joining the United States, it makes sense. If we accept Texans' support for Mexican federalism in 1824, then we should not so readily dismiss it in 1836. In this sense, the revolution was hardly revolutionary at all. Far from the result of two irreconcilable political cultures, it was inspired by a profound sense of duty to one – Mexico's. Loyalty, in fact, remained the primary impulse throughout most of the conflict, for Anglos as well as tejanos. Texans' ultimate decision to declare independence came late, reluctantly, and for many, it never came at all.

So then why *did* Texans ultimately end up abandoning Mexican federalism and making a go of it on their own despite the adamant protests of men like Harrison? Independence, as it turns out, was largely the result of two concurrent factors, both inspired by Texans' own inability to fight the Mexican centralists on their own, due to their comparatively small population and limited resources. One factor was the unwillingness of private investors in the North to fund an internal Mexican war. The other was the significant numbers of US recruits who flooded into Texas and, in accordance with Texans' long commitment to representative democracy and martial citizenship, received the right to vote. As we shall see, these recruits had a profound

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<sup>416</sup> Cantrell writes that "Their ultimate aim was clearly the independence of Texas. Declaring Texas a state of the Mexican federation was a subterfuge made necessary by political and military responsibilities," *Stephen F. Austin*, 323; Weber has described it as "disingenuous" because it declared loyalty to a government that by that time did not exist in *Mexican Frontier*, 245; Lack terms it "simply indecisive," *Texas Revolutionary Experience*, p. 49.

impact, not only on the course of the war, but on the direction of Texas politics more generally. These men emboldened a more radical minority largely composed of recent immigrants themselves, who had been flirting with the thought of independence at least since the Anáhuac crisis.

Thus, while the Texas Revolution began as a Mexican story, it would end as an American one. Volunteers from the North, along with speculators, slaveholders, and not to mention the Jackson administration itself, believed they had a vested interest in an independent Texas. They, as well as the thousands of men who answered the plea to help the fight against Santa Anna, often in return for land, were ultimately the ones to determine that the Texas rebellion would end very differently from how it began. Yet its outcome was hardly a testament to the enduring strength and superiority of the United States, but rather to the power of an increasingly territorially aggressive South and to the principles of radical federalism. In this regard, perhaps it is more accurate to say that the Texas Revolution began as a Mexican story and ended as a Southern one.

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The convention of 1832 constituted an illegal assembly under Mexican law, leaving Political Chief Ramón Músquiz little choice but to annul its petition. However, just a few months later, Santa Ana and his federalist forces overthrew Bustamante. The Mexican states subsequently elected the hero general to the presidency and the even more radical federalist, Valentín Gómez Farís, as his vice president. Things were beginning to

look up for the Texans, who called for another convention to push for their desired reforms. Once again, delegates from the Anglo colonies of T  jas y Coahuila met in San Felipe in April of the following year to draft a formal petition requesting the central government admit T  jas as a separate and independent state of the Mexican confederation under the law of May 7, 1824.<sup>417</sup>

In their memorial to the National Congress, the petitioners asked that the union between T  jas y Coahuila “be dissolved, abrogated and perpetually cease,” and that they, the inhabitants of Texas, be permitted to establish a separate state government “in accordance with the federal constitution and the constitutive act,” and that it “be received and incorporated into the great confederation of Mexico.” They pointed out that the consolidation of the provinces had always been provisional and specifically referenced the decree of the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1824 which stated that, as soon as Texas had accrued the number of inhabitants to constitute a state, it should inform Congress and receive recognition as such.<sup>418</sup>

Claiming that their relative isolation and lack of integration left many in B  xar exposed to the depredations of the “faithless Comanches,” inadequate schools and churches, and a general want of “human industry,” they complained “more of the *want* of

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<sup>417</sup> Timothy E. Anna, *Forging Mexico, 1821-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), p 254-258; Cantrell, 283.

<sup>418</sup> “Memorial to Congress Requesting Separate Statehood,” April, 1833, Ernest Wallace, David M. Vigness and George B. Ward, eds, *Documents of Texas History*, (Texas State Historical Association: Austin), 2002.

*all* the important attributes of government, than of the abuses of any,” and they made it clear that their appeal came from a desire to *protect* Mexico from lawlessness and invasion, most specifically from their own native country.

Constituting a remote frontier of the republic, and bordering on a powerful nation, a portion of whose population, in juxtaposition to hers, is notoriously profligate and lawless, she requires, in particular and emphatic sense, the vigorous application of such laws as are necessary, not only to the preservation of good order, the protection of property, and the redress of personal wrongs, but such also as are essential to the prevention of illicit commerce, to the security of the public revenues, and to the avoidance of serious collision with the authorities of the neighboring republic.

A more direct relationship with the central government, they insisted, would permit Texans to better serve and protect their state and, consequently, the nation, thus allowing Texas to “‘figure’ as a brilliant star in the Mexican constellation,” and “shed a new splendor around the illustrious city of Monteczuma.”<sup>419</sup> In fact, many Anglo Texans expressed support for separate statehood only on the condition that it would not result in independence. Harrison himself wrote that he believed the Anglo-Texans would “gladly embrace” a provisional government only if Texas remained “a part of the Mexican confederation.” He insisted “that we are all Mexicans and will rigidly protect all the rights and interests of Mexico.”<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Harrison to SFA, 30 November 1832, *AP*, Vol. II, 895-96.



Although most tejanos agreed with Texas statehood in theory, they felt that now was not the time to ask. The nation was plagued by political polarization and crisis, the federal government distracted, and such an appeal could be construed as a sign of rebellion or secession. Most tejanos believed that Texans should give the state government the opportunity to address their grievances before demanding separation. Near the end of 1832, Austin held a meeting with several prominent bexarenos in which he “said everything I could to induce them to concur in taking that step [toward separate statehood] at once.” They expressed agreement with his aim, but “thought it precipitate” before any “representations of our grievances were made to the Govt.” He conceded, and suggested that Texans accompany their grievances “with a positive declaration that if [they] were not fully redressed by the first day of March next, Texas would then proceed immediately to organize a local Government.” The B  xar leadership agreed to this, but insisted on April.<sup>421</sup>

Yet, not even everyone agreed that the state government was deficient enough to merit Texas’ separation. “[I]t is our duty as faithful citizens to preserve that govt, which affords us protection so long as it is worthy of support,” wrote John A. Williams to Austin. Such a reaction was perhaps unsurprising from the man who had led the suppression of the Fredonian rebels. “Every man of intelligence in this section of [the]Country that I have conversed with,” he claimed,” is “much opposed to the

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<sup>421</sup> SFA to Samuel May Williams, 6 December 1832, *AP*, Vol. II, 987-99.

Convention and all other innovation upon the established laws of the Country.” Williams even went so far as to question Austin’s integrity. “[Y]ou say that you are a ‘Mexican Citizen . . . Why then advise me to violate my duty, by the performance of an act expressly prohibited by law, and which you as a ‘Mexican citizen’ in obedience to your duty as such, could not, and I presume, would not perform.” He denied that Texans had anything to be discontent about, and dismissed the notion that the colonies were growing restive or needed a convention to quell their frustrations. “You say the late ‘convention terminated very happily, it tranquilized, harmonized, and united all . . . But there was nothing to harmonize and tranquilize. The people of Texas were at that time, for ought that I know, perfectly tranquil.”<sup>422</sup>

The call for statehood came primarily from a small but growing contingent of Anglo Texans, most of them newcomers and many of whom had been the ringleaders of the Anáhuac rebellion. Younger, less established, and with far more tenuous ties to their adopted country, these men largely rejected the older settlers’ appeals for calm, patience and neutrality with regard to the ongoing civil war. Perhaps the most vocal was William H. Wharton, a Virginia native raised in Tennessee. Wharton’s first trip to Texas in 1827 resulted in his marriage to the daughter of Jared E. Groce, the largest slaveowner in

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<sup>422</sup> John A. Williams to Samuel May Williams, 31 Jan 1833, Samuel May Williams Papers, Rosenberg Library, Galveston Texas.

Texas. The young couple spent the first few years of their marriage in Tennessee before returning to Texas in 1830.<sup>423</sup>

Wharton made no secret of his opposition to the old settlers, of whom he had complained bitterly during the Anáhuac crisis. “I have received several letters from San Felipe, breathing all the same *toryish* spirit and shewing that we have as much opposition to expect from our own countrymen as from the Mexicans,” he declared before a Brazoria Committee. Wharton’s frustration with Austin and his allies grew more intense during the October meeting when Austin was elected over him as presiding officer.<sup>424</sup>

It was this more radical contingent that Austin hoped to quell with the convention, but in doing so he sparked the ire of conservatives. “I believe further that if all the people of Texas were consulted,” wrote Williams, “and made to understand the subject in its proper light[,] then the main Question put, Shall we obey the laws of the Country we have adopted, or shall we not obey them, and yeald obedeance to the junto of San Felipe? I believe Sir that would find an over whelming majority in the affirmative.” He reminded the empresario that the convention’s resolution did not take precedence over any state or federal law “yet according to your strange system of reasoning,” it would appear that they were “at least equal to a Statute passed in due form by the legislative authority of the State.” He concluded by echoing the very instructions that Austin himself had issued

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<sup>423</sup> Cantrell, 329.

<sup>424</sup> W. Wharton to Committee at Brazoria, 4 July 1832, Charles Adams Gulick, Jr. and Katharine Elliott, eds, *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar (LP)*, Vol. I, (New York: AMS Press, 1973), 19-40.

time and again to his colonists - to abandon any and all behavior that might bring them into collision with Mexican officials. "Can it be the interest of Texas to dissolve the legal political bonds that unite us as one society?" Williams warned Austin that he did "not know of five men in this Munesepaety favourable to the plan you have so warmly espoused" and that if he were to call for an election "it would be disregarded." Even those who supported the Committee's resolution questioned its popularity and suggested delaying action until some kind of unanimity could be achieved. Frustrated, by the end of January 1833 Austin was prepared to give up on Texan politics altogether.<sup>425</sup>

As the primary founder of the Anglo colonies and their chief representative to the federal government, Austin found himself in a difficult position by 1833. Ever since his colony's establishment, he had counseled patience, obedience, and loyalty to Mexico. But with the governments' growth and increasing administrative presence in Texas, coupled with a flood of new immigrants from the North after 1830 - the majority of whom tended to be more politically restive than their predecessors, this position was becoming harder to sustain. The Father of Texas now found himself struggling to find a political course that suited Texas' changing demographic and relationship with the federal government. This was no easy task, and yet statehood was something that Texans had long expected and generally supported, even if they did not think it was the right time to ask.

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<sup>425</sup> John A Williams to SFA, 18 December 1832; D.W. Anthony to SFA, 25 January 1833; SFA to James F. Perry, 20 January 1833; *AP*, Vol. II, 903-6, 919-21, 917.

Despite some opposition, Austin understood that the desire for separate statehood was strong even among some of the more established settlers such as Ira Ingram.<sup>426</sup> He therefore accepted the task of traveling to Mexico City to present the document to national leaders, albeit with some trepidation: “I enter upon this mission with great anxiety for I am convinced the welfare of Texas depends on success,” he wrote to his sister and brother-in-law just before embarking, “We cannot do without a State govt any longer. It is impossible.” Although concerned that the political turmoil then plaguing the nation might hinder his efforts, Austin remained mostly optimistic. In a letter to his cousin he wrote, “I leave to-morrow for Mexico on the state Government mission – I go with considerable – I may say – strong hopes of success – The course taken by the convention, is the true one I think.” He could think of “no just reason” why the federal government would refuse him. Regarding separation from Mexico, he wrote that there was a “decided opposition” to it. “The people do not desire, and would not agree to it, for they could get a State Government.”<sup>427</sup>

Yet Austin was apprehensive. “The consequences of failure will no doubt be war,” he confided to his nephew. Specifically, he worried about how the more radical elements of the settler population would react. But for the time being, he chose to remain hopeful and continue to caution obedience and calm. Austin was most concerned

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<sup>426</sup> Ira Ingram to ?, 18 April 1833, *Ira Ingram Papers*, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio, TX.

<sup>427</sup> SFA to James F. and Emily Perry, 19 April 1833; SFA to Henry Austin, 19 April 1833; SFA to Mrs. Mary Austin Holley, 20 April 1833, *AP*, Vol. II, 951-52, 953-54, 954-56.

about the well-being of the “old settlers,” as he called them, if conflict ensued, either between Texas and the federal government or among the settlers themselves. “The settlers have earned what they have got too hard, and too many years of hard labor and privation, to jeopardize all hastily,” he wrote in a letter to one such individual, “a war with the nation will be ruinous to them, for they will be destroyed and overwhelmed, eaten up by those who come from abroad to aid them in fighting their battles.” Indeed, they had more to fear from the newer elements of their own settler population “than from the whole Mexican nation.” Men like Wharton who had been in Texas for a far shorter period of time, had yet to make their fortunes and, in many cases, found themselves cut out of political and economic opportunities by Austin’s cohort. “My policy has displeased the ardent spirits in my colony,” Austin wrote, “but I still think it was the correct one.” Many of these men viewed such johnny-come-latelies with heavy suspicion and did not look forward to a new government and the significant power shift that it would no doubt entail. Indeed, as the tide of radicalism was slowly gaining steam in Texas, Austin and his allies were struggling to hold onto power. In many ways this mission would prove their significance and the relevance of their hereunto cautious and deferential approach to Mexican authority.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> SFA to Mrs. Mary Austin Holley, 20 April 1833, *AP*, Vol. II, 954-56.

Austin arrived in Mexico City in July of 1833 and immediately presented Congress with a five point petition based on the measure drafted back in Texas. He stated that it was “The wish of the people and their declaration that they possessed the necessary elements to sustain a State Government,” and that it was “The natural right of Texas to occupy its station alongside of its sisters, the other States of the Confederation.” While “[Texas] has always been a distinct member of the Mexican Family,” he insisted that the appeal came from “the duty and the interest of Texas to cement and strengthen its union with the Mexican confederation.”<sup>429</sup>

This was all par for the course for Austin. But towards the end of the documents he dared to state that, if denied, “[S]elf-preservation” would compel Texans to organize a local government “with or without the approbation of the General Government.” Austin assured the Committee, “that this measure would not proceed from any hostile views to the permanent union of Texas with Mexico,” but rather, “from absolute necessity, to save themselves from anarchy and total ruin,” referring, no doubt, to the more restive elements of his population. At the same time, Austin acknowledged the potentially deleterious impact that such a move might have on the relationship between Texas and the federal government, “How such a measure would affect the union of Texas with Mexico, or where it would end, were matters worthy of serious reflection.” Was this a threat? Whatever the case, Austin defended his decision to add this appendage to his appeal,

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<sup>429</sup> SFA to General Committee, 24 July 1833, *AP*, Vol. II, 988-991.

insisting that he had long “pursued conciliation as a system,” but that “my judgment is now convinced that Texas, in this question of right to become a State, must be uncompromising.”<sup>430</sup>

Yet, even as he advocated forming a separate state government with or without federal approval, Austin made it clear that the ladder was in no way a demonstration of Texans’ disloyalty to their adopted country, much less an initial stage in their eventual separation from it. In his letter to the Minister of Relations, Austin reiterated his enduring belief in “The glory of the federal system” which he argued “consists in the fact that no other form of government invented by the wisdom of men, has been able to meet the local necessities of each angle of an immense country.” The petition of Texas was clearly in line with this purpose. He further insisted that “There is no individual in [T]exas who is not convinced that the greatest misfortune that could happen to him would be the separation of that country from [M]exico.” However, statehood was so indispensable “to the *welfare*’ and *happiness*’ of the people” that it could not be delayed. Consequently, if there were no way of obtaining it without “breaking the bonds of the union with Mexico, it would then be the interest of Texas to attempt her separation.”<sup>431</sup> For the first time, Austin argued that Texans’ loyalty to the principles of federalism ought to preempt their loyalty to Mexico, a clear departure from prior

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> SFA to Minister of Relations, 1 August 1833, *AP*, Vol. II, 992-96.



unconditional fealty to his adopted country, and conviction that Mexico was the only place on earth where such principles stood a chance of becoming reality.

When Austin dared to repeat his position to Gómez Farías, the Vice President interpreted it as a threat and had him thrown in prison. Tellingly, he did not blame the Mexicans for his predicament. “It has been intimated to me that some enemy, I know not who, had accused me of designs to unite Texas, with the US of the North.” Rather, the real people responsible for his arrest, according to Austin, were those stirring discontent in Texas. He now began to regret proceeding with the appeal. “Ever since I returned from Bexar a year ago last December and found the convention called in my absence,” he wrote to Williams, “I have considered myself as suspended over the alter of sacrifice.” The measure, he believed “compromised me in the highest degree” with both the bexarenos and his friends in San Felipe.<sup>432</sup>

Even as he sat in his cell in the prison of the Inquisition, Austin remained optimistic about the future of Mexican politics and, by implication, Texas’ relationship with Mexico. “The most favorable reforms and changes are taking place in the Mexican government and people, and a little time will put all right – there will be toleration of religion – Texas will be a state and all will go right.” Tellingly, Austin saw the real threat both to himself and Texas as coming from certain radical elements in the province. “I suppose that some of my enemies in the colony will rejoice at what they may think or

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<sup>432</sup> SFA to SMW, 31 December 1834, *AP*, Vol. III, 36-7.

*hope* will be my ruin,” he wrote to James Perry. That being the case, Austin wanted to make sure that his current predicament did not sour Texan attitudes towards Mexican leaders. “I do not in any manner blame the government for arresting me, and I particularly request that there be no excitement about it.”<sup>433</sup>

On the second day of his imprisonment, Austin heard the funeral honors for the slain Vicente Guerrero. Yet, even as he was reminded of Mexico’s troubled political climate and complained of his solitary confinement, “shut up in the dark dungeon,” he remained convinced that Texas belonged with Mexico. His opinions were unchanged nearly two months later when he observed the myriad disadvantages of United States acquisition of Texas. First, the US would be “receiving within its limits a country which is entirely isolated from all the other states, by its geographic situation, & by all the interests of agriculture, manufactures and commerce.” Austin observed that Texas’ rivers, as unnavigable as they may have been, linked it to Mexico “and do not enter the Territories of the north, so as to form bonds of union, as does the river Mississippi with Louisiana & other states adjacent.” Furthermore, Texas itself gained nothing by becoming a part of that country as “There is no market in the North for the produce of Texas, & there is in Mexico.” Sheer distance made such a connection undesirable since Texas was further from Washington than Mexico City. Neither was commerce any temptation since, in that regard, “the Mexican flag is equal to that of the North.” Finally,

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<sup>433</sup> SFA to James F. Perry, 14 January, 1834, *AP*, Vol. II, 1033-36.

the result of an additional cotton-producing state like Texas “would be to injure all the states south of Virginia, whose chief produce & almost the only one which is valuable is cotton.” If Texas, however, remained a part of Mexico, its progress “would promote the power of the Mexican Nation to a great degree” and “to the prejudice of the U. States of the North.” “What then is the true interest of Texas?” Austin asked, “It is to have a local government to cement & strengthen its union with Mexico.”<sup>434</sup>

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Those in the United States met news of Austin’s arrest with considerable interest. But they did not necessarily share his opinion regarding Texas’ future. Southern planters, especially, were beginning to look upon the fledgling cotton producing Mexican province of Texas with a wary eye and to embrace the notion that, despite its distance and geographic discontinuity, the Union would be best served by absorbing Texas rather than letting it remain a part of Mexico. And as Jackson entered his second term, it looked like they might have the chance.

As 1833 drew to a close, times remained hard for Southern cotton growers. “Cotton is low and extremely dull,” wrote one New Orleans trader to Samuel May Williams. “Times is very hard in this country and no prospect of their getting any better,” wrote another. Texas annexation would not only supply cotton growers with more land

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<sup>434</sup> SFA, “The ‘Prison Journal’ of Stephen F. Austin,” ed. W.P. Zuber, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 2 (January 1899).

for cotton production, it would facilitate a growing US monopoly of the cotton trade. Therefore, many in the South had a vested interest in seeing relations between Texas and Mexico worsen. One Texan trader wrote that, while he sincerely trusted “that nothing serious will happen,” nonetheless “should anything grow out of the circumstances of a serious nature we shall not lack friends.”<sup>435</sup>

While Jackson remained distracted with these and other domestic concerns, his foreign secretary, Anthony Butler, continued to scheme of ways to acquire Texas, including bribery. Jackson rebuffed such proposals but left Butler at his post. In March 1834, Butler concocted his brashest scheme yet. He assured the president that, in light of Santa Anna’s recent rise to power, there was “no hope of obtaining *Texas* by amicable arrangement unless we first shew our strength.” He encouraged the President to follow through on his earlier threat to establish a boundary without the Mexicans’ approval. “[*W*]e will never obtain even that portion of the *country* to which we think we have a clear title until *we occupy it forcibly*.” Butler was correct in believing that there was little prospect of a local movement to separate Texas from Mexico and attach it to the United States, but not necessarily for the reasons he identified. Most of the Anglo settlers were uninterested in rebellion, much less secession. This may have been precisely what compelled him to push Jackson to take some action himself. In perhaps his most brazen proposition yet, Butler proposed that the President permit him to filibuster Texas, stating

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<sup>435</sup> Elliott W. Gregory to SMW, 19 February 1834; Louis J. Sturdevant to SMW, 4 May 1834; Robert Wilson to SMW, 7 March 1834, SMWP.

he would “pledge my head” to be the one to finally “possess that part of Texas which is ours.” Such a proposal was too extreme even for Jackson who wisely decided at that point to recall Butler from his post.<sup>436</sup>

But for Austin and most other leading Texans at this time, the current discord in Texas had little to do with the North. Instead, they saw it as a product of the unrest then sweeping the rest of Mexico: “The past events in Texas necessarily grow out of the revolution in Jalappa, which overturned the constitution and produced the counter revolution of Vera Cruz,” Austin wrote, insisting that he had done his best to keep Texas out of the tumult. “A current was set in motion,” however, by events related to the civil war, and “Texas could not avoid being agitated.”<sup>437</sup>

It may have also had something to do with Gómez Farías’ decision to dispatch Colonels José María Noreiga and Juan Nepomuceno Almonte to Coahila y Tέjas for the purpose of reviewing a series of colonization and land transfer contracts. Colonel Almonte was assigned the specific task of ascertaining “the opinions of Anglo-Texan colonists concerning separation from Mexico.” The order was no doubt a result of concern ignited by Austin’s recent petition. He was also ordered to inform slaves of their proper status as freed men and women, and to promise land to Native Americans who

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<sup>436</sup> Anthony Butler to Andrew Jackson, 7 March 1834, *Correspondences of Andrew Jackson*, John Spencer Bassett, ed. (Carnegie Institute: Washington, D.C., 1913); Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire*, 1833-35, (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 347-55.

<sup>437</sup> Ayuntamiento of San Felipe, 17 January 1834, *AP*, Vol. II, 1039-41.

pledged their loyalty to Mexico. This “all-out nationalizing blitzkrieg,” as one historian has put it, no doubt ignited the ire of many Texans, especially Anglos.<sup>438</sup>

Yet, it also quieted certain concerns about the absence or ineffectuality of the federal government in the region. By May of that year, many of Austin’s closest friends continued to share his optimism and good faith in the Mexican leadership. In July, William H. Jack informed Thomas McKinney that “Col. Almonte is here; he is intelligent, agreeable and apparently candid. He says that Austin will be released soon” and that he had found “the report [on the state of affairs in Texas] to be worse than false.” The rest of the ayuntamientos seemed to fall in line behind their leader, expressing gratitude to both the State and National Government, requesting Austin’s release from prison, and acknowledging that most of their grievances had been sufficiently addressed. “Since A[ustin] was dispatched to Mexico the most favorable changes have taken place in the political affairs of Texas,” wrote the Ayuntamiento of Brazoria to Congress. The National Congress repealed the Law of April 6<sup>th</sup> and state government has “extended its arm of relief and applied the necessary remedy to our wrongs.” They concluded by “tending our most cordial and heartfelt gratitude both to the Federal and State Govts.” There remained only one more issue to be resolved: Austin’s release from prison. They assured the government that if it complied “Texas will prove that it is ready and willing

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<sup>438</sup> Reséndez, 151.

to spend its blood and treasure in support of the Mexican Constitution, the Mexican Laws and Mexican Territory.”<sup>439</sup>

When Santa Anna failed to release him in June, Austin again blamed his adversaries in Texas for tarnishing his name to Mexican authorities. “[W]ho those persons are I know not – it is said they are North Americans by birth,” he wrote, and suggested that W.H. Wharton might have had something to do with it. Blaming these men for his imprisonment may have been a stretch, but the radical elements in Texas certainly did take advantage of Austin’s absence to advance their agenda. On February 22, John Wharton published an editorial in *The People’s Advocate* complaining that the press in Texas was “muzzled, owned, supported by, and devoted to the interests of a few.” He accused Austin and his allies of being “timid & sycophantic” and of yielding to oppression. While he claimed to wish Austin “no harm,” he nonetheless hoped that the Mexicans would keep him in prison, until he “undergoes radical change.” “But perhaps the worst accusation that he leveled at the “Father of Texas” was that of irrelevance. Wharton claimed that most Texans were “diametrically opposed to the course recommended by him; some do not believe in his sincerity, and others disregard it all together.”<sup>440</sup> Wharton’s remarks suggested that Austin was out of touch with the current direction of Texan politics now being steered by a younger generation composed of men like himself.

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<sup>439</sup> James F. Perry to SFA, 13 May 1834; William H. Jack to Thomas F McKinney, 25 July 1834; Ayuntamiento of Brazoria to Congress, 31 July 1834, *AP*, Vol. II, 1055-56, 1067, 1069-71.

<sup>440</sup> John H. Wharton, “To the Citizens of Texas,” *The People’s Advocate of Texas*, 22 February 1835.

When Austin heard of Wharton's editorial, he was incensed. In his defense, Austin insisted that he had "yielded to the popular opinion" and instructed his allies "*to discountenance in the most unequivocal and efficient manner*" anyone who was in "*contempt or defiance of the mexican people or authorities.*" I do not believe there is any anti-Mexican party in Texas" he continued to insist, "but if there be, the adoption of the people of the motto and rule above stated, will soon detect and mark it." Austin concluded his letter by reiterating his hope that the authorities of the colony "will recognize and obey" the President Santa Anna, and proclaim "with one unanimous voice *Fidelity to Mexico, opposition to violent men or measures,* and all will be peace, harmony, and prosperity." He then stated that he hoped the state question was dead and would remain so.<sup>441</sup>

Austin's instructions seemed to take heed. Samuel May Williams assured his friend that his advice was being dutifully executed in Texas where the people have been "advised by the committee to have nothing to do with the State question." In a letter addressed to Perry, McKinney made it clear that the citizens of Brazoria were of a similar mind, deeming it their duty to no longer permit "a few aspiring ambitious demagogues to use our names or assume our rights." In so doing, the people of Brazoria not only separated themselves from those who continued to push for statehood, but also renounced

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<sup>441</sup> SFA to James F. Perry, 25 August 1834, AP, 1075-85.



them as effective usurpers, placing the democratic imperative back in the hands of Austin and the Mexican leadership.<sup>442</sup>

Meanwhile, the more radical elements in Texas fought the accusations of Austin and his more conservative allies. Terming Austin's letter "a bloated mass of disgusting self conceit – of arrogant dictation and of inconsistent stupidity," Wharton went on to cast aspersions at his critic in terms as harsh – or more so - than those he had received.

In conclusion I pledge myself when this obeyer of instructions this man of so many personal friends, this disinterested benefactor of Texas, this oracular weathercock, this political Proteas this innocent victim, this maker of mottos, this organizer of parties, this presumptuous dictator returns, to brand him on the forehead with a mark that shall outlast his epitaph.

For the time being, however, Wharton's threats would go unrealized, as it was becoming increasingly clear whose side most Texans were on. When the agitators for statehood attempted to renew their movement by calling for an election of members to a Revolutionary Congress, the Citizens of Brazoria took the lead in renouncing the "unauthorized call," stating that they believed it to jeopardize "the security of our families and our dearest rights and interests." Accordingly, they renounced the "few ambitious *agitators of revolutionary measures*," whom they accused of an "unwarranted assumption of authority to DICTATE to the people." Perry reported to Austin that

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<sup>442</sup> SMW to SFA, 29 October 1834, 14-4; McKinney to Perry, 4 November 1834, 16, *AP*, Vol. III, 16.

Wharton and his allies were “as politically dead as if they were buried” and that the people of Texas were not looking forward to any more conventions.<sup>443</sup>

The Texans’ renewed policy of patience and obedience, Austin assured them, was having beneficial effects in Mexico City where Santa Anna had “solemnly and officially declared that he will sustain the *federal republican system*.” Even the statehood question began to look likely again, despite the fact that Texans had by now formally abandoned it. Almonte himself wrote to Samuel May Williams that “The president agrees with the politics conducted by the colonists at this time,” and assured him that “When Congress opens sessions I will let you know regarding petitions of the communities to organize a government in Texas independent from that of Coahuila.” But the best evidence of this change of mind among Mexico’s political leadership finally came towards the end of 1834 when Austin was finally released from prison.<sup>444</sup>

With calm in Texas restored and his liberation achieved, Austin now turned his attention to realizing his longstanding dream of turning Texas into a formidable and lucrative member of the Mexican family, specifically through the cotton trade. “I hope that a dead calm will reign all over Texas for many years to come,” he wrote Perry, “and that there will be no more excitements of any kind whatever. Assuring his friend that “the dark days had passed,” he insisted that “Calm, a *dead calm*, is all that Texas needs.”

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<sup>443</sup> William Wharton to the Public, 9 November 1834; Address to the Public, November 1834; Perry to SFA, 7 December 1834, *AP*, Vol. III, 25-6, 27-9, 32-5.

<sup>444</sup> SFA to McKinney, 2 December 1834, *AP*, Vol. III, 30-1; Almonte to SMW, 20 December 1834, Samuel May Williams Papers; SFA to SMW, 31 December 1834; *AP*, Vol. III, 36-7

Austin now believed that the best means for Texas to achieve statehood was to simply make itself an indispensable part of the Mexican federation, just as it has always intended. Instead of wrestling with national politics, Texans' should focus on their own self-improvement. "[I]mmigration – good crops – no party divisions" was the order of the day. He made it clear that establishing stronger commercial ties with the rest of Mexico should be chief among these, and once again, he began to dream of his circum-Caribbean commercial network.<sup>445</sup> Texas' bond with Mexico was stronger and more promising than ever.

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But change in Mexico City did come. The same month that Austin directed Texans to expect no considerable alteration in the course of Mexican politics, Santa Ana unleashed a vigorous centralization program. The General had spent much of his presidency at his home in Velasco, allowing Gómez Farías to effectively run the country for him. The Vice President took the opportunity to push a series of sweeping reforms through congress. By spring of 1834, the two most powerful bastions of Mexican politics – the church and army – were complaining bitterly of their own alienation. On May 25<sup>th</sup>, representatives from these two contingents issued the Plan of Cuernavaca which called for a reversal of the recent reforms, demanded the removal of those legislators who were

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<sup>445</sup> SFA to Perry, 4 March 1835; SFA to Perry, 10 March 1835; SFA to SMW, 4 April 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 45-6, 46-8, 60.

responsible for them, and called on President Santa Anna to halt the federalist overhaul.<sup>446</sup>

Santa Anna complied. Not wanting to alienate the two most powerful groups in the country. He promptly replaced Gómez Farías and began aggressively reversing his policies. He dissolved Congress and ordered the election of a new one with whose aid he was able to unleash a series of measures that effectively overturned the federalist Constitution of 1824. These included dissolving state legislatures, abolishing almost all state militias, and transforming the states into departments with federally appointed leadership. Sensing that he had been misled by the general, in July Austin wrote to Perry that “Congress is to meet in extra session on the 19 of this month, there seems to be no doubt that the system of Govt will be changed from federal to central, tho it probably will be some months before the new constitution can be framed and published.”<sup>447</sup>

A staunch federalist opposition emerged around peripheral state governments, most specifically Zacatecas, Guerrero, Yucatán, and of course, T<sup>e</sup>jas y Coahuila. Reséndez writes that by 1830, “Coahuila and Texas had emerged as the staunchest bastion of federalism throughout Mexico, the very province chosen as sanctuary by the very highest Mexican officials, a liberal paradise.” It was therefore no surprise when the Governor of Nuevo León, Manuel M. de Llano suggested that federalists in the state retrench into Texas, decouple it from Coahuila and then get Anglo-Texan colonists to

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<sup>446</sup> Reséndez, 153; Anna, 259-60.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.; Anna, 60-1; SFA to Perry, 13 July 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 90-1.

cooperate in upholding it as a separate state in accordance with their own earlier expressed desires.<sup>448</sup>

Governor Viesca himself, had conceived of a similar plan, setting up a war council in response to the national Congress' decision to order drastic reductions in the size of state militias, which many, especially in Coahuila y T ejas, considered the greatest guarantor of state sovereignty. Anglo Texans were, at first, reluctant to get involved, preferring to believe Austin's claims that Santa Anna's new government posed no considerable threat to federalism. But Viesca attempted to gain their support by reminding them that the party "now in power is the same that prohibited the immigration of North American colonists in 1830, has openly declared against all foreigners, and secretly favors Spanish policy and Spanish despotism." Viesca warned that if they did nothing, they would soon see the reversal of a whole series of recent reforms, including a reinstatement of the Law of April 30<sup>th</sup>.<sup>449</sup>

Yet, Anglo-Texans continued to dismiss such calls to arms and insisted on calm. John Williams issued a circular pleading with Texans to heed Austin's advice, not Viesca's. "I fear that the people are now ready to plunge head long into the yawning jaws of a hopeless civil war," he wrote. "[The guardians of peace and order" had "forgotten the advice of the worthy Stephen F. Austin, who but the other day told them in the most emphatic language not to entangle themselves in the family quarrels of the

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<sup>448</sup> Res endez, 150-4, quote on page 150.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., 154-8.

Republic.” But Williams had little to worry about so long as the frontier remained largely unaffected by Santa Ana’s reforms. One man just returned from a trip to Mexico City, informed his fellow colonists that reports of the general’s “unfriendly disposition” towards the colonies were false, and that if troops were ordered there, “it is for the purpose of counteracting any insurrectionary movements that might be consequent on the arrest of the land speculators and corrupt officers of the state government.”<sup>450</sup>

Eager to silence the radicals and restore calm, Texan leaders decided to call for a convention to silence the rumors, and silence “the ORIGINATORS of the disturbances.” The peace party’s dominance had a chastening effect on the radicals. “The truth is, the people are much divided here,” wrote William Travis, a radical who led and would die at the Alamo siege. Yet, he conceded that, at this point, “The peace-party” were “the strongest, and make much the most noise.” Unless the “war party” – those calling on Texans to join the federalist resistance - could gain strength, “had we not better be quiet, and settle down for a while?”<sup>451</sup>

Thus, town leaders throughout Texas met in the summer of 1835 to confirm their loyalty to Mexico and the principles on which it stood. Furthermore, they flatly denied the accusations that Texans “cherish a hostile attitude to Mexicans, or to the Mexican government” and confirmed that “they are voluntary citizens of the same republic; have

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<sup>450</sup> John A Williams Circular, 3 July 1835; Fisher to Committee, 7 April 1835, *Papers of the Texas Revolution (PTR)*, (Austin, Presidial Press, 1973).

<sup>451</sup> Fisher to Committee, 7 April 1835; Travis to Bowie, 30 July 1835, *PTR*.

sworn to support the same constitution, and are by inclination and interest, as well as the most solemn obligations, bound to cherish and sustain the liberal and free institutions of this republic.” The town of Gonzalez went even further, protesting “against any *provisional government* or organization” tending “to estrange the Jurisdiction of Texas, from that of Coahuila.” They promised to challenge any body threatening “to interrupt the harmony and good understanding existing between Texas and the Federal Government,” stating that any such person deserved “the martial disapprobation and contempts of every friend of Constitutional order in the Country.”<sup>452</sup>

Indeed, it looked as if revolution was the last thing on most Texans’ minds in the summer of 1835. “I discover the Planters are again in good cheer,” observed Asa Brigham to Wharton in July of 1835. Men like Brigham, unaware of what was happening in Mexico City, believed their adopted country was merely at a crossroads. Yet, he did not doubt that Texans would at some point have to confront the storm that was brewing in the interior: “In my humble opinion, there are questions nearly ripe, and will soon be agitated; when once commenced, will flud in upon us in rapid succession.” It was clear that Texans had no interest in war. But they were also fully prepared to defend the principles on which their adopted country was founded if it ever came to

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<sup>452</sup> Mina Resolutions, 4 July 1835; Gonzalez Resolution, date unknown, *PTR* .

that.<sup>453</sup> While the state question and relations with Mexico remained open, Texas began to re-enter a period of cooperation and complacency.

It was not until Lorenzo de Zavala, noted federalist and former Vice President, reached Texas in August that the mood began to shift. In a lengthy address to the colonists, Zavala introduced himself as one who had “occupied in the Mexican nation the most honorable stations.” Indeed, his credentials, as one of the leading politicians in the nation, and perhaps the most knowledgeable man in Texas when it came to affairs concerning the national government, lent him the authority to convince the Anglo-Texan population that armed rebellion was necessary. Mexico, according to Zavala, was now effectively a military dictatorship and he warned that, so long as they remained faithful to the Constitution of 1824, Texans would soon find federal troops at their doorsteps. Certain generals had “destroyed the federal constitution” in order “to be promoted to the presidency of the republic,” he explained. Under such circumstances it was “inevitable that all the states of the confederation are left at liberty to act for themselves.” While acknowledging the colonists’ indebtedness to the “Supreme Government of Mexico,” he reminded them that “those governments are formed of the same men who are now persecuted, among whom I have the honor to count myself as one.”<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Asa Brigham to J.A. Wharton et. al., 19 July 1835, 92-3, *AP*, Vol. III, 92-3.

<sup>454</sup> Lorenzo de Zavala to Colonists, 8 August 1835, *LP*, Vol. I, 221-22.



As information of Santa Anna's vigorous centralization project began to trickle into the frontier, a hands-off approach began to feel increasingly less feasible. Significantly, Texans' ultimate decision was largely the result of their consultations with leaders in other northern Mexican states. For example, Horatio Allsbury addressed the people of Texas in late August stating that he had "left the state of New Leon on the 10<sup>th</sup> of this month with a request from our republican friends to say to the citizens of Texas that our only hopes of *future liberty and security depended upon our immediately* taking steps to oppose that military in their establishing a Central Government." Indeed, Texan leaders saw their movement as part of a much larger Mexican federalist revolt against the centralists. "War in defense of our rights, and oaths, and our Constitutions is inevitable in Texas!" declared one memorandum from San Augustus.

Information which is relied on has been received from the interior, that the State of Zacatecas and Guadalajara have risen and taken up arms in defence of the constitution of 1824, and in support of the federal system; also, that there are insurrections in the state of Tamaulipas, in favor of the same cause, also that the republican general, Juan Alvarez, has gained a victory over the government troops in the south of Mexico.

As much as they understood themselves to be continuing the tradition epitomized by their forefathers in the American Revolution, Anglo Texans nonetheless saw their action as part of a national movement. "I do not view it as Texas battling alone for her liberties,"

wrote one newspaper editor, “I view it as the great work of laying the corner stone of liberty in the great Mexican republic.”<sup>455</sup>

Yet, it was not until later that month that Austin himself, having just returned from Mexico City, joined the call for convention, demonstrating that his time in the nation’s capital had profoundly impacted his political outlook for Texas. “I fully hoped to have found Texas in a state of tranquility, but regret to find it in commotion;” he wrote in a public statement. But unlike in the past, this state of affairs had “not been produced by any acts of the people of this country,” rather “it is the natural and inevitable consequences of the revolution that has spread all over Mexico.” For Austin, now all too familiar with Santa Ana’s determination to transform Mexico’s government, the decision to replace the Constitution of 1824 was a game changer. “Whether the people of Texas ought not to agree to this change,” he continued, “and relinquish all or part of their constitutional and vested rights under the constitution of 1824, is a question of the most vital importance; one that calls for the deliberate consideration of the people, and can only be decided by them, fairly convened for the purpose.”<sup>456</sup>

Whereas, for years, the Father of Texas had found himself termed a conservative, now he was calling on Texans to not only forcibly separate themselves from Coahuila but engage in a civil war against the federal government. According to Austin’s logic, the government had betrayed the Mexican constitution, and with it its social contract, not just

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<sup>455</sup>“San Augustus, Texas,” 5 October 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, .

<sup>456</sup> SFA to the People of Texas, 29 September 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 139.

with Texas, but the rest of Mexico too. The Constitution of 1824 “gave to Texas a specific political existence, and vested in its inhabitants special and defined rights, which can only be relinquished by the people of Texas,” Austin explained. The state, therefore, could no more forfeit their rights than the government could deprive it of them “unless expressly authorized by the people of Texas to do so.” Austin made it clear that this particular set of circumstances called for a change of course. “These declarations afford another and more urgent necessity for a general consultation of all Texas,” he wrote, “in order to inform the general government, and especially General Santa Anna, what kind of organization will suit the education, habits, and situation of this people.” His actions were greeted with enthusiastic approval by the more radical elements. “It is different now, thank God!” wrote Travis to a friend, “Principle has triumphed over prejudice, passion, cowardice, and slavery. Texas is herself again.”<sup>457</sup>

This is how the Texas Revolution would begin – not as a movement to separate from Mexico, nor as a desire to join the United States, but as a result of Texans’ perceived duty and obligation as Mexican citizens. In September, the ayuntamiento of San Felipe met to discuss the recent crisis. It ultimately resolved to “support the constitution of the Mexican Republic of 1824, to which we have solemnly obligated ourselves” and recommended “each jurisdiction to elect five members to meet in San Felipe on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October next,” ostensibly to discuss what collective action they

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<sup>457</sup>Ibid.; Travis to Moore, 31 August 1835, *PTR*.

would take to combat the impending federal invasion. Austin made it clear that whatever they decided on, Texans must stay united. “I have received very favourable news from Bexar and think they will send members to the consultation - in short all Texas will go together and that makes all safe.” Indeed, the expressed support of Béxar, a place that had historically been reluctant to oppose the central government or the state of Coahuila y Tέjas, was a meaningful accomplishment.<sup>458</sup>

Conservatives increasingly found themselves pressed to defend a position that no longer seemed feasible. “[M]any worthy and patriotic citizens have been opposed on principles which they deemed sound and correct, to a rupture with the authorities of Mexico,” wrote one individual. Yet, while their position “may have been innocent and even praiseworthy in its origin,” he advised them “to reconsider the subject and to enquire whether the present situation of the country does not essentially change their ground.” A defense of Mexico now seemed to necessitate joining the war movement. “Why halt yea between to opinions? If the constitution be the object of your allegiance then rise up like men and support the constitution.”<sup>459</sup>

However, a letter written by Austin the month prior reveals that independence may have already been on his mind. Just after his release from prison, Austin travelled to New Orleans where he undoubtedly discussed the current crisis in Mexico and the fate of Texas with people there. Austin revealed that he was beginning to see Texas as an

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<sup>458</sup> San Felipe Meeting; SFA to James F. Perry, 14 September 1835, *PTR*.

<sup>459</sup> Tanner et al to Bryan, ? 1835, *PTR*.

important contributor to the US national project in the way that he had once envisioned for Mexico, “[T]exas must, and ought to become an *out work* on the west, as Alabama and Florida are on the East, to defend the key of the western world – the mouths of the Mississippi.” Although he did not call for it, Austin made it clear what he thought the outcome of all this would be. While Texas’ politics may be more closely aligned with Mexico, its economics and culture were bringing it ever closer to the North: “Can it be supposed that the violent political convulsions of Mexico will not shake off Texas so soon as it is ripe enough to fall.” And perhaps more important than anything, was Santa Anna’s unpredictable, though rapidly deteriorating, relationship with Texas and the rest of the federalist states of the north: “Gen. Santa Anna told me he should visit Texas next month - *as a friend*. His visit is uncertain – his friendship much more so.”<sup>460</sup>

With the current state of Mexican politics, Austin tended to see Texas, at least for the time being, as an entity independent from both the US and Mexico. “We must rely on ourselves and prepare for the worst. A large immigration will prepare us, give us strength resources, everything.” And then Austin wrote the words that seemed to contradict everything he had said since settling in Texas fifteen years prior: “If there was any way of getting at it, I should like to know what the *wise men* of the United States think the people of Texas ought to do. The fact is, we must, and ought to become a part of the United States.” With Mexico in chaos and the future of Mexican federalism

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<sup>460</sup> SFA to Mary Austin Holley, 21 August 1835, *AP*, 101-03.

uncertain, the United States was, finally, beginning to look like the better option.<sup>461</sup>

Some have pointed to these words as evidence that Austin always intended to see Texas become a part of the US, regardless of the fact that for years he claimed the opposite. But it is more helpful to see them as evidence of a change of mind that was a result of the no less dramatic shift taking place in Mexican national politics and the realization that an alliance with the United States of the North, whatever that might ultimately mean, looked like the best option.

Still, the public's enthusiasm for war, to say nothing of independence, fell short of Austin's and other Texan leaders' hopes as evinced by militia leaders' struggle to muster men to the battlefield. "The orders rec'd here this morning were not agreeable to a large number of men;" reported militia commander William H. Jack, "but they almost unanimously determined to obey without a murmur." Similar complaints began to emerge from militia commanders throughout Texas. "When I wrote yesterday it was my desire to have urged you to order on immediately because I know Militia could not be kept in a post like this long at a time, and in this I was correct," wrote Benjamin Fort Smith, "[Y]ou are not upon a bed of roses."<sup>462</sup>

Historian Paul Lack writes that Texan volunteers "demonstrated a militia-like tendency to turn out during crises but then dismiss themselves at apparent lull times to

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> William H. Jack to SFA, 13 October 1835; Benjamin Fort Smith to SFA, 14 October 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 177-78, 179-81.

care for the needs of farms and families.”<sup>463</sup> Whether this signified a lack of investment in the cause or old fashioned Texan individualism is unclear. Regardless, it appears the threat of Santa Anna and Mexican centralism was strong enough to bring men to the field, but not keep them there. “[O]f the little band that entered this place on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup>, inst., many have returned home, and others say they will go in a few days,” reported Phillip Dimmitt. R.R. Royall wrote that “the members here are like Volunteers in Camp (Very Restless) and much is said about going home.” The men, “one by one each plead their necessities some from the frontier are afraid of Indians on the Brazos others to the eastward are not fully into the spirit.” For many Texans, Mexican political affairs were but a remote concern in light of far more pressing threats.<sup>464</sup>

Throughout the war, leaders would struggle to enforce obedience and discipline, often fighting an uphill battle against a culture of extreme individualism and suspicion of authority. When Austin replaced Demitt with another commander of the Goliad forces, the men nearly mutinied. Claiming that Austin had treated them like “servile dependents” and subjected them to “despotic command,” they accused him of violating the very principles for which the Texas Revolution had been declared, “It is against this that we took to the field,” and against “the imposition of degradations like this” that “we are ready to fight again.”<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> Lack, 110.

<sup>464</sup> Lack, 110; Philip Dimmitt to SFA, 21 October 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 201-2.

<sup>465</sup> Goliad Volunteers to Stephen F. Austin, 21 November 1835, *PTR*; Lack 116;

But indifference and disobedience were not the only concern facing the Texan Army. Rumors of disloyalty emerged almost immediately, namely among those who had always cautioned a more conservative position. In October of 1835 Royall reported that John A. Williams was taking “a very active Part against the Acts of the Colonists.” Advocating “the measures pursued by the Mexican Government,” he had “arrayed himself with 58 followers already enrolled against our military movements.” A similar report emerged regarding a Mr. JM Smith who, accordingly, “has always been opposed to the cause of Freedom, he has whenever in his power, favored the Mexicans, to the prejudice of our citizens” and was now “injur[ing] the cause of Liberty by giving all the information possible to enemies.” The truth of these accusations is hard to confirm, but the mere fact that they were taken seriously suggests that at least some active loyalism existed.<sup>466</sup>

It was concerns like these that compelled some Texan leaders to consider recruits from the United States. They found particular enthusiasm, not surprisingly, in the southwestern states. “[H]undreds of applications are daily making to join the Rank,” one recruiter reported, “This movement of ours here will be followed by similar ones thru’ the whole valley of the Mississippi.” The only concern was “that more will be received than required.” These men, unlike their Texan counterparts, had little to distract them from the fight. They tended to be young, single and unencumbered by family and

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<sup>466</sup> R.R. Royall to SFA, 16 October 1835; Peter J. Menard to R.R. Royall, 19 October 1835, *AP* Vol. III, 172-3, 193..



property ownership. They therefore had little to lose in the war and no prior connection with Mexico. Thus, competing loyalties were not a threat among these men the way he had been for Texans.<sup>467</sup>

And these recruits, not surprisingly, understood the Texas fight differently from how most Texans did, in large part due to how recruiters explained the struggle. Those assigned to attract volunteers were often not Texan, but rather the close associates of Texan leaders. They did not, therefore, articulate a particularly sophisticated understanding of the conflict and often drew on racist assumptions about Mexicans then popular in the North. Convincing men to risk their lives for a people and place they had no prior connection to required reminding them of the “fertile sugar and cotton lands” that they would receive for their service, thanks to a decision by the newly formed Provisional Council. Although the Jackson administration had adopted a policy of neutrality, recruitment officers insisted that this should not stop individual citizens from participating in a noble struggle to ensure democracy to their Anglo-American brethren. After all, “wherever the rights of man are battled for, against military and religious despotism, Americans can never look on with indifference.” However, in the process of drawing on their shared ethnic and political heritage, recruiters characterized Mexicans as “a cowardly, treacherous, semi-civilized people, without enterprise, workmanship, or discipline,” as opposed to the Anglo settlers, who were “brave, hardy, enterprising” – just

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<sup>467</sup> James Ramage to SFA, 21 October 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 197-99.

like their brethren in the North. Because few of these volunteers had any pressing desire to leave the United States, recruiters misrepresented the struggle as one for independence, assuring them that “Texas will no doubt become a member of this Union,” and “wave in peaceful triumph from the Sabine to the Rio Bravo.”<sup>468</sup>

However, when the Texans themselves convened on November 3, they hotly debated the independence question for several days before discarding it in favor of “a provisional government, upon the principles of the constitution of 1824.” They reasserted their commitment to federalist Mexico and dismissed any suspicions otherwise. They insisted they were “not the aggressor.” Rather it was their duty “to defend our unalienable rights against all who attempt to subvert our liberties, although citizens of the same country.” They were defending, not attacking, Mexico and its people, and offered their “support and assistance to such Mexicans of the Mexican Confederacy as will take up arms against their military despotism,” once again framing their rebellion as part of the national rebellion against Santa Anna.<sup>469</sup>

But perhaps most significantly, they made their loyalty to Mexico conditional. They stated specifically that they would “continue faithful to the Mexican Government” only “so long as that nation is governed by the Constitution and Laws that were formed for the government of the political association.” Although historians have dismissed this

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> Barrett to Consultation, 4 November 1835, *PTR*.

move as “disingenuous” or at best “indecisive,” it is perhaps more helpful to see it as consistent with the very principles that had compelled many to immigrate to Mexico in the first place. According to their own logic, Texans already had the right to secede at that moment if they chose to do so, considering that Santa Anna had discarded the Constitution of 1824. Yet they chose at this juncture to remain. And while the Convention revealed that Texans certainly were not united politically, the one thing they could agree on was a commitment to radical federalism. Philip Dimitt even reported that he had a flag made “the colours, and their arrangement the same as the old one” with the phrase, “Constitution of 1824,” displayed in the center.<sup>470</sup>

Their continuing relationship with Mexico, however, depended on the success of federalists elsewhere in the country who, at least for the time being, appeared to be on the upswing. “The Commander in chief announces to the Army information of the most encouraging nature,” Austin wrote on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, asserting “that the Cause of the Constitution and the Federal System is *there*, gaining new strength, daily.” Indeed, all of Texas seemed to be firmly and demonstrably behind the Federalist cause.<sup>471</sup>

Just as Texans were confirming their loyalty to Mexican federalism, they experienced a sudden influx of about “60 or 70 fine young men from New Orleans” to assist them in the fight. “Another vessel containing many more is hourly expected,”

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<sup>470</sup> SFA to the Army, 23 October 1835; Philip Dimmitt to SFA, 25 October 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 204, 207-09.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid.*

wrote Royall, “Seventy five men have gone up Red River also from New Orleans, intending to come by land from Natchitoches.” Evidently, the news of Santa Anna’s intention “to bring the Texians under his immediate subjection excite the general and increased interest throughout the U States in your favor with a disposition to render you prompt and efficient aid,” wrote John P. Austin to his uncle. Accordingly, President Jackson had “no disposition to interfere with any present aid given you by Citizens of the US provided they do not openly violate the laws of Nations.” Indeed, Jackson chose to turn a blind eye to a movement that he probably hoped would result in achieving his long-held dream of Texas becoming a part of the United States of the North. But the sudden influx of volunteers from the north with no prior experience with Mexico or its people, many of them full of racist and self-righteous agitation, would have a profound impact on the course of the war, beginning with Texas’ relationship with its federalist allies.<sup>472</sup>

Largely thanks to the efforts of recruiters, most of these volunteers failed to see the fight they were about to join as an effort to support Mexican federalism. “We know that you are Bone of our Bone! and Flesh of our Flesh! That none but a Republican Government can exist over you!” wrote one northern sympathizer, “You will conduct your affairs with the justice and courage which led our Fathers in the revolution to establish the equal rights which we now enjoy.” Many of these men saw the movement

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<sup>472</sup> RR Royall to SFA, 29 October 1835; John P. Austin to SFA, 8 November 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 220-21, 244-47..

in Texas as not only beginning in the same way the American Revolution had, but ending in the same way too.<sup>473</sup>

Perhaps emboldened by such encouragement from the land of their birth, the Texan call for independence became more strident. William Wharton, the elected leader of the November Convention, stated that Texan leaders were being unrealistic in expecting to cooperate with Mexican federalists. “[B]oth parties of the Interior will unite against us, whatever be our declaration,” he warned. Evidently still believing that he could change Jackson’s mind, Wharton wrote that, in neglecting to declare independence, they would “receive no efficient or permanent aid, or pecuniary assistance, from the United States.” Thus, “we encounter all the evils of a declaration of independence, without reaping one-tenth of the advantages of such declaration.”<sup>474</sup>

Indeed, by the beginning of 1836, it had become clear that Texas was becoming increasingly divided over the question of independence. “It is apparent that there are two parties in this Country who indulge all the virulence of party spirit,” wrote John Sowers Brooks, a recruit from Kentucky. “One party is strongly in favor of an immediate Declaration of Independence and the other desires a non-politic course. They think that a Declaration for the Constitution of 1824 will unite the Liberal party in Mexico with them and thus enable them to establish their independence ultimately with greater ease.”

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<sup>473</sup> Henry Meigs to SFA, 15 November 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 254-55; Reséndez, 166.

<sup>474</sup> William H Wharton to BT Archer, President of the Convention, 13 November 1835, *AP*, Vol. III,

The pro-Independence faction gradually grew more vocal and visible, perhaps taking advantage of the conservatives' false sense of security. "I fear if a stand is not taken against self dubbed patriots all our labors in Texas are gone to the devil and me with it," warned McKinney in a letter to Austin, after finding several pro-independence articles written "by the Same men over different signatures and finding none of our Citizens opposing." He claimed that he had in fact written to the publisher "in order to let be known that we were not unanimous in that way of thinking and to get our citizens to reflect." But after securing his promise that McKinney's editorial would appear in the next day's issue, Wharton evidently suppressed the publication and "substituted a bag of stuff illy comporting with our present condition." McKinney feared that Texan politicians were "yielding the very right of thought to a wild unthinking faction."<sup>475</sup>

Due to their small numbers and comparably elite status, many of those in favor of preserving the Constitution were soon deemed Tories and dismissed by some, including many historians, as merely self-interested elitists. Most of these men were among the wealthiest and most established members of their society. As much as Texans opposed centralism, federalism in the hands of such men did not fare much better. "Perceived as a landed aristocracy with shady connections to the Mexican political elite, peace party members lost influence," writes Reséndez, "The disrepute of the 'speculating party' (as the peace party became known) allowed those who favored complete independence from

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<sup>475</sup> McKinney to SFA, 17 December 1835, *PTR*.

Mexico to gain the upper hand.”<sup>476</sup> Brooks in fact wrote that “the peace party seems to be actuated by a different motive than that which they profess,” and that “Their extensive speculations in land have acquired them an influence in the mexican councils which it is said, they have exerted to their own aggrandisement and to the detriment of the interest of the settlers.” Their influence with prominent Mexican families, he observed, “enables them to govern the Colony as they desire.” Indeed, just a few months prior, a handful of powerful settlers including Samuel May Williams and Lorenzo de Zavala, had attempted to buy up a large portion of land near Moncalva and sell its plots at inflated prices to a group of recent immigrants. The scheme failed, but it served to aggravate pre-existing tensions between older and newer settlers, and reinforce the notion that the older generation had enjoyed a profound political and economic advantage over the newcomers, who consequently greeted their calls for moderation with suspicion.<sup>477</sup> Brooks made it clear where he stood on the question: “I am in favour of pursuing an open, bold, and fearless course, such as a Declaration of Independence,” he wrote. Not only would it “ensure us the aid of every Liberal in the United States, either in men or money,” but it would secure Texas “for the General Good of the bone and Sinew of our Country the Actual Settlers.”<sup>478</sup> Most recruits stood on the issue, and as their numbers increased, so too did the call for independence.

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<sup>476</sup> Reséndez, 161, 165-66.

<sup>477</sup> John Sowers Brooks to A.H. Brooks 20 January 1836, John Sowers Brooks Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio; Cantrell 299-300.

<sup>478</sup> John S Brooks to Miss Mary Ann Brooks, 8 January, 1836, John Sowers Brooks Papers.

As more and more men like Brooks flooded into Texas to join the revolutionary forces, they quickly began to outnumber the more longstanding and established Texans who had deeper ties to Mexico and more to lose in the war. Many of the volunteers' experience with Mexico and Mexicans was forged in a time of war and shaped by notions that they were fighting a backward and despotic people. They had nothing to lose and no desire to be Mexican. Such men were rapidly overwhelming the older settlers and the *tejanos* and, if Texas was to extend full rights of citizenship to them, they would soon be outvoting them too.

Such suspicions went both ways. Austin himself wondered if the independence movement had not been designed to dispose of the old settlers. "I fear that the true secret of the efforts to declare independence is that there must then be a considerable standing army, which, in the hands of a few, would dispose of the old settlers and their interests as they thought proper," he wrote. He accused Wharton and others of recruiting volunteers from the North for the specific purpose of adding to their pro-independence constituency:

[W]hat ought the owners of the soil, the old settlers of Texas, who have redeemed this country from the wilderness and made it what it is, think of men who will collect the signatures of persons on their first landing, who had not been here a day, or only a few days in the country, and attempt to impose a paper thus signed upon the world as the opinion of the people of Texas.<sup>479</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> SFA to Royall, 25 December 1836, *AP*, Vol. III, 292-94.



Austin transmitted these sentiments to the Provisional Government, stating unequivocally that he was opposed to any measure that would give the central government “any foundation to say that the Texan war, is purely a national war against foreigners and foreign invaders.” He confirmed his stated belief “that Texas should rigidly adhere to the leading principles of the declaration of the 7<sup>th</sup> Novr” in “strict conformity with the basis on which the federal party are acting.” Although “the dissolution of the social compact” gave Texas “the *right* of declaring herself an independent community,” it was not in her best interest to do so. It appears that the primary source of Austin’s hesitancy at this juncture was that he knew that independence would expose “the old settlers and men of property in this country to much risk.” Furthermore, “it will turn all parties in Mexico against us” and “bring back the war to our own doors.” While Austin seemed to think that this natural current was in the Federalists’ favor he left no question about what he thought Texans should do if the federalists were not successful: “[I]f they fail, Texas at any time can resort to her natural rights.”<sup>480</sup>

Independence remained a last resort dependent on the actions of the Mexican government itself. In his final correspondence with the Provisional Government dated November 30<sup>th</sup>, Austin stated that the declared cause should continue as it was originally, for it was in defense of the federalist constitution of 1824 that had prompted them to join in the first place. However, he qualified his remarks by stating that “[S]hould these be

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<sup>480</sup> SFA to Provisional Gov’t, 22 December 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 290-92.

destroyed in Mexico,” the volunteer army would “do their duty to their country.” Austin made it clear that such government actions would leave the people of Texas no choice *but* to call for independence. Anything else would mean violating “the first law which God stamped upon the heart of man, civilized or savage, which is the Law, or the right of self-preservation.”<sup>481</sup>

But a trip to the Brazos Valley would, however briefly, change his mind. On the ride back, after having evidently consulted with several of the older settlers, Austin reversed his opinion. “I am more and more convinced every day,” he wrote, “and especially on calm reflection during a solitary ride down here, that the political position of Texas, should continue as established by the declaration of the 7<sup>th</sup> November last.” Any change in their position would “injure us abroad by giving an idea that we are unstable in our opinions and it would paralyze the efforts of the federal party which are now in our favour.” Rather than threatening independence, Austin insisted that “Texas ought therefore to adhere rigidly and firmly to the declaration of 7 Novr,” disregarding “the opinions of excited moments, no matter by whom expressed.” Austin was not ready to abandon the Federalists or Mexico just yet. “I think the situation of Texas, may in a great degree, depend on adhering to the declaration of 7 Novr and on enlisting the federal

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<sup>481</sup> SFA to Provisional Government, 30 November 1835, *AP*, 269-273.

party in our favor – I repeat this idea so often, because I am satisfied much depends on it.”<sup>482</sup>

However, as long as leaders struggled to convince Texans to join the fight for longer than a few days or weeks, they would continue to have to rely on northerners like Brooks whose political vision differed significantly from their own. While it continued to receive large numbers of recruits from the North throughout the early part of 1836, the Provisional Government struggled with enforcing obedience and loyalty to the revolutionary movement among Texans themselves, many of whom demonstrated the proven Texan tendency to prioritize individual concerns over collective ones. “[O]ut of more than four hundred men at or near this post, I doubt if twenty-five citizens of Texas can be mustered in the ranks,” wrote the colonel. “[N]ay, I am informed, whilst writing the above, that there is not half that number.” Thus, the fight for Texas was by and large conducted by US citizens who issued “just complaints and taunting remarks in regard to the absence of the old settlers and owners of the soil.”<sup>483</sup> Fearing the fate of he and his men, Fannin wrote that he hoped that soon “the people have risen and are marching to the relief of Bexar and this post.” But if the worst were to happen,

on whose head should the burthen of censure fall – not on the heads of those brave men who have left their homes in the United States to aid us in our struggle for Liberty – but on those whose all is in Texas and who notwithstanding the

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<sup>482</sup> SFA to Provisional Government, 14 December 1835, *AP*, 282-84.

<sup>483</sup> Fannin to Gov and Council, February 7 1836; Fannin to the Acting Governor and Council of the Provisional Gov of Texas, February 28 1836, *PTR*.

repeated calls have remained at home without raising finger to keep the enemy from their thresholds.

In another letter to a close friend, Fannin confided, “I have not as much confidence in the people of Texas as I once had.” Although he had called on them for weeks to join his men “not one yet arrived.”<sup>484</sup>

Indeed, as the revolution progressed, Texans showed a greater propensity to avoid battle, forcing commanders to rely ever more heavily on recruits who, by the end of the Revolution, formed a significant portion of the Texas Army. Lack observes that, whereas at least 1,100 of the 1,300 men who rushed to arms in October and November were Texan, about three quarters of the over nine hundred soldiers who defended Texas between January and March of 1836 emigrated after October, and only about one-fourth as many Texans came out. “Just as virtually every class and locale in Texas had supplied volunteers in the fall,” writes Lack, “so did Texans of varied conditions stay away from the army during the winter.”<sup>485</sup>

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In addition to manpower, Texas needed finances to participate in a civil war against Mexico, and so the Provisional Government decided to send a team north for that purpose. In an attempt to sufficiently represent the various factions in Texas, the

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<sup>484</sup> Fannin to Joseph Mims, 28 February 1836; Fannin to the Honorable Governor and Council of Texas, 1 March 1836, *PTR*.

<sup>485</sup> Lack, p. 122.

Provisional Government decided to send Austin and his chief rival, Wharton. Austin did not look forward to it. However, upon arriving in the United States and meeting with northern capitalists, he would finally become fully and permanently convinced of Wharton's position. The reason? Northern financial support for the Texans was premised on one thing: "independence *immediately* - it will give us the aid of men of capital and high standing and character who wish for a more extensive field, than a mere party war in Texas." Admitting that "My own feelings and impulses inclined me to this course long ago," Austin made it clear that his visit to the Low Country had compelled him to temporarily deviate from his convictions. Regretting that he had allowed "the warm and even violent feelings of some of my friends did at the time to a certain extent precipitate me into *party feelings*," Austin now made it clear where he stood on the independence question, especially now that he understood how essential it was to gaining northern aid. "*I go for Independence* for I have no doubt we shall get aid, as much as we need and perhaps more so." <sup>486</sup>

Furthermore, the set of reports that Austin was receiving regarding events in Mexico, seemed to suggest that casting their lot with the federalists no longer made sense. Relying on reports that "the federal party has united with Santa Ana against us" Austin determined that remaining loyal to the Constitution of 1824 "does us no good with the Federalists, it was also "doing us harm in this country, by keeping away the kind of

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<sup>486</sup> SFA to Royall, 25 December 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 292-94; SFA to Henry Austin, 7 January 1836, *PTR*.

men we most need.” In a letter to his sister, Austin suggested that recent events in Mexico left Texas no other option. According to the logic they had laid down in the November convention, “The Texans may, therefore, for the future, be considered an independent people, entirely separate from Mexico.” Finally, with federalism all but eviscerated, Austin made it clear that Texans would have to look to another power for moral and political guidance. “We are young to set up for ourselves, but we are the sons of that great nation which has astonished the world by its deeds, and progress in the cause of liberty[,] light[,] and truth.”<sup>487</sup>

Indeed, by early 1836 it appeared that Santa Ana had all but crushed federalism in every other state of the Mexican republic. He had turned Zacatecas into a territory and outlawed its militia. For reasons not entirely the fault of Mexican federalists, Texans, for the first time in their nation’s history, faced Mexico City alone.<sup>488</sup>

Austin, knowing that his change of heart would not be well greeted by a number of his closest associates, insisted that Texans *had* to declare for independence if they were to stand any chance against the centralists. “There is but one sentiment all over the US which is in favor of Texas and of an immediate declaration of independence,” he explained. “We have negotiated a loan on the terms of the enclosed contract. This was obtained on the belief that Texas would declare independence in march – it could not have been had otherwise.” As far as the federalists were concerned, “The accounts from

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<sup>487</sup> SFA to Henry Austin, 7 January 1836, *PTR*

<sup>488</sup> SFA to Soldiers, 15 January 1836, *PTR*.

Vera Cruz and Tampico are that the federal party have united with Santanna against Texas.” Anticipating McKinney’s opposition, he wrote, “I know what reply you will make to this – but my object is the country, our country, it is, or ought to be the paramount object of all.” After having once worked so feverishly to unite Texans *against* independence, Austin now scrambled to gain unanimous agreement to the contrary: “The country ought to go *unanimously* for independence. Public opinion all over the U.S. expects and earnestly calls for it.”<sup>489</sup>

But McKinney who, like Austin, had dedicated years to developing Texas under Mexico and expressing his devotion to Mexican federalism, was simply unwilling to accept this change of course. Over a month would pass before he finally replied to Austin’s letter, but when he did, he made it clear how he felt about his friend’s recent change of heart and where their relationship stood as a result. “I have intended answering your letter to me from N. Orleans but have really been at a loss,” he wrote. “[Y]ou and I must sever totally in anything of a political character . . . my confidence in you is I think forever at an end.” He was not Austin’s enemy, he assured him, “but at the same time, I am now fully convinced that you cannot be anything but an injury to your country.” McKinney, in fact, could not even find the words to describe his reaction: “your illusions and remarks in that letter to me from N. Orleans are - - -.” Not only did McKinney make it clear in no uncertain terms that he objected to Austin’s decision to call for

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<sup>489</sup> SFA to McKinney, 16 January 1836; SFA to Col. D.C. Barrett, 17 January 1836; SFA to McKinney, 21 January 1836, *AP*, Vol. III, 304-5, 305-6, 308-9.

independence, but he also suspected that few Texans would support it, concluding that “You will very probably find yourself unsustained in your pledges for Texas declaring Independence.”<sup>490</sup>

But Austin did not have time to lament the loss of his friendship or, for that matter, permit his longtime friend to change his mind. He made it consistently clear, that any and all financial assistance from the North depended unequivocally on independence. He and Wharton greeted each day hoping for news that the convention had offered up a declaration. “We are disappointed at not hearing from the convention before now, and expect the declaration of independence daily.” Texan leaders on both sides of the border found themselves in a near desperate situation, as morale in Texas began to flag without aid from the North and northern capitalists held their fists tight.<sup>491</sup>

As Austin struggled to hold investors’ interest, he continued to remind northerners of their kinship with the revolutionaries and of the familiarity of their cause. In a letter to Nicholas Biddle, Austin declared it “the cause of freedom and of mankind, but more emphatically of the people of the United States, than any other.” Austin flattered himself “that you view it in the same light,” and would therefore “give to it the attention which its importance merits.”<sup>492</sup> In his remarks to Senator L.F. Linn, he referred to the conflict in Texas as “A war of extermination,” no less than a race war “of barbarism and of despotic

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<sup>490</sup> McKinney to SFA, 22 February 1836, *AP*, Vol. III, 316-17.

<sup>491</sup> SFA, Archer, and Wharton to Bryan, 31 March 1836, *AP*, Vol. III, 319-20.

<sup>492</sup> SFA to Nicholas Biddle, 9 April 1836; SFA to David G. Burnet, 3 April 1836, *AP*, Vol. III, 328-9, 341-1.



principles, waged by the mongrel Spanish-Indian and Negro race, against civilization and the Anglo-American race.”

Austin, who had for years presented his efforts to settle the region as part of a wish to serve the national interest of Mexico, now reversed course, and insisted that all of his work had been in the service of his native country, not his adopted one. “For fifteen years,” he claimed, he had been “laboring like a slave to *Americanize* Texas” forming “a nucleus around which my native countrymen could collect and grow into a solid body that would forever be a barrier of safety to the southwestern frontier” and serve as a beacon-light to the Mexicans in their search after liberty.” The man who had once argued that Mexico was the safe haven of true republicanism and the natural home of all freemen, now renounced the country he had adopted and insisted that his settlement was exceptional in a land far less enlightened than its neighbor to the east. But now the Anglo-American colonies, “this nucleus of republicanism,” were to be destroyed and their place “supplied by a population of Indians, Mexicans, and renegades, all mixed together, and all the natural enemies of white men and of civilization.” Terming Mexico “a usurper, a base, unprincipled, bloody monster, who sets the laws of civilization and of humanity at defiance,” he insisted that Mexico’s “war of extermination” would “crimson the waters of the Mississippi, and make *it* the eastern boundary of Mexico.”<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> SFA to Senator L.F. Linn, 4 May, 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 344-45.

Such polarizing language was particularly evident in Austin's appeal to Andrew Jackson. "It Appears that Santa Ana has succeeded in uniting the whole of the Mexicans against Texas by making it a national war against heretics," he told the President. He went on to characterize the conflict in the most simplistic and racialized terms he could. It was a war "of barbarism against civilization, of despotism against liberty" and finally, although not entirely accurately, "of Mexicans against Americans." Austin hoped to give his cause a national appeal even as he attempted to play down its evident sectional character. As Austin employed much of the same logic in his efforts to gain US support as he had done in his efforts to gain Mexican acceptance a decade and a half prior, he had the added benefit of a shared origin and heritage to draw upon.

Will you, can you turn a deaf ear to the appeals of your fellow citizens in favour of your and their countrymen and friends who are massacred, butchered, outraged in Texas at your very doors? Are not *we*, the Texians obeying the dictates of an education received here: from you the American people, from our fathers, from the patriots of '76 – the Republicans of 1836?<sup>494</sup>

Austin understandably expected to receive most of his support from slave-state audiences where, according to his biographer, he delivered a distinctly southern "paean to Manifest Destiny." At stake in the Texan struggle for independence was not just liberty but protection of the "southern frontier – the weakest and most vulnerable in the nation" from "mistaken philanthropists, and wild fanatics" who "might attempt a system of intervention in the domestic concerns of the South, which might lead to a servile war, or

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<sup>494</sup> SFA to Andrew Jackson, 15 April 1836, *AP*, Vol. III, 332-333.

at least jeopardize the tranquility of Louisiana and the neighboring States.”<sup>495</sup> To ignore the conflict in Texas would simply be in direct violation of the best national interests of the south. “[W]hat I have been the means of effecting towards the Americanism of Texas, is of more real service to the protection of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri, than the expenditure of *thirty millions of dollars* on the fortifications of that frontier.”

Such language is undoubtedly surprising coming from a man who had for so long praised Mexico and its people, and in fact counted Mexicans among some of his closest friends and allies. But by spring of 1836, Austin no doubt understood that if Texas was going to gain any support at all from the North, it was going to come from Jacksonian Democrats and their southwestern base. Thus it was their racist language that he adopted.<sup>496</sup> Austin was willing to admit that he had once held very different feelings towards Mexico - “I have, in times past, had more kind and charitable feelings for the Mexicans in general, and have been much more faithful to them than they merited.” But, “sad and dear bought” experience had taught him that it was “in vain to hope for any good from mexican institutions, or Mexican justice.”<sup>497</sup>

Indeed, Austin and Wharton received a remarkably cooler reception in the north, where donations were a mere fraction of what they were in the South and West. *The New York Herald*, even as it expressed sympathy with the Texan cause, lamented to see “the

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<sup>495</sup> Austin cited in Mary Austin Holley, ed. *Texas* (Austin :Texas State Historical Association, 1990), 253-80; Cantrell, 340-41.

<sup>496</sup> Cantrell makes this same observation, 344-5.

<sup>497</sup> SFA to Senator L.F. Linn, 4 May, 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 344-45.

glorious cause deposited in the hands of stock gamblers in Wall Street.” The rough and tumble gentlemen often selected for recruitment and funding campaigns “solicited a broad laugh” from New York investors, many of whom saw the Texas cause as at best futile and at worst destructive to national interests of the United States.<sup>498</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Texas, they prepared for another Convention. But this time, independence was no longer the preferred path of a radical minority. The primary factor determining this shift, was the Provisional Government’s decision to allow volunteers in the Texan Army the right to vote, specifically, for delegates in the upcoming convention. In February, a group of northern volunteers petitioned the government for this privilege. “We consider ourselves as citizen soldiers having a common interest with every citizen of Texas,” their petition stated, “We are equally anxious for its prosperity” having “fought and aided in repelling the mercenary troops of the enemy from its border.” Indeed, these men had done more to protect Texas than many Texans. Yet their politics, motivation and experience were significantly different. When their petitions were denied, the volunteers often turned to physical intimidation. In Nacogdoches, a group of forty Kentucky volunteers drew their guns and advanced on election quarters, their colonel declaring that “he had come to Texas to fight for it and had as soon commence in the town of Nacogdoches as elsewhere.”<sup>499</sup> Restive, violent, and with little to lose, these

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<sup>498</sup> Cantrell, 343-5.

<sup>499</sup> Volunteers to Convention, February 1836; Houston to Soldiers 15 January 1836, *PTR*.

recruits were determined to see that Texas delivered on its promise to them. But first, they had to defeat Mexico.

The man to do it was a charismatic young commander from Tennessee who claimed a personal friendship with Andrew Jackson. Sam Houston had arrived in Texas just two years prior, escaping a failed political career and personal scandal.<sup>500</sup> Despite devastating defeats at the Alamo and Goliad, the six foot two inches tour de force insisted to his soldiers that he could lead the Texans to victory and encouraged them to elect representatives who would call for independence. “It is the duty of the army to send several representatives,” Houston stated, “and I hope that my comrades will elect only men who will vote for our independence, will fearlessly proclaim our separation from Mexico, and what they decide upon, comrades, we will defend with our arms.”<sup>501</sup> With the politicization of volunteers from the North coupled with the defeat of Mexican federalists in the interior, the revolution became, in the words of one historian, “more openly anti-Mexican,” although these sentiments had been evident earlier. For example, when Governor Viesca and General Mexía visited a camp of volunteers in mid-December, Austin admitted that they “scarsely escaped insult.” Given the current climate in the camps and among the Texan volunteers, especially those from the North, Austin predicted that Anglo-Mexican relations would only get worse: “These things however are not carried to anything like the extreme they will be. I say, fear they will be, because

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<sup>500</sup> Randolph B. Campbell, *Sam Houston and the American Southwest*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), Chapter 2 and 3.

<sup>501</sup> Sam Houston to Soldiers, 15 January 1836, *PTR*.

some outrage upon justice and hospitality may be committed by our excited patriots, as they call themselves, that will do no credit to Texas”<sup>502</sup>

His prediction was correct. When the hope of an anticontralist uprising in the interior failed, Anglos began to express “both open hostility towards tejanos and a belief that fundamental cultural-political differences dictated the need for independence.”<sup>503</sup> “My opinion is that Texas ought, at the next convention, unless a great and mighty change takes place in the policy of Mexico, to declare itself independent of that nation,” wrote Gail Borden,

It is true, that at the beginning of the present struggle, we aimed not at separation from the Mexican people: in the late battles we cried and fought for the constitution of 1824, and, I believe, it was the wish of a majority of our citizens, to see the federal party prevail. But the federal constitution, as we see by the decree of the General Congress of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, is dead; centralism is established, and we are threatened with annihilation.”

As for the continued reliance on relief from the interior, the only people the Texans could rely on at this point was, ironically, the very nation they had abandoned. The “mass of the Mexican people” were deemed, “ignorant, bigoted, and superstitious: they do not, neither can they understand the true principles of a republican form of government; and consequently a dictatorial form is best suited to their education and habits.” All ties of political affinity between Anglos and the rest of the country were dead, according to

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<sup>502</sup> SFA to McKinney, 16 December 1835, *AP*, Vol. III, 285.

<sup>503</sup> Lack, 78.

Borden. “[A]s a nation I look upon [all Mexicans] as our enemies.” Democracy was now the purview of the United States, Mexicans had proven themselves incapable of it. Appropriately, Borden closed his letter with a quote from John Adams, “Independence now, and independence forever!”<sup>504</sup>

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But the call for independence did not, in fact, come so readily to tejanos. Zavala, whose appeal was crucial in organizing Anglo resistance to the centralists, advised withdrawing from Mexico on tentative terms only, promising to rejoin if and when it returned to the social contract defined in the 1824 constitution. If Mexico failed to do so after a defined period, Texas would consider itself permanently independent. As for the Mexican federalists, themselves, they continued to believe that the Anglo colonies were their allies as late as December 1835, dismissing rumors to the contrary.<sup>505</sup>

On March 2, 1836, a new Convention in every sense commenced in San Felipe. Only thirteen of the fifty-nine delegates who attended it had been present the past November. Only seven were veterans of the 1832 and 1833 conventions. Only eleven had held office during the period of Mexican rule. They tended to be younger (averaging 37 years), had been in Texas significantly less time, with almost a quarter having immigrated in only the past year and nearly half having been in Texas for two years or

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<sup>504</sup> Gail Borden Jr to Voters, January 19 1836, *PTR*.

<sup>505</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities*, 166-68, Gómez Farías quoted on page 167.

less. They had distinguished themselves through military rather than political experience. In a place plagued by a lack of military enthusiasm, forty percent of these men had answered the call to take up arms against Mexico. And only a handful of them were ethnic Mexicans, including Zavala and José Antonio Navarro, who, as much as he wanted to see Texas free, was said to have “trembled at the thought of having to sanction with his signature the eternal separation of Texas from the mother country.” All of these factors, according to Lack, “made the delegates aptly qualified to carry the Revolution to its more radical conclusion.”<sup>506</sup>

Furthermore, much had changed in the political landscape of both Texas and Mexico in the past few months. The federalists in the interior were defeated. Texans stood alone in their fight against the centralists. Austin, who had always counselled patience and obedience was now eagerly pushing for independence, insisting that northern funds were dependent on it. Those delegates who had sworn to support the Constitution of 1824 sensed that they were in the minority and mostly kept silent.

The forty-one delegates unanimously voted for independence and drafted the Declaration that Austin had been urging for months. Effectively, the people of Texas had no choice *but* to declare for independence “When a government has ceased to protect the lives, liberty and property of the people, from whom its legitimate powers are derived, and for the advancement of whose happiness it was instituted.” The document

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<sup>506</sup> Lack, 83-5, Navarro quoted in Reséndez, 170.



went on to cite all that the immigrants found most repugnant about the new government – the concentration of power in the hands of the military and the Church, the arrests, the suspicion. But they also made clear that their decision rested with a principle that transcended national loyalty

When, in consequence of such acts of malfeasance and abduction on the part of the government, anarchy prevails, and civil society is dissolved into its original elements, in such a crisis, the first law of nature, the rights of self-preservation, the inherent and inalienable right of the people to appeal to first principles, and take their political affairs into their own hands in extreme cases, enjoins it as a right towards themselves, and a sacred obligation to their posterity, to abolish such government, and create another in its stead.

Mexico had proven incapable of protecting their rights and, consequently the contract they had formed with it was null and void. The “natural” principles of republicanism surpassed any and all national loyalties. This was precisely the logic that had propelled these people to leave the United States sixteen years earlier and had compelled their fathers and grandfathers to declare independence from Britain sixty years earlier. Yet, one thing made the Texas Revolution different. Texans did not stop at renouncing Mexico, they renounced Mexicans themselves as a people incapable of exercising or protecting these principles. The last lines of the document made this clear. “We appealed to our Mexican brethren for assistance: our appeal has been made in vain; though months have elapsed, no sympathetic response has yet been heard from the

interior. We are therefore, forced to the melancholy conclusion, that the Mexican people have acquiesced in the destruction of their liberty.”<sup>507</sup>

Whereas their forefathers had broken away from a people of “kindred blood, language, and institutions,” Texans were now separating from “a people one half of whom are the most depraved of the different races of Indians, different in color, pursuits and character.” With the federalist defeat in the interior and the failure of most tejanos to support independence, Houston now felt comfortable declaring that “the vigor of the descendants of the north [will never] mix with the phlegm of the indolent Mexicans, no matter how long we may live among them. Two different tribes on the same hunting ground will never get along together.”<sup>508</sup>

Texans adopted a Constitution modeled after that of their native country but which contained certain elements of the Spanish-Mexican legal traditional. They included a specific Declaration of Rights infused with Jacksonian sentiment that, among other things, disallowed monopolies as “contrary to the genius of a free government” and prohibited laws of primogeniture or entail. The document also forbid imprisonment for debt. This right, predictably, did not extend to all men. Just as those who had founded the United States of America sixty years before, the Founding Father of Texas flatly denied citizenship to people of African descent and included a slave code designed to

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<sup>507</sup> “The Texas Declaration of Independence,” 2 March 1836 in Ernest Wallace, David M. Vigness and George B. Ward, eds, *Documents of Texas History*, (Texas State Historical Association: Austin), 2002, 98-9.

<sup>508</sup> Lack, 86-7.

ensure that all blacks held in bondage under various contracts maintained their chattel status. The document set forth the “social compact theory of government in which all authority derived from the people,” according to Lack. All citizens retained “equal right” and permission to “alter their government,” thereby effectively permitting future revolution. In a decision that would not only determine the military future of Texas, but perhaps its political one as well, Article VI, Section 8 stipulated that “All persons who shall leave the country for the purpose of evading participation in the present struggle, or shall refuse to participate in it, or shall give aid or assistance to the present enemy, shall forfeit all rights of citizenship, and such lands as they may hold in the republic.”<sup>509</sup> Texans who had avoided military service up to this point now had a crucial choice to make – either join the cause or risk losing everything.

Indeed, Texan leaders’ first line of order would be to assert control over military affairs. One of the first administrative offices they established was that of commander general with authority to subordinate all units of the army. Declaring that “It is the bounden duty of every man who asks of the country protection of his person and property to stand forth in such a crisis as its defense,” the Provisional Government conscripted all able-bodied men between seventeen and fifty and called for punitive measures against anyone who resisted, making it clear that the success of the Revolution took priority over individual rights. Officials were appointed to conduct thorough registration in every district. Men would be chosen for service based on a rotating lottery and, if selected,

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<sup>509</sup> “The Constitution of the Republic of Texas,” 17 March 1836, in *Documents of Texas History*, 99-100.

called to duty by the chief executive at any time. Those who failed to appear or hire a substitute would be court-marshalled at risk of losing their citizenship and up to half of their personal property.<sup>510</sup>

David G. Burnett, a late convert to the independence movement who had been absent from the March Convention was appointed interim president. He would claim later that he had merely “consented to be a candidate.” His opponents had resided in Texas for only a few months, making Burnett’s victory, in many people’s eyes, the lesser of two evils. After a rather grandiose inaugural address, Burnett set to work implementing the policies of the Convention, the first of which was to declare martial law. He made an appeal to the people of Eastern Texas, a portion of whom “under the influence of idle and groundless rumors are leaving their homes and by the circulation of false news may prevent others of their countrymen from repairing to the standard of their country.” Thus, a renewed military vigor did not seem to accompany the declaration of independence. “I conjure you my countrymen to repair to the field forthwith to deafen your ears to all rumors from whatever quarter they may come,” pleaded Burnett, “to the field then my countrymen, to the standard of liberty and defend your rites in a manner worthy of your sires and yourselves.”<sup>511</sup>

A couple weeks later, he issued another proclamation, this time to the whole of Texas, “Your country demands your aid,” it began, “The enemy is pressing upon us,

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<sup>510</sup> Lack, 93-4.

<sup>511</sup> David G. Burnett to People in Eastern Texas, 18 May 1836, David G. Burnett Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas Austin.

families and wives and children of your neighbors, are driven from their firesides and compelled to take shelter in the woods and forests, while the enemy draws confidence and audacity from every disaster we encounter.” His words reveal that Texas still faced many of the military problems that it always had. Even following a declaration of independence and imminent defeat by Santa Anna, “too many citizens are lingering in idleness, and lethargy, or ingloriously [fleeing] before the enemy, whom we have heretofore effected to despise.” He went on to invoke a sense of national shame that again likened the Texans’ struggle against Mexico to the Anglo-American colonists’ struggle against Britain: “Is it possible that the free citizens of Texas the descendent of the heroes of ’76 can take panic at the approach of the paltry minions of a despot, who threatens to desolate our beautiful country.” All else failing, Burnett sought to draw on Texans’ sense of self-interest to inspire them to pick up arms, “Let every man able to poise a rifle or wield a sabre fly to the army, and soon, very soon, your families will be safe.” Ultimately, Burnett adopted much of the racist rhetoric employed by Houston and others of the pro-independence faction, referring to Mexicans as “minions of despotism, the panders of priestly ambition” who were “waging a merciless and exterminating war upon us.” There being no more time for waffling or indecisiveness, those who did not join the fight for independence would be considered enemies of Texas - “Those who are not for us are against us.” Burnett proclaimed null and void all previous exemptions from armed service under the new government and ordered every able-bodied man to the field.

“Let no man hope for exemption. All are interested, all must abide the same fate. The law makes no distinction, none will be made.”<sup>512</sup>

In his Executive Order, Burnett specifically referenced the trouble that he was having getting Texans to join the cause. “Experience has demonstrated that an entire unity of action cannot be had from the Law,” he wrote, “that many men are found among us who are willing to rest quietly at home.” He went on to warn of the consequences it would render, not just in terms of trouble defeating the Mexicans, but of the wellbeing of Texas once it achieved independence. Texas, according to Burnett, “must be made [independent] by the united exertions and the common sacrifices of her citizens. To depend upon volunteers from abroad is no less dangerous than disgraceful.”<sup>513</sup>

Burnett’s appeals mostly fell on deaf ears, however. Furthermore, the government’s threatening and ultimately inconsistent efforts to enforce conscription only served to alienate more Texans. The army failed to militarize on the local level as the plans for conscription were somehow never instituted effectively. A group of Nacogdoches leaders wrote on April 11 that “there is no organization of the physical force of this community, and we are without a head.”<sup>514</sup> Other municipalities simply refused to comply. A few inhabitants were even seen “still daring to express sympathy with the cause of Mexico.” Burnett’s appeals grew increasingly desperate. “Texans, have

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<sup>512</sup> Burnett, “Proclamation”, 29 March 1836; Burnett, “Proclamation” 25 March 1836, Burnett Papers.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Lack, 100.

you no pride?" he pleaded, "Will not the finger of scorn be pointed at you should you leave the country without an effort to retain it? What will the world think of your boasted declaration of independence when you flee at the sight of the first enemy that makes his appearance. Texans' reluctance to fight was particularly shameful given the large numbers of northern volunteers who arrived daily, ready to take up the call.

[M]any brave soldiers who has magnanimously left his home and country to aid your cause, have been sacrificed through your supineness already. The time has arrived that every man must do his duty. He must defend the soil that he expects to reside on. He must fight for the privileges if he expects to enjoy them.

Anyone who refused his order would be forced to surrender their citizenship, forfeit their land, "and from henceforth treated as an alien and a foreigner."<sup>515</sup>

As the Battle of San Jacinto approached, military leaders scrambled to muster as many men as they could to reverse the course of the war. In their efforts, they directly accused Texans of a shameful indifference, unworthy of their heritage: "Are you Americans? Are you freeman? If you are, prove your blood and birth by rallying at once to your country's standard!"<sup>516</sup> As Santa Anna's front approached, Texas neared anarchy. Help needed to come from somewhere.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Burnet to the Citizens of Texas, 6 April 1836, Burnet Papers.

<sup>516</sup> Houston and Rusk to Public, 19 April 1836, *PTR*.

<sup>517</sup> Burnet to the People of Eastern Texas, March 1836; Burnet Papers; Lack, 102.

News of the declaration finally reached New Orleans a few weeks later. Publications all over the country quickly filled with praise and support for the brave and courageous republicans carrying forth the age-old banner of individual freedom and personal liberty. And when news of the bloody siege at the Alamo reached the North, sympathies poured forth for the fallen heroes. “They sold their lives dearly, and that barbarian, Santa Anna, and his savage hordes, will long remember the terrible fight of Bexar, and the voice of fame, when she proclaims in future times, the names of the illustrious who died in glory’s arms,” wrote the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*.<sup>518</sup>

Even the *New York Herald* published an article placing Texans in a republican lineage that dated back to the ancient Greeks. “What Thermopalaee was to ancient Greece – what Bunker Hill has been to the United States – so will Bexar be to Texas.” It went on to remind the reader of the common heritage shared by Texans and the citizens of the North, perpetuating the very notion that the conflict was, effectively, a race war. The Mexicans had massacred “bone and flesh of our flesh.” The article simply dismissed the complex and variegated causes of the conflict. “It is idle – utterly so – futile – completely so, to enter into an examination of miserable technical points in the affairs between Mexico and Texas.” Suffice was to say that, “Under the form of an illegitimate war, Santa Ana has perpetrated deeds more atrocious than those of the pirate on the high seas – of the wandering houseless Arab of the desert.” Just as the author expressed

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<sup>518</sup> *Cincinnati and Daily Gazette*, 2 July 1836, Asbury Papers.



solidarity with the Texans based on a common ethnic and national heritage, so it castigated the Mexicans as a “race of miscreants” who, it suggested, were not even worth negotiating with. Mexico simply was no match for the proud and just Anglo-American family. “The blood of our murdered brethren call to high heaven for instant and immediate vengeance.”<sup>519</sup>

The *Grand Gulf Advertiser* flatly denied that the Texans were ever really Mexican: “‘Tis true they left their country, but they were still American citizens. They only left one confederacy of states for that of another - the protection of the parent for the protection of the friend.” It was merely economic advantage that the immigrants had sought. They had never intended to turn their backs on their country of origin. Furthermore, by characterizing the Texans as brothers of the North and one-time friends of Mexico, the author invoked a sense of natural belonging ironically just like the one the Texans themselves had once employed to describe their relationship with Mexico. That nation had once aspired to be like the US, but aspiration was all it could achieve, as republican freedom was a biologically inherited quality. The article, of course, failed to mention that the Mexican Constitution demonstrated a deeper commitment to federalism than that of the United States and one grounded in a specifically Hispanic political tradition. Furthermore, it completely ignored the fact that these settlers were in fact Mexican citizens and instead represented them as ambassadors of the Anglo world.

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<sup>519</sup> *New York Herald*, 14 April 1836, Almonte Papers, Briscoe Center for American History.

“They were still, however, free, still citizens of a free country – still the sons of the heroes of ’76, emigrating to add light to the dawning of liberty in the new world.”

Publication in the US, particularly the South, rushed to claim Texas and its cause as their own in a way that completely erased Texans Mexican identity and status

Resolved, That they are our countrymen and brothers, born to the inheritance of liberty, and inspired by the same heaven – born feeling which animated our fathers in ’76 – that the blood of those martyred patriots, which crimson the wall of the Alamo, cries aloud for retribution justice, and appeals to every American freeman for vengeance.<sup>520</sup>

Sympathy for the Texans quickly translated into the largest volunteer surge yet. One sympathizer offered to bring two regiments from Tennessee, although he wished to bring four. The surge of US immigrants eager to earn citizenship in the new country, prompted a national debate over the diplomatic propriety and repercussions of thousands of US men flooding into a region whose status as an independent republic was still debatable, to fight in a conflict in which the US had declared neutrality. “The policy of our Government is doubtless not to interfere with foreign nations, or infringe the recognized law of nations,” wrote the *Cincinnati Republican and Commercial Register*, “But it is not the policy of government of free and independent people to stifle or suppress public sentiment, no matter how manifested or expressed.” The *Register* deemed

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<sup>520</sup> *Grand Gulf Advertiser*, 28 April 1836, Asbury Papers.

it “unnatural” for Americans not to participate in the struggle, treating the fight for liberty as if it were a biologically inherited trait.<sup>521</sup>

If the United States embodied democracy and freedom, then Mexico embodied its antithesis – tyranny, oppression, and greed. The *Register* declared that it was the Mexican centralists’ aim “to sweep from the nation every vestige of civil liberty, and to establish upon the ruins of a Federal Constitution, an absolute military and ecclesiastical despotism.” Liberty was the purview of the United States of the North and something that Mexicans hated.<sup>522</sup> Reports of the horrors of Mexican oppression filled the pages of northern newspapers. One recruiter reported that he had “seen forty squads of 300 men each, impressed against their own protestations, and those of their wives and children into the armed services of the country.” As if oblivious to Texas’ most recent conscription laws, he continued,

I have seen 300 men chained with not a rag on to hide their nakedness, up to the middle in the common sewers of the city, guarded by half as many soldiers who besides their arms, carried large switchen, with which they unmercifully lashed the poor prisoners . . . I have seen the doors of private citizens and of public officers, and of the National Assembly, guarded by bodies of armed men. Yet this is called a republic”

The speaker, of course, made no mention of the obvious similarities to chattel slavery in the United States. In a stroke of irony and perhaps blind privilege, US critics of Mexico

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<sup>521</sup> *The Cincinnati Republican and Commercial Register*, date unknown, Asbury Papers.

<sup>522</sup> “A Voice from Texas,” *Daily Cincinnati and Republican and Commercial Register*, 20 July, 1836, Asbury Papers.

attacked it for committing many of the very same injustices that characterized their own nation.<sup>523</sup>

The fact that volunteers were promised land in exchange for their service did not seem to compromise their lofty ideals. Indeed, appeals to prospective volunteers' material desires were often included in solicitations, "It is truly and emphatically the Italy of America, combining agricultural and commercial advantages in a most eminent degree, with a delightful and healthy climate," reported "A Voice from Texas." The solicitation continued, "All then who are desirous of participating in the glorious struggle for freedom, and uniting their destinies with this interesting country, would do well to embrace the present opportunity."<sup>524</sup>

As news of the atrocities at the Goliad and Alamo streamed into the United States, Texas came to represent nothing short of a humanitarian crisis. In response to the Jackson administration's neutrality, the *Cincinnati Gazette* declared that "It is always noble to assist any people who are overwhelmed with calamity" The paper proceeded to point out that "When Greece, of classic renown, was struggling for her liberty" from "the ruthless Turk" the United States had rushed to her aid" Yet it was now a crime to assist Texas – "what law, sir, forbids such sympathies; and what law forbids us to emigrate – and what law forbids us to aid the distressed, an feed the hungry."<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>523</sup> *Daily Cincinnati Republican and Commercial Register*, 19 November 1836, Asbury Papers.

<sup>524</sup> "A Voice from Texas," *Daily Cincinnati Republican and Commercial Register*, 20 July 1836; *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 8 September, 1836, Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 8 September 1836, Asbury Papers.

But not everyone agreed with the sudden rush to join the Texas cause. “Those who undertake to engage soldiers in a foreign country, without permission of the sovereign,” declared another contributor, “violates one of the most sacred rights of the prince and of the nation” and should be considered a crime of the highest order. “For our citizens then, to commit murders and depredations, on the members of nations at peace with us, or to combine to do it” was “as much against the laws of the land as to murder or rob, or combine to murder or rob.” The war in Texas was not about democratic principles, it was about opportunism and greed.<sup>526</sup>

Meanwhile, despite their efforts, Texan military leaders largely failed to coerce Texans themselves to the field and continued to receive reports of insubordination. One such document claimed that “John Durst and many of his disciples had proclaimed against independence, on grounds that “the colonists has sworn false by departing from the Constitution of 1824.” Contrary to Eugene Barker’s claim that “it was the ‘old settlers’ who did, almost unaided, all the effective fighting,” Lack shows that over 1,800 of the men who fought at the most decisive battle of the revolution, San Jacinto, arrived in Texas after Santa Anna had defeated the federalists. The median date of emigration was 1834 and a significant number had arrived so recently that its was their first Texas battle. Indeed, more than nine hundred men who responded to the initial call to arms in 1835, simply failed to enroll the following year. The most significant battle of the Texas

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

Revolution would be fought and won by men with almost no connection to the place for which they were fighting.<sup>527</sup>

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After months of low morale and consistent defeat by the Mexicans, the war in Texas would take a fateful turn at the Battle of San Jacinto in which the Texans would not only defeat but capture Santa Anna. But once they had the general there was no clear consensus about what to do with him, introducing one of the first disagreements between Texas and its newly declared “parent republic.” While many in the US believed Santa Anna should face extradition to their country, Texan leaders disagreed. Burnett explained that if the federal party ascended to power, recognition of Texan independence would become impossible in accordance with the very terms on which the Texans had declared independence. “But, the sovereign power, under a Central Constitution would find it equally facile and advisable to get rid of the obstreperous republicans, and practical federalists of Texas, by severing her from the empire.” Indeed, Santa Ana’s capture and the Texans’ ultimate decision to allow him to return to Mexico City to reclaim power, was the nail in the coffin of their alliance with the rest of the federalist states, and their relationship with Mexico itself. As Burnett astutely observed,

The federalists of Mexico are the enemies of Santa Ana. By detaining him here, we give to them the reins of government, and deny to ourselves all hope of a formal recognition. But letting him depart in time to sustain his authority at

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<sup>527</sup> Gaines to Burnett, 28 May 1836, Burnett Papers; Lack, 125-32.

home, we assure to ourselves a certainty that our independence *can* be recognized and at least a probability that it will.

The Texans would ultimately release Santa Ana and he would return to Mexico City as the national leader. But Burnett's prediction was not entirely correct. Santa Anna and the Mexicans would not accept Texan secession, leaving the new republic in a deeply vulnerable and precarious position. Opposition to its recently achieved status as an independent republic came from virtually every corner – from Mexico, from opponents in the North and, perhaps most importantly, from many Texans themselves.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**“Free, Happy and Independent”**  
**The Imperial Republic of Texas**  
**1836-1845**

Scholars have tended to see the period of Texan independence as a brief, unwanted, and ultimately doomed attempt at nation building. Considered an economic and political fiasco, the independent Republic of Texas failed to achieve peace or recognition from Mexico, effectively secure and protect its borders, or attain anything close to economic self-sufficiency. As one historian put it, for the full nine years of its independence, Texas “was virtually impoverished. Its internal transportation system still was largely primitive. Many of its plans for achieving rapid economic maturity came to nothing.”<sup>528</sup> The fact that Texans voted almost unanimously to seek annexation to the United States immediately after defeating Santa Anna supports the premise that they never really wanted to be independent. Furthermore, the scholarly and popular tendency to fixate on Sam Houston as the dominant figure in post-revolutionary Texas has fueled this interpretation, since Houston – an unfailing US patriot and unionist - made annexation his primary aim during both presidential terms. “The Lone Star flag flew proudly and perilously over Texas for ten years, but not through Texans’ choice,” writes T.R. Fehrenbach in his once definitive tome. The reason why Texas remained independent for so long? - “[T]he political situation that had developed within the past

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<sup>528</sup> William Ranson Hogan, *A Social and Economic History of the Republic of Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 292.



half-dozen years inside the United States.”<sup>529</sup> In other words, Texas’ fate – and that of much of the rest of the continent - had more to do with politics in the north than with Texans themselves.

Yet, histories that view annexation as a *fait accompli* of the independence period, and one that was ultimately dependent on the political course of the United States, overlook the extent to which Texans not only took their independence seriously, but earnestly pursued other geopolitical and diplomatic arrangements. Not only did these other options mean rejecting the United States, but they often meant bringing Texas into direct competition with it. As annexation began to look less likely, many Texans not only began to embrace independence, but to entertain the idea that their young republic might one day become a formidable empire of its own, replacing both the US and Mexico as the politically and economically dominant nation in the northwestern hemisphere. The chief advocate of this view was Texas’ second president, Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar.

The historiography has largely dismissed Lamar’s presidency as “nothing more than a deviation from” Houston’s policies of caution and retrenchment.<sup>530</sup> Since it was Houston’s early vision of seeing Texas joining the United States that eventually bore fruit, it is easy to see why. But the aims of Lamar and his followers, who included a large number of both early and newer settlers, were much more consistent with Texas’ “long history.” They envisioned a vibrant and independent Texan empire with closer ties to

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<sup>529</sup> T.R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans, Fro Prehistory to the Present* (Da Capo Press: 1968, 2000), 248.

<sup>530</sup><sup>530</sup> Stanley Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic, 1836-1845* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1956), viii.

England, France and federalist Mexico, and imagined Texas extending its dominion all the way to the Pacific. While such a goal may strike us as little more than delusional today, it was not all together unimaginable, and much more in line with how Texans thought of themselves both before and after independence. Whatever problems Texas faced as an infant nation, its star was rising.

Texan independence was nearly impossible, however, without the recognition and friendship of its southern neighbor. Indeed, as soon as he came into office, Lamar immediately prioritized diplomacy with Mexico over the United States. While Houston directed his diplomatic efforts at the North, recalling the shared heritage of Texas and the United States while often speaking disparagingly of Mexico and its people, Lamar often highlighted the two countries' shared commitment to republican democracy. Lamar believed, quite rightly, that the health of Texan independence depended much more on its relationship with Mexico than with the United States. But pursuing a diplomatic course with Mexico in the 1840's was complicated. Sometimes it meant attempting negotiations with Mexico City and other times it meant achieving recognition and peace from its federalist rebels in the North – some of whom were pursuing independence themselves – and could act as a critical buffer between Texas and the Mexican centralists.

There was also a small but no less influential minority in Texas who questioned whether it should not rejoin Mexico, especially when it looked like the federalists might return to power. This group included many tejanos and some members of the first cohort of Anglo-American immigrants. These men actively entertained the idea of returning

Texas to Mexico, and, in at least one case, nearly caused it to happen. Knowing that Texas could not realistically exist on its own, and not wanting to see it absorbed by the very nation they had turned their backs on years ago, they introduced the possibility of a third geopolitical arrangement, one that would undo one of the most pivotal events of the early nineteenth century.

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Texas entered a fragile and precarious independence, lacking formal recognition from any nation-state and significantly divided. Many established Texans had only tenuously embraced independence and now found themselves surrounded by recent arrivals whose politics, experiences, and worldview differed markedly from their own. “Texas has more to fear from internal dissensions, or want of harmony than from the Mexicans,” wrote John P Austin.<sup>531</sup> John P. Ramage agreed. Even as he relished that “never in my opinion has Texas stood upon the same high ground in the [estimation] of civilized nations than she does at this moment,” he had to confess that he had his “doubts and fears” arising “not from your external foes but from your enemies within.” Specifically, Ramage worried about the post-independence population’s lack of unity, community, or direction. “[Y]ou have a class of people thrown among you, who when

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<sup>531</sup> John P Austin to SFA, 29 July 1836, *Austin Papers (AP)* Vol. III (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924, 1928), 407-09.

the excitement ceases which collected them, will exhibit the evils attendant on ill organized minds and unbridled passions.”<sup>532</sup>

Texan demographics and politics changed dramatically after Santa Anna’s defeat. In August of 1836, it had approximately 30,000 Anglo residents up from about 25,000 in 1834. Many of these men were recruits from the North who had answered the revolution’s call for volunteers, as well as their families and slaves. Their numbers dwarfed the mere 3,470 ethnic Mexicans, and many would end up settling in the western sections of the state near or in territory claimed by Mexico, bringing them into regular conflict with that country as well as the Kiowa, Comanche and other nomadic Indian groups that still dominated it. The number of slaves from the North also increased dramatically from approximately 2,300 in 1834 before the revolution to 5,000 by the end of the revolution. The independence period would see an even more dramatic population influx from the North, as Anglo-Americans, as well as a significant number of German immigrants, flooded into the republic. By 1847 Texas had about 102,961 citizens - only about 12,000 to 14,000 of whom were Mexican – 38,753 slaves and 295 free blacks.<sup>533</sup> Indeed, Texas not only became increasingly Americanized over the course of its independence, it became increasingly “southernized.” Most of those who immigrated were white southerners and their slaves, strengthening the institution’s presence in the young republic. They brought with them a southern culture, worldview, and political

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<sup>532</sup> James Ramage to SFA, 27 July 1839, *AP*, Vol. III, 405-06.

<sup>533</sup> Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas A History of the Lone Star State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159.

disposition. Meanwhile, tejanos, many of whom had once served as powerful political brokers when Texas was still a part of Mexico, now found themselves marginalized and subject to suspicion.

But this does not mean that we should see Texas as a mere extension of the South or any part of the United States. While the majority of Anglo-Texans wanted to return to the US, a powerful and well established minority opposed annexation and even continued to question independence. This, of course, begged the question of what, exactly, would become of Texas. Would it remain independent? Would it join the United States or would it return to Mexico? Texans found themselves faced with several geopolitical possibilities. But for the time being, they would have to assert themselves as an independent republic. Many countries, not least of which was Mexico, still did not recognize Texas independence. If Texans wanted to annex themselves to the US, they would first have to prove that they did not constitute a significant burden or danger to that country, specifically, that they were capable of defending themselves against Indian and Mexican incursions. Ironically, Texans would have to prove that they were capable of independence in order to achieve annexation.

Given the profound disunity that plagued Texas at this time, this was no easy task. The first formidable nation-building challenge that Texans faced, was picking a president. Austin was ill and declining, wartime disagreements had all but destroyed many of his former allegiances. The Wharton party put forth Sam Houston, the Hero of San Jacinto, who, despite his battlefield heroics, was not particularly popular among

many of the old settlers, including Austin. Yet, with the old guard divided or indifferent, there were few other options. Running against an exhausted Austin and reluctant David Burnet in a nation now dominated by men like him, Houston won by a landslide. His constituency was composed mostly of men who had been attracted to Texas by promises of land in exchange for their military service, had little sense of belonging or Texan nationalism, little relationship with the new republic or understanding of its past, and little interest in engaging in the hard, self-sacrificing work of nation-building. And many, including Houston himself, hardly shared the admiration for early Mexican politics that many of the original settlers had. When he first arrived in Texas, he wrote in a letter to Andrew Jackson that Mexicans were dishonest and uneducated, and predicted that Texas would eventually break away from Mexico and join the United States or Great Britain.<sup>534</sup>

This made him an ideal man to lead the campaign for Texas annexation to the United States. Indeed, many believed that the only way that Texas could save itself from social strife and anarchy was to join a more powerful protectorate – and for many there was only one clear option. Even the venerable Father of Texas embraced annexation because it seemed “the most effectual and speedy mode of procuring for its inhabitants that security and civility in civil Govt which alone can compensate them for their past sufferings.”<sup>535</sup> Annexation was proposed in the very first election along with the ballot

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<sup>534</sup> Campbell, 40-44.

<sup>535</sup> SFA to Gen Gaines, 27 July 1836, *AP*, Vol. III, 403-05.

for president. It passed by an overwhelming majority, thereby becoming the new presidents' chief aim. Asserting that the people of Texas had, with a "unanimity unparalleled, declared that they will be reunited with the great republican family of the North," Houston turned to what he deemed, "A circumstance of the highest import," predicting confidently that the United States would "hail us welcome into the great family of free men."<sup>536</sup>

Upon his inauguration, Houston promptly dispatched a diplomatic mission to the United States with a frank letter to his most probable supporter. "My great desire is that our country Texas shall be annexed to the U States and on a footing of Justice and reciprocity to the parties," he wrote to Andrew Jackson. Although the recently elected president of an independent republic, Houston confided to his friend, "It is policy to hold out the idea (and few there are who Know to the contrary) that we are very able to sustain ourselves, against any power, who are not impotent, yet I am free to say *to you* that we cannot do it."

But in their formal declaration to Congress, the delegation presented a very different explanation for their desire to join their mother country. "[Texas] claims annexation by the kindred ties of blood, language, institutions by a common origin, by a

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<sup>536</sup> Sam Houston, "First Inaugural Address," 2 October 1836, Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Baker, *The Writings of Sam Houston*, Vol. I (Austin: University of Texas, 1938-43).

common history, and by a common freedom.”<sup>537</sup> This, of course, was a dramatic shift from the time when Anglo-Texans attempted to emphasize their political and cultural similarities with Mexico, while turning their backs on the nation of their birth.

But not all Texan leaders were as eager for annexation as Houston. “It should be borne in mind that Texas makes a great sacrifice by agreeing to the annexation at all,”<sup>538</sup> Austin wrote to John Wharton, then leader of the Texas envoy in the United States. He cautioned Wharton against forfeiting too much, insisting that Texas should only accept annexation “on the broad basis of equitable reciprocity.” He reminded Wharton of the rights that Texans had acquired “under the laws of the former and present governments,” all of which “must be duly respected and secured beyond the possibility of a doubt.”<sup>539</sup>

Austin believed that the near unanimous vote to annex Texas to the US was “more the result of attachment to the native government” and “ties of the kindred,” than “of mature reflection, on the future glory, interest and prosperity of Texas.” Unlike the newer cohort of immigrants, for Austin and many of the older settlers, annexation carried with it the threat of greater loss than gain. These men had consistently imagined a world apart from the United States and the thought of returning to it, however pragmatic, did not necessarily appeal to them. Furthermore, as Austin hoped to remind Wharton, they

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<sup>537</sup> Untitled, 8 April 1837, “Notes from the Texas Legation in the US to the Department of State, 1836-45,” National Archives, Washington D.C.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>539</sup> SFA to Wharton, 18 November 1836, *Diplomatic Correspondences of Texas (DCT)*, Vol. II, (Washington DC: Government Print Office, 1908-11), 127-135.



had other options: “In the event therefore of discovering any such disposition in the government of Congress of the United States, you will have full and free conversations with the British, French and other foreign ministers, on the Texas question.” For such nations, association with a cotton-producing Texas, promised “great commercial advantages,” including a market free of the kind of onerous tariffs that northern cotton producers faced. *If* Texas were to enter the United States, Austin insisted that it enter as a state “without passing through the intermediate stage of a territorial government,” that there be no restriction whatsoever on slavery, and that the land titles of “*bona fide* settlers” be honored “so as to secure them from the heartless grasp and persecution of speculators.”<sup>540</sup>

Southern cotton growers, however, immediately recognized Texan annexation as a political and economic boon. The annexation of a vast cotton-producing region promised an end to the great shortages and fluctuations that had plagued the South. Politically, it would fortify the region by adding considerably to its representation and population. As Wharton himself observed, if Texas were admitted to the Union “the preponderance of political power will very soon depart from the North and permanently reside in the South and West.”<sup>541</sup> Not to mention that Jackson had dreamed of acquiring Texas for decades.

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<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> Wharton to SFA, 6 January 1837, *DCT*, Vol. II, 168-72.

Yet, it was not to be. Several formidable obstacles convinced Jackson that annexation, as much as he wanted it, was not worth the cost. First, it would contribute to growing sectional rivalry on the eve of a presidential election. Second, Mexico already blamed his administration for the Texas fiasco, and annexation would further damage an already fragile relationship between that country and the United States, potentially tarnishing the latter's image abroad. Finally, and perhaps as a result of Houston's letter, Jackson knew that the cost of defending such a sparsely populated and impoverished region would most likely fall on the federal government, thereby making the burden of absorbing Texas outweigh the benefit. According to his biographer, "It was very important to Jackson that the rest of the world see any exchange of territory as an honorable and proper transaction." That being the case, Jackson refused to annex Texas and advised Congress to "stand aloof" on the question, at least until "Mexico herself, or one of the great foreign powers, should recognize Texas first." Doing so, Jackson argued, would "secure to us respect and influence abroad and inspire confidence at home." Congress did, however, succumb in part to the vigor of the Texas commissioners, and on March 1, 1837 recommend to the president the formal recognition, but not annexation, of Texas.<sup>542</sup>

To some in Texas, this came as a relief. Many questioned the United States' claim and investment in Texas. If the US had, since the signing of the Adams-Onís

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<sup>542</sup> For a full discussion of the United States' recognition of Texas independence see Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845*, Vol. III, (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), 357-68; Remini quoted on pg 366, Jackson quoted on page 363-64.

Treaty, claimed the region as its own, why had it not intervened sooner? Why had it not come to its aid in its war with Mexico? Mexico, many assumed, would surely have consented to sell Texas to the Americans if they had offered the proper price. “But what would the people of Texas be likely to think of such a consummation of their revolutionary struggle?” asked the *Weekly Houston Telegraph*, “They have already purchased the soils at a price more costly than its mines could pay – the blood of those who fought and fell at San Jacinto.” Regarding Texas’ previous desire to attach themselves to the US, the *Telegraph* asserted that “the sentiments of her people are believed to have undergone a change since the vote of 1836.” And for good reason. “[T]he United States would be the greater, if not the sole gainers, both politically and commercially,” the paper asserted, “We would be subjected to all those financial evils from which the United States have labored from first to last” and Texas’ “fertile regions” would only serve “to fil the pockets of northern manufacturers and monopolists.”<sup>543</sup> Why return to the same onerous impositions from which many Texans had fled? Why become the peripheral corner of a vast and extractive empire when you could become one yourself?

Rejected by the Jackson administration and losing its appeal among Texans, Houston decided to abandon annexation and put forth a plan to make Texas a viable independent nation. “Recognized as we have been, by the United States, a free,

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<sup>543</sup> *Weekly Houston Telegraph*, 17 March 1838.

sovereign and independent nation, it becomes our imperious duty, to pursue such a course of policy and legislation, as will at once command the policy and respect of other nations.” Of paramount importance was addressing the nation’s embarrassed finances. “A boundless revenue to the country will arise from the opening of the land offices,” he informed Congress. Furthermore, Texas needed an organized militia and functional Navy. “There can be no doubt but that the enemy will avail themselves of every advantage by sea.” Texans must therefore not only “make preparation to meet them, but to maintain active operations by sea and land.” Yet, despite its financial insolvency, insecure borders and woefully underdeveloped infrastructure, there was one thing that Houston was certain Texas would never succumb to: “It is vain to suppose that Mexico, imbecile as she is, and distracted by internal factions, can ever reconquer the fair region of Texas, and maintain her conquest. The same spirits who have subdued the wilderness and have repelled the boasted invincibility of Mexico, yet live.”<sup>544</sup>

Consequently, annexation became increasingly less attractive to a president who had almost made acquiring Texas his life mission. But it also began to look less appealing to Texans themselves. “Annexation with respect to ourselves alone is now a question of more embarrassment than heretofore,” wrote Texas Secretary of State, Robert A. Irion, “From indications evinced by members of the late session of the Texan

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<sup>544</sup> Sam Houston, “Message to both Houses of Congress,” 28 November 1837, “Notes from the Texas Legation in the US to the Department of State, 1836-45,” National Archives, Washington D.C.

Congress[,] the people are becoming less anxious for the success of the measure.”<sup>545</sup> A month later Irion stated that pushing further for Texas annexation was “useless” and would be “derogatory to ourselves. If the United States decided it wanted Texas, “the proposition should come from them.” Texas’ policy from here on out would be “to appear indifferent upon the subject.”<sup>546</sup> No matter how fragile their independence might be, Texans insisted to themselves and the rest of the world that they could stand alone.

Indeed, even as Texans complained of their poverty and lack of resources, many of them embraced independence as an opportunity to enrich themselves and their new republic unhindered by the North’s onerous regulations and tariffs. “There never has been such a universal feeling in favour of raising cotton in Texas,” Thomas McKinney wrote to Samuel May Williams in February 1838. Whereas, just six months earlier, he had bemoaned “how many disappointments necessarily occur in a country so poorly organized [in all] her commercial relations,” McKinney now cheerfully informed his friend that he had “received orders for Six Gin stands.” He now believed Texas was in a position to produce five times the amount of cotton it had the previous year, and that “There are a great many persons now emigrating from the United States to this country” who “will doubtless produce a revival of lines and business.”<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Robert A. Irion to Memecum Hunt, 31 December 1837, *DCT*, Vol. II, 277-281.

<sup>546</sup> Hunt to Irion, 31 January 1838, *DCT*, Vol. II, 284-288.

<sup>547</sup> Thomas McKinney to Samuel May Williams, 28 July 1838, 22 February 1839, Samuel May Williams Papers (SMWP), Rosenberg Library, Galveston.

Indeed, when Jackson finally decided to kill the annexation bill for fear that it would send his nation further into sectionalism and threaten its already delicate relationship with Mexico, not a few Texans were relieved. “How *glorious* will Texas be standing alone, and relying upon her own strength,” wrote Anson Jones, the republic’s new minister to the United States.<sup>548</sup> And although the South had almost unanimously supported annexation, there were a few southern leaders who agreed. McKinney wrote of a few “friends” of Texas from Louisiana[,] Mississippi[,] Kentucky[,] etc” who “opposed our annexation on the grounds that a brighter destiny now awaits Texas.” Whereas, if Texas were to join the United States, it would be subject to the same perceived oppression that the rest of the South experienced, namely “high Tariffs and other Northern measures,” and may even be “driven to nullification, secession etc and be thus involved in a worse revolution than we are now engaged in.” Texas was emerging as a beacon of hope for an increasingly disgruntled South, at least some of whose leaders encouraged the young nation to “go on as we have commenced conquering and to conquer and never pause until we had annexed all or the best portion of Mexico to Texas.” In so doing, Texas might establish “an independent government that would rival [the United States] in extent, resources and population.”<sup>549</sup> Texans, for the time being, were prepared to take their advice.

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<sup>548</sup> Anson Jones quoted in Gambrell, Herbert Gambrell, *Anson Jones: The Last President of Texas* (Garden City, NY: 1948), 399.

<sup>549</sup> Wharton to SFA, 11 December 1836, *DCT*, Vol. II, 151-154.

Houston's term ran out at the end of 1839 and since the Texas constitution did not allow consecutive terms, it is impossible to know if Texans were satisfied enough with his presidency to re-elect him. But the man they did elect was about as far from Houston, personally and politically, as one could get. Where Houston was charismatic and extroverted, Lamar was bookish and unimposing. Whereas Houston pursued a policy of caution and retrenchment, hoping to see Texas become a US state, Lamar hoped not only to preserve independence, but to turn Texas into a formidable empire of its own that extended all the way to the Pacific. In this regard, Lamar's policies were far more consistent with Texan politics up to that point. Indeed, as early as December 1836, shortly after they had organized a formal government, the committee on the state of the republic adopted a bill incorporating an entity known as the "Texas Railroad, Navigation, and Banking Company." Its aim was to establish railroad communication and transportation between the Rio Grande and the Sabine.

But some had even bigger dreams for the project. Texas Congressman Thomas J. Green envisioned a pattern of railroads and canals that connected New Orleans to the Gulf of California, thus making Texas a gateway to Asia and India. Green predicted that "a combination of political events must soon happen, which will place Texas no longer in a frontier position to the States of the North." He envisioned adding a country west of Texas "as large as the original thirteen States."<sup>550</sup> But in negotiations with the Jackson

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<sup>550</sup> Thomas J. Green, date unknown, *Telegraph and Texas Register*.

administration, Texan officials soon learned that if they wanted to gain recognition, they would have to claim far less territory than even their most modest ambitions entailed. By claiming the Rio Grande as their western border, the Texan congress, many believed, encroached on Mexican territory, including Santa Fé. The boundary question never really came up, in part because knowledge of the sheer size of Texas would prompt many to withhold recognition.

Yet the failed attempt at annexation had emboldened imperially-minded Texans such as Memecum Hunt, Irion's successor as Texas' representative to the United States. Hunt asserted that Texans would continue to push their western boundary, "pursuing the destiny indicated to us by that significant and beautiful emblem of our nationality, the evening star," thereby adding "*star* after *star* to our Banner," just as the United States had done.<sup>551</sup> When asked by John Forsythe, secretary of the United States, how far Texas aimed to extend its western boundary, Hunt boldly replied "As far as the Pacific Ocean." As an independent republic, Texas would take the mantle of Anglo expansion in the Northwestern hemisphere. But Texans did not simply adopt US expansionism, the notion of Texas resting at the heart of a vibrant transnational economy and community was something Austin himself had expressed, albeit in the service of Mexico. In many ways, independent Texas attempted to pursue many of the same ambitions that it had expressed

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<sup>551</sup> Hunt to Irion, 31 December 1837, *DCT*, Vol. II, 277-281.



under Mexico, placing it at odds with both that country and the United States. Texas went from soliciting the United States to competing with it.

Lamar laid out his vision for the young republic in his inaugural speech delivered in December 1838. Of annexation, he claimed “I have never been able myself to perceive the policy of the desired connexion, or discover in it any advantage either civil, political, or commercial, which could possibly result to Texas.” On the contrary, annexation “would produce a lasting regret, and ultimately prove as disastrous to our liberty and hopes, as the triumphant sword of the enemy.” Lamar made it clear that, unlike Houston, who had attempted to rejoin the union at his first opportunity, he was a Texan through and through, and would remain so. Although he claimed “no irreverence to the character and institutions of my native country,” he insisted that “the land of my adoption must claim the highest allegiance and affection.”<sup>552</sup>

Lamar explained that becoming a part of the United States would mean surrendering the very freedoms that had attracted so many to Texas in the first place and that they had fought so ardently to defend in the recent war with Mexico:

When I reflect upon the invaluable rights which Texas will have to yield up with the surrender of her Independence – the right of making either war or peace; the right of controlling the Indian tribes within her borders; the right of appropriating her public domain to purposes of education and internal improvements; of levying

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<sup>552</sup> Lamar, “Lamar’s Inaugural Address,” 10 December 1838, Charles A. Gulick, Jr. and Katherine Elliott, eds, *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar (LP)*, Vol. II (Austin, 1922).

her own taxes, regulating her own commerce and forming her own alliances and treaties – when I view her divested of the most essential attributes of free government; reduced to the level of an unfelt fraction of a giant empire. . . I cannot regard the annexation of Texas to the American union in any other light than as the grave of all her hopes of happiness and greatness.

Annexation, as far as Lamar saw it, was the worst thing for Texans' happiness and prosperity. It would place Texas on the periphery of a vast and extractive empire whose center of power was located thousands of miles away and controlled by men whose interests did not at all coincide with their own. Lamar emphasized Texans' natural wealth, which included "the most delightful climate and the richest soil in the world," and he insisted that if it remained independent, Texas would "have no rival; with the whole world for her market." In fact, through various ingenuity and improvement measures, Texas might supply an "example in free trade" to other nations, "emancipating it from the thralldom of tariff restrictions and placing it upon the high grounds of equitable reciprocity."

Language like this reminded Texans of precisely the frustrations with US society and politics that had initially compelled them to leave that country for Mexico. While Houston and the pro-annexationists had emphasized Texans' similarities with the North, Lamar reminded Texans of their differences. He referred to Americans as "another people," even "remote and uncongenial."<sup>553</sup> Texans and Americans, despite their common heritage, were not the same. Annexation, Lamar insisted, would return Texans

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid.

to the same state of poverty and disempowerment that they had fled as citizens of the North. Independence would finally give them the opportunity that they had sought in Mexico and defended in the recent revolution. The by now decades long search for political and economic utopia was still within reach, but only if Texans remained independent from both the US and Mexico. Texas would not permit itself to become some peripheral part of a vast empire – it would become one itself.<sup>554</sup>

With the failure of annexation, Texas turned to another imperial power for assistance and tutelage – Great Britain. In light of the geopolitical circumstances of the 1830's and 1840's it made perfect sense. The growing power and influence of the slave South had made Britain nervous, and thus they had an interest in bringing Texas within their sphere of influence. For Texans, aligning themselves with Britain permitted them to compete with the United States, rather than become beholden to it. “We are about to separate from our fatherland forever,” declared Lamar. “No longer with light hearts swiftly shall we seek the old homestead – we track the broad Atlantic but it is for the white cliffs of England.” For men like Lamar, the promise of Texas’ greatness rested in a very different kind of relationship with the US. “We become the rivals of the United states in the production of her great staple. [A]nd if we become a commercial people, her rivals in everything.”<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> Lamar, “Recognition of Independence,” date unknown, “Notes from the Texas Legation in the US to the Department of State, 1836-45,” National Archives, Washington D.C.

Such language did not go unnoticed in the North where, as Jackson himself observed, a Texan alliance with Great Britain could mean more than simply the loss of the region forever. All of this was taking place at the same time that Great Britain and its former colony were laying competing claims to the Oregon Territory. The acquisition of both Texas and Oregon would permit Great Britain, as Jackson explained, to “form an iron hoop around the United States, with her West India islands.”<sup>556</sup> In light of these concerns, Texan annexation was all the more crucial to US security.

Indeed, Texas had its own imperial ambitions when it came to the Pacific Northwest. In early 1840, Secretary of the Treasury Richard Dunlap reported that “The Congress of the United States have a proposition before it, for the establishment of a territorial Govt at the mouth of the Columbia.” He argued that this constituted a concern for the Government of Texas, for “If this port shall pass into the possession of the United States, it will be forever out of the reach of Texas, and will certainly circumscribe her growing power, and cripple her means for future advancement.”<sup>557</sup> Texan leaders also aspired, just as they had done under Mexico, to divert trade between Santa Fé and the Caribbean through Texas. Texans envisioned replacing the United States as Cuba’s chief supplier of “mules, Horses, cattle, Beef, cotton Etc.” Meanwhile “the coffee, Sugar, cigars, Tobasco fruit Etc, of Cuba” could be furnished to Texas at reduced rates.

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<sup>556</sup> Andrew Jackson to Sam Houston, 15 March 1834, Rep of Texas General File, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas Austin.

<sup>557</sup> RG Dunlap to Burnet, 12 January 1840, *DCT*, Vol. II, 435.

Rendering St. Louis all but obsolete, Texans believed that their ports would provide “a cheaper more direct and expeditious route.”<sup>558</sup>

But even as the newly forged nation distanced itself from the United States, it served as a source of inspiration for certain of her citizens. “If then infatuated Fanaticks ever drive us to separation,” wrote one admiring Southerner to Lamar shortly after his inauguration, “I look to Texas as a Country to fall back upon, & whether a new Confederation with the Southern States shall be effected, or not, the Southern Country will find a powerful ally in that new, & I trust I may soon add powerful Commonwealth.”<sup>559</sup> As southerners began flirting with the idea of secession, many looked to Texas as their inspiration - A group of die-hard agrarian federalists committed to regional sovereignty and free trade who had successfully seceded from a centralizing republic.

Yet, before it could become an empire, Texas had to achieve some degree of security, one of the most serious threats to which came from the United States or, more specifically, its displaced Native Americans. During the ten years that Texas existed as an independent nation, it faced constant incursions by Indian groups who, with little regard for national boundaries, often crossed from the United States into Texas and northern Mexico to conduct raids. This prompted reciprocal attacks from Texans. Thus, almost as soon as discussions of annexation with the US ended, arguments over whose

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<sup>558</sup> Bernard E Bee to the Envoy of Her Majesty the Queen of Spain, 27 February 1841, *DCT*, 482.

<sup>559</sup> JM White to Lamar, 1 June 1839, *LP*, Vol. III, 10.

responsibility it was to police Texas' borders began. Texas argued that the US still had an obligation under an earlier treaty with Mexico to restrain Indian incursions against them.<sup>560</sup>

Indeed, even as they insisted that Texas was not only a viably independent nation, but capable of expansion, Texans complained that their country was too poor and weak to police their frontier, pressuring their leaders to appeal for US assistance.<sup>561</sup> In a letter to the US Secretary of State, AP Upsher, the head of the Texas Legation to Washington DC, Isaac Van Zandt formally requested that the US government "aid, and cooperate in every measure necessary to control these people," referring to its recently displaced Indians.<sup>562</sup>

As relations with the North cooled, Texans began to turn their attention to achieving recognition and amity from their southern neighbor. While Lamar often receives attention for his exclusionist policies regarding Native Americans, it was during his administration that Texas made the greatest progress towards improving its relationship with Mexico. It did so by first turning to Britain for assistance in hashing out a peace agreement. Bernard E. Bee, the Texan secretary of state, went to Mexico City in a special envoy with only two provisions – sign no treaty that does not recognize the unconditional independence of Texas, and sign no treaty that does not place the

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<sup>560</sup> JS Mayfield to Bee, 17 February 1841, 20 April 1841, *DCT*, Vol. I, 82-6.

<sup>561</sup> Lamar to Daniel Webster, 2 January 1842, "Notes from the Texas Legation in the US to the Department of State, 1836-45," National Archives, Washington D.C.

<sup>562</sup> Isaac Van Zandt to the Honorable AP Upsher, 16 August 1843, *Ibid.*

international border at the Rio Grande.<sup>563</sup> Lamar attempted to initiate diplomatic talks by highlighting the affinity between the two nations. In a letter to the vice president, Valentín Gómez Farías, Lamar expressed his assurance that “in you are to be found a concentration of all those liberal principles and enlightened views which tend to the promotion of civil and religious liberty.” Despite the two countries’ current state of hostility, Lamar hoped that he would find a sympathetic ear in “one who has so long and through so many trying scenes maintained the character of a consistent statesman and devoted patriot.”<sup>564</sup>

Because of his previous relationship with Mexican leaders, Lamar recruited Thomas McKinney to prepare a separate letter introducing Bee to the Bustamante administration. However, McKinney, always one for frankness and less effusive than Lamar, took the opportunity to remind the Vice President of his true feelings regarding Texan independence:

You well know that I opposed the declaration of independence of Texas and even now do not have reason nor motive to change my opinion[,] but the obvious has passed and God desires a good result from the trip of Col. Bee and that it establishes good relations between Texas and Mexico.<sup>565</sup>

Whether or not McKinney’s letter had anything to do with the failure of Bee’s mission we will never know. Suffice is to say that when he arrived in Mexico City, Bee met with

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<sup>563</sup> Siegel, 122.

<sup>564</sup> Lamar to Valentín Gómez Farías, 18 April 1839, Gómez Farías Papers, Benson Center for Latin American History, University of Texas, Austin

<sup>565</sup> McKinney to Gómez Farías, *Ibid.*

an intransigent Mexican leadership that would accept nothing less than Texas' return to Mexico. Mexican leaders insisted that such was necessary to the continued sovereignty and peace of their country. "General Victoria says that the acknowledgement of our Independence is out of the question," reported Bee, "that Zacatecas, Sonora etc would soon be asking the same thing." When Bee attempted to sway him by pointing to Texans' racial and cultural distinctiveness, he was dismissed. Instead, the General urged "that Texas should at once propose to be *reunited* with Mexico," and that she would "be received with open arms." When Bee brought up the two nations' political incompatibility because Mexico was a central government and Texas "attached to a *Federal*," the general replied that Mexico "was a *Representative Republic* [and] that Texas as a Department would have a right to be represented etc etc." When Bee brought up the issue of slavery, Victoria replied, "that can be got over."

For Victoria, Texans' ethnic, cultural or even institutional differences did not make them incompatible with the rest of Mexico. They were not even unique in their decision to secede. Even slavery could be dealt with. As for the Texans themselves, they pursued a somewhat inconsistent diplomacy that both highlighted their affinity with Mexico while at the same time demanding recognition based on this affinity. Mexican leaders must have found this confusing. Furthermore, Texans seemed to believe that ethnic and cultural homogeneity were essential to a functional republic in a way that Mexican leaders did not. Perhaps nothing more eloquently highlighted the difference in these two men's political vision than the general's closing remarks that would have rung



much truer to a Texan of the 1820's than one of the 1840's. As Bee left the meeting, Victoria told him to remember that "Mexico is the finest country in the world; avail yourself of its advantages, at a future day *your* son may be at its head."<sup>566</sup>

With the failure of the Texas Republic's first formal attempt to gain recognition from Mexico, Britain intervened in the form of Sir Richard Pakenham, the British minister to Mexico, who saw Texas' offer to purchase its territory from Mexico as means to secure Mexican payment of debts owed to Britain. Lamar appointed James Treat to issue a second offer to Mexico, but this one would entail a request for even more territory. Treat was to insist on the same boundary line along the Rio Grande that Bee had, but first he was to "feel" out the Mexican authorities regarding their amicability towards a line that would extend to Paso del Norte and from there westward "to the Gulf of California and along the southern shore of that gulf to the Pacific Ocean." Alas, Treat's efforts met with no more success than Bee's had, so that, in the words of one scholar, by the end of 1840, "Texas had secured no definite results on the question of extending her jurisdiction to the Rio Grande" - not from the US and not from Mexico.<sup>567</sup> The latter still did not even recognize Texas independence.

Some welcomed the failed negotiation as an invitation to war. "I had liked to have said I was glad of it," wrote one official to Lamar, "We shall be forced to treat the recent tyrant in a Manner that will advance us in a National point of view and make us as

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<sup>566</sup> Bee to James Webb, 24 May 1839, *DCT*, Vol. I, 447-449.

<sup>567</sup> William Campbell Binkley, *The Expansionist Movement in Texas, 1836-1850*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1925), 42.

a nation[,] one of the most powerful in the world eventually.” To those who shared this view, another war with Mexico meant another opportunity for Texans to prove their chops as a formidable new power. “*My voice is for war* and as Bustamante has expressed his determination to invade us the sooner we are ready the better for our interests,” declared Hunt.<sup>568</sup> The President, however, understood that his new republic was in no condition for such a conflict and strictly forbid any official or unofficial invasion of Mexican territory by Texan citizens.<sup>569</sup>

Lamar also strove to remind Texans of their affinity and shared history with Mexico, advocating peace and cooperation with a nation that many Texans had once called home. “Adverse as I am to our protracted state of affairs with Mexico,” he explained, “I have nevertheless thought it due to ourselves, and to the enlightened opinions of the world, to show that we have no vindictive feelings to gratify, but are willing to meet her in a spirit of forbearance” and “establish a basis for a future intercourse which shall be equally beneficial to both nations.” Lamar, however, understood the complexity of Mexican politics, and that diplomacy with the country might require a dual approach. While Texas had failed to gain the recognition and cooperation of Mexico City, Lamar suspected he would have better luck with the Mexican federalists just south of his country, who were in a position to protect Texan independence and interest. Mexico was, as Lamar observed, “divided into two parties”

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<sup>568</sup> Hunt to Lamar, 10 June 1839, *LP*, Vol. III, 18-9.

<sup>569</sup> Proclamation by the President of the Republic of Texas, December 1836, “Notes from the Texas Legation in the US to the Department of State, 1836-45,” National Archives, Washington D.C.

and one of these parties, “chiefly occupying the northern provinces,” had already “made overtures to [the Texas] Government, indicating a desire to cultivate friendly relations by establishing reciprocal trade and commerce.”<sup>570</sup> Lamar intended to take them up on their offer.

Indeed, leaders of the northern states of Tamaulipas, San Luis Potosi, Zacatecas, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Durango, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, New Mexico and the Californias sought an agreement with Texas in which it would supply two thousand troops in exchange for a formal recognition of independence from a successfully established Republic of the Rio Grande.<sup>571</sup> In fact, Lamar had received a formal correspondence from General Canales, leader of the northern federalists, just after his election in December 1838. Canales, reporting that “On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of last month these towns of the North declared for the Federal States. The movement has progressed very rapidly and uninterruptedly, and I doubt not the Republic will follow it in a few days.” Canales reported that a recent string of victories in the interior had revived the federalists. “The cause of liberty must infallibly triumph,” he assured Lamar, and once it did “those towns and yours will again very shortly be united in bonds of former amity.” Having congratulated the president on such a prospect, Canales requested “protection in your Republic, which interests (imperiously demand) that we . . . take up arms.”<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> Lamar, “Second Annual Message to Congress,” 12 November 1839, *LP*, Vol. III, 159-183.

<sup>571</sup> Binkley, 43-48.

<sup>572</sup> Antonio Canales to President Lamar, 7 December 1838, *DCT*, Vol. I, 430-1.

Texans received another appeal a few months later from one of Canales' federalist allies then in New Orleans. Pointing to the United States' failure to either absorb or defend Texas against its enemies, the author gestured to the great and necessary benefit that Texas would gain from aligning itself with a federalist north – “those states containing the greatest mass of the population, of the territorial riches, and of the moral, scientific, and political abilities amongst the Mexican people.” The author credited Lamar for having “opened a commercial intercourse” between Texas and northern Mexico, but pointed out that the two countries “have still a common enemy to reduce.” They must, therefore, also establish a “*political* intercourse” which would “cause the hordes of Centralists, now advancing to the stroke of a whip, to fall back terrified and their government to be struck with sudden death.”<sup>573</sup>

But such alliances, while tempting, threatened to derail Texan negotiations with Mexico itself. As Bee had reported from Mexico City, the recent federalist revolt was the primary reason why Mexico refused to acknowledge Texan independence. In light of this, Texan leaders decided that it was not in their best interest to formally align themselves with Mexican federalists. But this was not the preferred policy of many Texans themselves. In April of 1840, a group of citizens of western Texas wrote to the President that they had “Resolved that such terms and conditions be authori[z]ed to [be] made with the Federal Mexicans as may secure their friendship not compromising the

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<sup>573</sup> *Weekly Houston Telegraph*, 10 April 1839.

Honour and character of the Texian Government.”<sup>574</sup> One gentleman writing from west Texas echoed their sentiments, declaring that “The feeling here in regard to the Federalist is of the kindest character: - the sympathy displayed in their cause is as warm as it is possible for it to be.” He spoke admiringly of the federalist commander and described a dinner that local leaders held in his honor during his recent visit. Plummer claimed that “The crowd was so great that many of them had no room for seats,” and he assured Lamar that “The Conduct of the President are those of a gentlemen of the highest order - and his talent seems to be of the highest cast.” But Texans, of course, had more than simply ideological kinship with Mexican federalists. In many ways, they understood their own national security to depend upon Federalist success. Texans were as deeply invested in the political situation in Mexico as they had always been, and, in some cases, pleaded with their president to lift his neutrality and permit them to join their federalist allies

Once we join the Federalist and Texas will never stand in need of hereafter spending one dollar in fighting Mexicans.- Americans will flock there by thousands and join the Federal Cause - We will get clear of a large number of useless population – we can loose no wealth.- We make a warm friend of a neighbor & you put down all Centralism in Mexico at the very first advance in the Federal cause.<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> J. Hemphill, Proceedings and Resolutions of Citizens Meeting of Western Texas, 23 April 1840, *LP*, Vol. III, 375-77.

<sup>575</sup> Samuel A. Plummer to Lamar, 25 April 1840, *LP*, Vol. III, 381-83.

Regardless, Lamar's policy did not stop private Texas citizens from cooperating with the federalists. But such behavior often only served to sabotage Texan diplomacy in Mexico City, and therefore received heavy criticism from the administration which struggled to find a way to compel its citizens to stop violating its own neutrality. "I know not how it is that an alliance has been made between the Federals and the Texians," wrote one member of Bee's envoy, "but let this be as it may, The Government of Mexico seems to be convinced that the Government of Texas has an active part in the invasion of Mexico and will strain every nerve to retake that colony."<sup>576</sup>

Texan leaders, for their part, often attempted to exploit the Mexican civil war to their advantage wherever they could. Insisting that they explicitly forbid, and in fact had done a decent job of prohibiting, cooperation between their citizens and the federalist rebels, they nonetheless employed the threat of such cooperation to gain leverage in their negotiations with Mexico.<sup>577</sup> "You are no doubt aware, that repeated overtures have been made by the Federalists of the Northern and Southern provinces of Mexico, accompanied by the most alluring offers, to induce the people of Texas to unite with them in a war against their Government and to make common cause in forcing an acknowledgement of our and their Independence," wrote one envoy to Packenham, "and you are no doubt equally aware that all of these overtures have been rejected on the part of my

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<sup>576</sup> AS Wright to William Bryan, 25 December 1839, *DCT*, Vol. I, 519.

<sup>577</sup> Abner S. Lipscomb to James Treat, 13 June 1840, *DCT*, Vol. I, 642-45.

Government.” This was done with the understanding that Mexico “would change her policy in reference to us.”<sup>578</sup>

Unfortunately, this had little impact on the Mexicans. Yet, Lamar would continue trying to achieve Mexican recognition until, after three failed attempts, he finally gave up. For Lamar, establishing peace and diplomatic relations with Mexico had been “the polar star of all my policy” and “the great foundation of our future prosperity, wealth, & happiness.” He termed Mexico “a country of unsurpassed, I may say unequal fertility and beauty” and its population “hardy, enterprising and industrious.”<sup>579</sup> Despite declaring official neutrality in the Mexican conflict, Lamar did take steps to open up trade and commerce with Mexico’s northern provinces, and insisted that he remained “assured of the acknowledgement of our independence in the event of the success of [the Federalists].” One cabinet member declared that the president, despite his refusal to formally declare in their favour, had always considered, “the Northern States of Mexico as of immense importance, not only to our entire western frontier, but to the whole country at large.” He especially looked forward to “a safe and friendly commerce with that portion of the Mexican territory.”<sup>580</sup> Some have pointed to this as evidence of Lamar’s efforts to impose Texan authority over northern Mexico. In fact, some members of Lamar’s cabinet unabashedly looked forward to the day when Texas would absorb much of northern Mexico. As Lamar himself put it, with such conditions achieved, the

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<sup>578</sup> Webb to Pakenham, 16 June 1841, *DCT*, Vol. I, 759-60.

<sup>579</sup> Lamar, “Address at a Public Dinner, ? 1840, *LP*, Vol. III, 476-480.

<sup>580</sup> Roberts to Van Ness and Morris, 24 June 1841, *DCT*, Vol. I, 748.

northern Mexican provinces “would easily be brought to form a portion of our nation, in sentiment, in feeling, even in interest.”<sup>581</sup> Others agreed. “The people on Rio Grande are much divided in opinion,” wrote one of Lamar’s advisors, “much of their patriotism is lost” and they “think that they would live just as well under the Federal Government or Texian as they do now under the Central Government.”<sup>582</sup> Ultimately, however, the Lamar administration would determine that they did not have the resources to annex that much territory, nor could they afford the diplomatic cost with Mexico.

The federalists, in fact, did finally manage to establish a provisional government they named the Republic of Rio Grande. And one of their first policy decisions was to recognize Texan independence and the Rio Grande as its formal border. Federalists also solicited military advice from the Texans. “Whatever commands you have for our camp I will bear with pleasure,” wrote General M.J. Carbajal in July 1840, asserting that his “talents and good fortune” had placed the president “in a situation to immortalize your name beyond the reach of envious and vindictive enemies, of ensuring at little cost the prosperity and happiness of the Country over which you preside, and making to yourself millions of admiring and grateful friends in Mexico.”<sup>583</sup> These men’s attitude toward Texas should not be surprising given their own historical commitment to federalism and current relationship with Mexico which did not differ much from Texas’ relationship with that country just a few years prior. It is clear, in fact, from General Canales’ formal

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<sup>581</sup> Lamar, “Address at a Public Dinner,” ? 1840, *LP*, Vol. III, 476-480.

<sup>582</sup> Wright to Bryan, 27 December 1839, *DCT*, Vol. II,

<sup>583</sup> M.J. Carbajal to Lamar, 27 July 1840, *LP*, Vol. III, 424-25.



address to his troops in February 1840 that Mexican federalists saw their fight as part of a much broader hemispheric struggle to preserve federalism, of which Texas was a leader. In fact, Mexican federalists specifically referenced the young republic as a source of their inspiration. “Citizens. The hour has struck, The most extreme of the last colonies founded by the Spanish government have thrown down the gauntlet. The liberty and happiness of the republic is already very near. Let a part of it organize themselves promptly, and the others will follow your example.”<sup>584</sup>

Given this affinity for Texas, it should not be surprising that when the federalists faced a series of military setbacks beginning in mid-1840, they did not hesitate to appeal to their allies in Texas for refuge. In his letter to Lamar, asking that he and his troops be allowed to retreat to Texas, Cardenas wrote that “The government of the northern frontier of the Mexican republic has always recognized in Texas, because of the generous conduct and the philanthropic ideas of that government and all its inhabitants, a land of refuge in the event of an unfortunate occurrence.” But it was not just a place to rest and recuperate that Cardenas asked for. He requested “the establishment of peace and commercial relations” between the two countries “in order that this government may rescue the war against the government of Mexico.” In so doing, he specifically referenced “the sympathies which unite this country and yours,” and “similarity of the cause which both sustain.”<sup>585</sup> Cardenas’ overtures were warmly welcomed by Lamar and his advisors, one

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<sup>584</sup> Canales. General in Chief of the Conventional Army to the troops of his command, date unknown, *LP*, Vol. V, 403-04.

<sup>585</sup> J. Cardenas to Lamar, 8 April 1840, *LP*, Vol. III, 364-5.

of whom described the general as “a gentleman of high intelligence and character,” whose “generous & liberal conduct towards our frontier citizens & traders will entitle him to your friendly attention.”<sup>586</sup> At the end of his stay, Cardenas warmly thanked the President for his gracious hospitality and warm support, and assured him that the “high favours” he and his men had received “shall never be effaced from the hearts of the Mexicans of the Frontier of the North.”<sup>587</sup>

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The Lower Rio Grande was not the only part of Mexico that the Lamar administration had its eyes on. In February of 1840, the president received a letter from his secret envoy in Mexico, James Treat, regarding the federalist movement in the southern province of Yucatán. He reported that “the revolution that has been on foot therefore some time is making serious headway, and it is feared the whole department may concur in the *grito* for federation.” While Treat regretted the news, stating that it would only render the Mexican government “more timid” and less willing to recognize Texas, Lamar and his administration saw a golden opportunity.<sup>588</sup>

A few months later the *Morning Star* reported on the fall of Campeche, “the last hold of the centralists, in the Yucatan” and stated that the event “may be regarded as the first step in a political movement that is destined to revolutionize” the country. “The population in Yucatan are, from all accounts, the proper ingredients to constitute a

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<sup>586</sup> Cornelius Van Ness to Lamar, 20 March 1840, *LP*, Vol. V, 413.

<sup>587</sup> Canales to Lamar, 29 April 1840, *LP*, Vol. V, 424.

<sup>588</sup> Treat to Lamar, 29 February 1840, *DCT*. Vol. II., 579-80.

republic,” the author asserted, “They are a people of simple and laborious habits addicted to the pursuits of industry and much better educated and informed on political subjects than the great mass of the Mexicans.” Chief among the province’s most admirable qualities, was its dedication to a standing militia. “The utmost jealousy is manifested against military power and sacerdotal influence. Standing armies are repudiated as dangerous to freedom. Every citizen is required to bear arms.” It was this, according to *The Star* that “will deliver Yucatan from a power that now holds the rest of Mexico in chains.”<sup>589</sup> Upon news several months later that Yucatán had joined with Tobasco and Compeche to form an independent confederation, Lamar determined that Texas “should ascertain the position which they [the newly confederated *yucatecanos*] intended to occupy towards us.” He assured the Senate that “we have reasons to be gratified with the spirit that prevailed among the public authorities of these provinces, as well as among the people, in favour of our Independence, which they were ready to acknowledge so soon as their own should be established.”<sup>590</sup>

Throughout 1840, Texas took proactive steps to establish friendly relations with Mexican federalists, even going so far as to appoint an envoy to Yucatán to this end. In July of 1841 Lamar wrote a formal letter to the Governor stating that

It has been my earnest desire to establish with the States of Yucatan, Tobasco and such others as may throw off the Yoke of Central Despotism in Mexico, relations of amity and friendship, and to show the disposition of this Government to

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<sup>589</sup>*The Morning Star*, 20 June 1840, *LP*, Vol. III, .

<sup>590</sup> Lamar to the Senate, 1 November 1840, *LP*, III, 464-70.

reciprocate in the fullest manner, every evidence of good will manifested by the Federalists of Mexico towards this country, I hereby have the pleasure of declaring to you and of making known to your Citizens, that the Ports of Texas are open to the vessels and Commerce of Yucatan upon the same terms as we extend to the most favoured nations.<sup>591</sup>

The governor welcomed Lamar's overtures and replied that "Yucatan desires to extend its relations with the people of Texas, and to unite with them to sustain the cause of liberty that they have proclaimed in contrast to the oppressive government of Mexico."<sup>592</sup> The two nations soon drafted a treaty in which Texas agreed to supply Yucatán with \$8,000 to fund their continuing fight against Mexico City.

But it was the large swath of unincorporated territory to its west over which Texas was most intent on asserting its claims. New Mexico and its chief town of Santa Fé had rested on the very edge of the Spanish Empire and later Mexican Republic for generations. Its inhabitants traded mostly with the United States and often struggled to survive amidst Indian incursions. The Lamar administration knew that Texas could not very well embark on a mission of territorial expansion without first successfully establishing its jurisdiction over territory already claimed. It was in his annual message of 1839 that Lamar first expressed his interest in establishing "a correspondence and intercourse with the people of Santa Fe."<sup>593</sup> In fact, Austin himself had envisioned diverting trade from Santa Fé to Galveston as early as 1829, and in 1837 George S. Park,

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<sup>591</sup> Lamar to the Governor of Yucatán, 20 July 1841, *DCT*, Vol. I, 792-3.

<sup>592</sup> Miguel Brabachano to Lamar, 24 August 1841, *DCT*, Vol. I, 793-4.

<sup>593</sup> Lamar, "Second Annual Message to Congress," 1 November 1839, *LP*, Vol. III, 159-883.

a Texan who had been kidnapped by the Comanches before escaping to Santa Fé, wrote that if the trade from there would go through Texas it would bring thousands of dollars in silver, allowing the young republic to secure “that important position in the interior of North America – that key which will unlock that enterprise of North Americans[,] the valuable country of California on the shores of the Pacific.”<sup>594</sup>

Lamar insisted that the people of Santa Fé were effectively citizens of Texas who had not yet had the opportunity to establish an appropriate relationship with their government, “and it is believed by those best acquainted with their character and habits, that it is only necessary that they should be correctly informed of the nature of our government, and of its free and liberal institutions.” Not only was Santa Fé technically part of Texas, argued Lamar, but its chief cultural and commercial ties had always been with the North. “Though Mexican in their origin and language,” they had enjoyed a “long intercommunion and trade with the western portions of the United States” and had thus “lost many of their natural prejudices against strangers, and if not already prepared to identify their fortunes with ours, would, it is thought, readily become so.” All they had to do was educate the *nuevomexicanos* on the virtues of Texan government.<sup>595</sup>

This would be easy, since politically, too, they had more in common with Texas than with Mexico City, whose longstanding neglect had rendered their region impoverished, underdeveloped and vulnerable. “That their predilections are not in favour

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<sup>594</sup> George S. Park quoted in Binkley, 57-8.

<sup>595</sup> Lamar, “Second Annual Message to Congress,” 1 November 1839, *LP*, Vol. III, 159-83.

of the present Government of Mexico is certain,” claimed Lamar, “and that they are attached to the principles which gave rise to our revolution is equally so.”<sup>596</sup> Given the current political climate in Mexico and the attempts of adjacent Mexican provinces to break away and establish ties with Texas, Lamar was not delusional in expecting that the inhabitants of Santa Fé would allow Texas to absorb them. Furthermore, simple geography, Lamar believed, would be inducement enough. “The immense difference in the distance between the trading points of the two countries would alone secure to this.” Indeed, “the inducements for bringing it here will be too powerful to be resisted by any which can be offered elsewhere.”<sup>597</sup>

Texas would in fact attempt three times to convince the people of Santa Fé to accept their authority. The first attempt occurred in late 1838, at the peak of Texan nationalism. Reporting on the cavalcade’s departure from San Antonio, *The Weekly Houston Telegraph* described how “[T]he banner of the Single Star was unfurled, and spreading its glorious folds to the breeze, seemed to shine forth and the harbinger of brighter days.” A gentleman witness stated that “it was one of the proudest spectacles that he had ever beheld” and *The Telegraph* predicted that “ere long we trust the terrible din of their rifles will burst like a thunder bolt upon the terrified earls of Armijo and his minions.”<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> “Santa Fé Expedition, 29 December 1838, *Weekly Houston Telegraph*.

But this was not to be. The New Mexicans rebuffed the Texans twice. Despite their frustrations with Mexico City, they did not wish to join a young, fragile and increasingly Anglo-dominated republic that would almost certainly fare no better than Mexico did at protecting its people. Lamar's third and final attempt would employ the assistance of José Antonio Navarro, the son of a well-established tejano federalist family who had fought in the revolution and played a significant role in the establishment of the republic.

Indeed, the expedition provided Mexicans in Texas with a crucial opportunity to prove their patriotism and loyalty to a nation that, despite their sacrifice in its war for independence, treated them with suspicion and contempt. The ominous presence of Mexican troops just across the Rio Grande, Mexico's steadfast refusal to acknowledge Texan independence, and the fact that most Anglo-Texans by this point had little or no prior experience with or relationship to the tejano community, all contributed to growing suspicion of their new neighbors. Tejanos, in some cases, were even suspected of being spies for the Mexican government, prompting some frontier residents to advocate a "vigilant scrutiny by the citizens [of Texas] into the character and habits of all resident and transient Mexicans." Although the writer admitted that these "disguised Mexicans" no doubt enjoyed the cooperation of similarly "disguised Americans," he wrote that "Of the latter I am glad to believe there are but few."<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>599</sup> P.H. Bell to BT Archer, 21 November 1841, *LP*, Vol. III, 592-94.

Bexarenos, whom the Anglo-Texan community had once trusted and respected as their political allies and brokers, now rested in a precarious position. They found little immediate relief in Houston whose answer to their perceived threat was to order San Antonio evacuated and destroyed. This prompted alcalde Nicolás Flores to issue an impassioned plea to Juan Seguín in which he declared that “The resulting evil is almost the same as taking their lives.”<sup>600</sup> The latter swayed the captain who, the following day, “determined to totally suspend execution” of the order and ultimately convinced Houston to spare the town.<sup>601</sup> Established and well connected as they were, Seguín and other tejano elites assumed critical roles as “cultural brokers” between tejanos and the Anglo-dominated government, advocating for their communities and vouching for the character and integrity of other tejanos.<sup>602</sup>

But growing language and cultural barriers made this role increasingly difficult. As early as September 1836, John A Wharton, then acting Secretary of War, directed Seguín, who spoke little English, to begin writing all of his reports in that language instead of his native Spanish.<sup>603</sup> Language barriers and a lack of familiarity with US-derived laws posed a formidable problem for tejanos after independence, and scholars have observed that this made them the victims of fraud and manipulation, especially when it came to land purchases and inheritance. “My constituents have, as yet, not seen a

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<sup>600</sup> Nicolas Flores to Seguín, 28 March 1837, *A Revolution Remembered: Memoirs and Selected Correspondence of Juan N. Seguín*, Jesús F. de la Teja, (Austin: Texas State Historical Society, 2002).

<sup>601</sup> Seguín to Flores, 29 March 1837, *Ibid.*

<sup>602</sup> Seguín to Houston, 21 June 1837, *Ibid.*

<sup>603</sup> John A. Wharton to Juan Seguín 17 September 1836, *Ibid.*, 144.



single law translated and printed; neither do we know when we shall receive them,” Seguín stated in a formal address to the Senate in 1840. “[T]he dearest rights of my constituents as Mexico-Texans are guaranteed by the Constitution and the Laws of the Republic of Texas; and at the formation of the social compact between the Mexicans and the Texans, they had rights guaranteed to them.” He reminded Texan leaders that “The Mexico-Texians are among the first who sacrificed their all in our glorious Revolution, and the disasters of war weighed heavy upon them, to achieve those blessings which, it appears, they are destined to be the last to enjoy.”<sup>604</sup>

However, as at least one historian has observed, Lamar, “understood that the involvement of tejanos in the [Santa Fé] expedition was crucial, as they would be able to identify more readily with nuevomexicanos.”<sup>605</sup> To this end, he managed to recruit José Antonio Navarro to head the expedition. Navarro was ordered to read to the citizens of Santa Fé a formal address from President Lamar himself: “[The Texas] Government reclaims jurisdiction of the territory in which you now live and it offers you the protection and advantages that the Government of Mexico can never extend.” Lamar admitted that it was “not so long ago” that Mexico had inspired trust in all those allied to liberty,” promising to “evolve brilliantly among the civilized nations.” But “what a deceptive hope it turned out to be,” he declared. Meanwhile Texas, “with the innate vigor of a Hercules, rose from its very birth, invincible, and you see now how well established it is, secure

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<sup>604</sup> Seguín’s Address in Senate, February 1840, *Ibid.*

<sup>605</sup> Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 207.

and impervious.” Lamar assured his audience that “The day is not far when you will see it become the richest, most powerful nation in America.” His decision to choose a Mexican Texan to deliver the address, reinforced his promise that nuevomexicanos had nothing to fear in joining a country now dominated by people from another country. “Take a look at our Constitution and our laws, under which now live a large number of Mexican-Texans, who are your brothers, having blood, language and religion in common with you.”<sup>606</sup> Lamar of course failed to mention that in joining Texas, the people of Santa Fé would be attaching themselves to a government that was even less effectual than Mexico’s, he wrote, especially when it came to protecting the rights of ethnic Mexicans.

Regardless, Navarro never got a chance to deliver his message. The men were ill prepared for the trek, having failed to pack enough food and other provisions, and soon succumbed to hunger and exhaustion. Receiving news ahead of time that the Texans were on their way, the Mexican commissioner detached a portion of his army who encountered the men unprepared for a fight, arrested them and sent them on a long, arduous, and for many, deadly march to Mexico City. Lamar’s failed effort to extend Texan jurisdiction westward might be dismissed as little more than unchecked hubris and at worst desperation. Yet, given what was happening in other parts of Mexico at the time, it is easy to see why Lamar and his supporters believed they would be successful. The Texans and their revolution had in fact inspired a series of similar secessionist

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<sup>606</sup> Lamar, “To the Citizens of Santa Fé and the other surrounding towns of New Mexico East of the Rio Grande, 1841, José A. Navarro Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio.

attempts throughout Mexico. But just because Mexicans admired Texas, and in many cases hoped to imitate its success, this did not mean they wished to become a part of it.

Although a massive administrative failure, the Santa Fé Expedition was premised on the notion that Texas could nevertheless become a vibrant, multi-ethnic empire that protected and served the interests of Mexicans as well as Anglos. But its failure, as Andrés Reséndez observes, “exoticized Mexicans, hereafter associating their character with treachery, cruelty, and servility.”<sup>607</sup> This is not to say, however, that Texans were prepared to embrace Houston’s vision of a smaller, more homogenous republic. As dismal as the Lamar administration’s expansionist efforts had been, Texans were reluctant to let go of the hope that their fledgling republic might one day dominate much of North America. At the very least, Lamar had compelled Texans to take their independence seriously. By the end of his term, Texas was a different place than it had been when it first entered independence. Indeed, shortly after the expedition, Congress, in reaction to the injustices suffered by the captives of the Santa Fé expedition, attempted to pass a bill pushing the boundaries of Texas past its southwestern border with Mexico to absorb California, New Mexico, Chihuahua, Sonora and parts of various other northern provinces.

Houston promptly vetoed it, arguing that it would appear curious “that a people destitute of means to meet their most pressing wants should assume to govern a country possessing a population of more than thirty-one million.” In addition to refusing to

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<sup>607</sup> Reséndez, 181.

entertain Texans' imperial ambitions, Houston also withdrew support for Mexican federalists.

Yet, while Houston continued to pursue annexation, he did so in a much more strategic way than he had during his first presidency. If there was one aspect of Lamar's presidency that did carry over to Houston's second, it was the tendency to take Texan independence seriously. Texans by now had a much better sense of what their national interests were and how best to pursue them. Attachment to the United States was only desirable if that country could sufficiently serve and protect them. They also had an astute awareness of what would be the cost of failed negotiations. If Texas forewent negotiations with Mexico to pursue annexation to the US to no end, Texas would be left in perhaps an even worse posture than it had been originally. "[I]t would not be politic to abandon the expectations which now exist of a speedy settlement of our difficulties with Mexico, through the good offices of other powers for the very uncertain prospect of annexation to the United States," wrote Secretary of State, Anson Jones.<sup>608</sup> Thus, Houston would not pursue annexation until he was certain of the United States' earnest desire to absorb Texas.

But with the way things were going in the North, he might not have to wait for long. By the time the Tyler administration re-opened the question of annexation in 1843, Texas was, in the words of one scholar, emerging as "the most critical front in the Anglo-American cold war over slavery." Increasingly internationally-minded Southern leaders,

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<sup>608</sup> Jones to Van Zandt, 13 December 1843, *DCT*, Vol. I, 232-35.

intent on expanding and strengthening their institution abroad, saw in Texas a critical ally and one that shared a strategic border with the United States no less. As such, many Southern leaders believed that the young republic required US support and protection, if not absorption. They were particularly concerned about the British influence in Texas. If the young republic were forced to turn to England, it might have to abolish slavery, placing the institution in a more precarious position internationally. As Matthew Karp explains, Southerners feared an “Anglo-Mexican chain” choking the Mississippi Valley and Lower South.<sup>609</sup>

Yet annexation no longer held the appeal for Texans themselves that it had in 1836. Most Texans may have abandoned their imperial dream, but they had not necessarily abandoned the belief that independence, no matter how vulnerable it made them, was less preferable to annexation. Whereas their initial vote might have been unanimous, by 1843, the Texans were largely split over the question of annexation. “The editors of the *Civilian* and the *Planter* differ very much in their opinions relative to the desire of the people of Texas for annexation,” reported the *Telegraph*. The former reporting that the majority opposed annexation and the latter reporting that they supported it.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>609</sup> Matthew Jason Karp, “‘This Vast Southern Empire’: The South and the Foreign Policy of Slavery, 1833-1861” (Ph.D. dissertation 2011, University of Pennsylvania), 170-192. quotes on page 170 and 179.

<sup>610</sup> *Weekly Houston Telegraph*, 11 October 1843.

This would remain the case for the next year and half as Houston, following his reelection, recommenced negotiations with the North. Again, the nation's press reported conflicting opinions. Those in favor of joining the US, pointed to the shared economic benefit and the fact that it would fulfill the founders' hope of a united Anglo confederacy. Reflecting the Manifest Destiny notion then gaining prominence in the North, one author wrote that "The framers of the Constitution [had] signified their desire that the whole Anglo-American settlements and colonies should at some future day become a part of the future confederacy." In a manner that completely disregarded Texas' Mexican origins, the author continued, "Why then should Texas, which is the offspring of Anglo American States, be excluded?"<sup>611</sup> Yet eight months later, the same publication seemed content to accept permanent independence if Texas was again rebuffed by the US. "We concur in the sentiment expressed in the *Times* that, on failure of Annexation, our best destiny will be to continue as we now are, dependent only on our own resources."<sup>612</sup>

Indeed, as he reopened negotiations with the United States, Houston was determined to play his cards differently. Rather than abandoning talks with Mexico to pursue negotiations with the US, he embarked on a policy of dual diplomacy, choosing to solicit US protection and annexation, while at the same time attempting to achieve Mexican recognition. In a letter to the US Secretary of State, Houston assured him that "Texas can become sovereign and independent, founded upon her own incalculable

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<sup>611</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 January 1844.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 January 1845.

advantages of situation, and sustained by European influences without the slightest compromital to her nationality.” In fact, Houston claimed, “every day which passes only convinces me more clearly that it is the last effort at Annexation that Texas will ever make.”<sup>613</sup> And he did not hesitate to remind the United States that Texas had other offers. “Texas alone can well be sustained,” Houston assured Van Zandt, “and no matter what sincere desire we may well have entertained for a connection with the Govt, and the affectionate enthusiasm that has existed in us towards it, we will be compelled to reconcile ourself to our present condition, or to assume such attitude toward other countries, as will certainly look to our Independence.”<sup>614</sup>

Texas was unwilling to re-open negotiations with the US without further assurance that it would be successful. Furthermore, the United States would need to first prove itself capable of protecting Texas. As Jones put it, “The subject of most pressing and immediate importance, is that of the aid and protection to be rendered this country by the United States in the event of a resumption of active hostilities by Mexico.” If the government of the United States was unwilling or unable “to fulfill all of those pledges in the most ample manner and to protect us both by sea and land,” it would “of course have a very considerable influence in determining the future policy of Texas in reference to annexation.”<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>613</sup> Houston to Van Zandt and Henderson, 29 April 1844, *DCT*, Vol. I, 274-76.

<sup>614</sup> Houston to Van Zandt and Henderson, 17 May 1845, *DCT*, Vol. I.

<sup>615</sup> Jones to Reily 16 October 1844, *DCT*, I, 315-16.

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In the meantime, Texas continued negotiations with Mexico which, if successful, might render the need for annexation obsolete. Acting on information from the chargé de affairs in London that the British were hatching a plan to abolish slavery in Texas, the Tyler administration jumped into action. Andrew Jackson re-entered the debate from his home at the Hermitage. “Great Britain enters into an alliance with Texas - looking forward to war with us,” he asserted, hypothecating that the British would use Texas as a base from which to launch an invasion of the United States. He predicted as many as twenty or thirty thousands troops who, “when furnished with all supplies, and equit for active service” would cross into the US and excite “the negroes to insurrection.” Meanwhile, Britain would dispatch “an army from canady along our western frontier to cooperate with the army from texas.” Only US acquisition of Texas could prevent such a horror from occurring, he insisted. Texas “Settled to the Rio grande and up to our southern boundary and along that to the pacific,” would make the United States, according to Jackson, “invulnerable from a combination of the whole European world against us.”<sup>616</sup>

As southern leaders scrambled to come up with a scheme to keep Texas out of the ominous British sphere of influence, Texans themselves moved forward on all fronts. In January 1844, Houston dispatched Samuel May Williams and George W. Hockley to

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<sup>616</sup> AJ to Aaron V. Brown, *Correspondences of Andrew Jackson*, Vol. 6, 201-202, also cited in Karp, 182-3.



Mexico to meet with Santa Anna. Houston chose them, presumably, because of their preceding relationship with the Mexican federalist government. But Houston made it clear that he had to formally approve any agreement reached between the Legation and the Mexicans before it could be considered legitimate. They agreed to the mission, but only if Houston halted negotiations with the United States first, arguing that it was disingenuous to pursue both, and that if Mexico found out it would “at once terminate the armistice, halt official negotiations for peace and again threaten or commence.”<sup>617</sup>

But Houston ignored this advice, and as the two attempted to hash out a treaty with Mexico that would secure peace for Texas, he continued to court annexationists in the North. In April 1844, Houston assured the US Congress “that should the annexation be consummated, the same will receive the hearty and full concurrence of the people of Texas.” Yet, he warned them that this was their last chance, and that “be the decision whatever it may,” it would “forever decide the question of annexation – a question, the continued agitation of which has prevented [the Texas] government from pursuing vigorously any other policy.” This last part, of course, was not really true since, at that very moment, Texan representatives were meeting with Mexican authorities near the Sabine.<sup>618</sup>

What exactly happened during the Legation is unknown, but the result was something that few in Texas were willing to accept. Williams and Hockley returned from

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<sup>617</sup>Isaac Van Zandt to A.P. Upsher, 17 January 1844, “Notes from the Texas Legation in the US to the Department of State, 1836-45,” National Archives, Washington D.C

<sup>618</sup> Houston, 15 April 1844, *Ibid.*

the Sabine and placed in Houston's hands a document that effectively re-established Texas as a "department" of Mexico. Not surprisingly, Houston swiftly rejected it. The *Texan Democrat*, while agreeing that the commissioners "had not authority to compromise the integrity of our territorial limits," speculated that the Mexican authorities, becoming aware of Texas' negotiations with the US, "withdrew their original draft as proposed," and substituted it with one "which regards Texas as a *Department of Mexico*." But why would Williams and Hockley sign such a document? The newspaper speculated that "Perhaps they preferred independence to annexation." It is entirely likely that the men, both early settlers who perhaps knew that Texas could not stand on its own, would have preferred to see it return to Mexico than the United States. "[A]nd if they did[,] it must have been a matter of sore disappointment to them to see it snatched from their grasp" by such "desperate folly" on the part of Congress, wrote the *Democrat*, in reference to the annexation agreement.<sup>619</sup> Williams himself would write years later that they were "required to exert themselves to produce a cessation of hostilities with a hope that future negotiation" might produce a more favorable agreement. He criticized Houston for at that time entering into negotiations with the United States for annexation, stating that "it produced a very hostile feeling in Mexico towards Texas" and "the commissioners were looked upon as endeavoring to further the negotiations by entrapping Mexico into an armistice."<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>619</sup> Van Zandt to Calhoun, 16 May 1844, *DCT*, Vol. I.; *Texian Democrat*, 10 October 1844, *LP*, Vol. V.

<sup>620</sup> Samuel May Williams, 13 March 1846, *LP*, Vol. V, 17-18.

But Houston agreed with the *Democrat's* conclusion. In a correspondence with Anson Jones, he speculated that theirs was a calculated move intended to sabotage negotiations with the US. Houston explained that “in exceeding their powers and acknowledging Texas to be a ‘*Department of Mexico*,’ they committed a serious and double error, which was well calculated to do us great harm.”<sup>621</sup> Alas, Houston made it clear that no such arrangement would ever result. In his final correspondence with Mexican authorities, he wrote that the president’s decision to designate Texas “a department of the Mexican Confederacy” was “highly obnoxious” and consequently would not receive his approval.<sup>622</sup> The only nation that Houston would even consider annexing Texas to was the United States, and to this end he had been working even as the commissioners were meeting with the Mexicans.

But the ultimate offer from the United States was not to his or most Texans’ liking. While the language of the treaty emphasized the mutuality of such an arrangement by stating that it would provide for Texans’ “security and prosperity,” it nonetheless insisted that they enter the US as a territory.<sup>623</sup> Such language was unpalatable to a people who had dedicated their new republic and, in many cases their lives, to securing regional sovereignty. To return to the United States as a territory felt like a precise reversal of all that they had worked so hard to achieve over the past two

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<sup>621</sup> Judge Norton and Sam Houston, 24 April, 1844, Anson Jones, *Memoranda and Official Correspondence Relating to the Republic of Texas*, (New York: 1859), 342

<sup>622</sup> Houston to Santa Anna, 29 July 1844, Sam Houston Papers (SHP), Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>623</sup> The Treaty of Annexation, 12 April 1844, *Documents of Texas History*, Ernest Wallace, David M. Vigness and George B. Ward eds (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2001), 143.

decades. Furthermore, some Texans who had once supported annexation, were by now used to thinking of themselves as an independent people who might even one day rise to hemispheric dominance. “[A]s to the United States as a government – we had ceased to make explication to her and were growing indifferent when she came around to the proposition of annexation,” wrote one immigrant.<sup>624</sup> If Texas was going to be annexed to the US, it was going to have to be that country, not Texas, that did the soliciting – only then could Texans be virtually assured of the future success of their negotiations. This attitude even extended to Houston who decided to adopt a much coyer stance to the annexation question. “They are too well acquainted with the history of our origin and progress,” he said of the United States,

to suppose, for an instant, that we would, under any circumstances, surrender one jot or tittle of that liberty and right to self-government which we achieved in the sanguinary conflicts of our revolution, or give up a single privilege secured to us by our laws and constitution. They do not ask it – they do not expect it – we would not give it.

Houston reminded his audience that he had similarly rejected the previous year’s treaty with Mexico “disregarding as it did every ordinary courtesy, even between belligerence, and descending into the vilest and most unmerited abuse of the people of Texas.”

Houston echoed the sentiments of Lamar and the many Texans who had by now begun to question whether or not Texas needed to attach itself to any country at all. “Our Indian

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<sup>624</sup> Ernest Erath, date unknown, Erath Family Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin.

affairs are in as good condition as the most sanguine would reasonably have anticipated,” he asserted, “completely pacified and in regular friendly intercourse with our friendly trading establishments.” Houston did not deny that disorder still existed on the frontier. “[T]here are among the Indians, as among our own people, individuals who will disregard all law and commit excesses of the most flagrant character,” but, he insisted, they constituted only “a few desperados and renegades.” Whatever challenges of governance Texas was facing, they were hardly unique and might not be remedied by annexation to any country. “Other governments of far superior resources for imposing restraints upon the wild men of the forests and prairies, have not been exempt from the infraction of treaties and the occasional commission of the acts of rapine and bloodshed.” As for the finances of the country, Houston insisted they were “in the most healthy and prosperous condition.”<sup>625</sup>

He made it clear, that Texas’ policy for the next year would be to move forward as if independence was permanent. If the United States wanted to annex the country, it would have to court them. The sincerity of Houston’s remarks, however, are debatable. Some historians have suggested that it was mere coyness on Houston’s part, pointing out that, while he might have spoken optimistically about an independent Texas, the fact that he continued to negotiate with the US means that he never really took it seriously. Campbell’s suggestion that Houston played the United States and Great Britain off each other, reminding each nation of the other’s continued interest in Texas was his way of

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<sup>625</sup> Sam Houston, “State of the Union,” 4 December 1844, SHP.

achieving his ultimate goal of annexation to the United States on desirable terms.<sup>626</sup>

Houston's suggestion of annexing California, New Mexico, and Oregon can also be seen as a means of goading United States expansionists by threatening to absorb those regions before they could. Yet, many Texan leaders did in fact oppose annexation. If nothing else, Houston's seemingly dual diplomacy evinced a growing rift in Texas politics between those who supported joining the United States and those who wanted Texas to remain an independent republic or even, ultimately, an empire of its own.

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One such individual was Houston's Secretary of State and fourth president of the republic, Anson Jones. Jones had been an early supporter of independence when he served as representative to the United States during its first failed attempt at annexation. But by now he was more realistic about his country's ability to sustain itself as an independent nation. By the time Jones came into office, Texas had attempted for nine years to establish a viable domestic economy, secure its borders, and achieve peace with its Mexican and Indian neighbors. Even so, Texan annexation to the United States was still not a foregone conclusion.

Yet, many Texans, especially tejanos, believed that a peaceful treaty with Mexico was still well within reach. Seguín acknowledged the inherent desire to keep Texas independent, but he also felt that if Texas was going to be absorbed by another country,

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<sup>626</sup> Campbell, *Sam Houston and the American West*, (New York, Harper Collins:1993), 104

better Mexico. "I know that the true happiness of Texas, according to the general direction its question has taken, consists in preserving its independence from any power other than Mexico." Seguín, having spent some time in Mexico since Houston's rejection of the last treaty, insisted that the country now "understands that it behooves it to avoid a war that would bring upon itself great devastation," and that it had "therefore, resolved to recognize the independence of Texas by way of treaties to which (As you may know) England and France have offered themselves as guarantors." With the treaty of annexation to the US now dead, Seguín encouraged Jones to give Mexico another go. "So fortunately, if it sends its commissioners with its proposals to this government, I am sure that they would be heard, and our difficulties would be over in a manner greatly beneficial to both countries."<sup>627</sup> Opposed to annexation himself, but knowing that it was popular among Texan voters, Jones was faced with the difficult task of trying to prevent annexation without looking like that was what he was doing.<sup>628</sup>

He received help from Great Britain which, not wanting to see Texas return to Mexico, attempted one last time to draft just such a treaty in May 1845. The treaty not only recognized, but stipulated that Texas remain independent and that she was "not to annex herself or become subject to any country whatever" though it also stated that she "remit disputed points respecting territory, and other matters, to the arbitration of umpires." It is unclear as to why exactly this treaty was never accepted or enforced.

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<sup>627</sup> Juan Seguín to Anson Jones, 24 July 1845, Juan Seguín Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas Austin.

<sup>628</sup> Gambrell, 399-400.

Perhaps Seguín was mistaken and Mexico was not ready to accept Texan independence. What is more likely is that Jones, knowing how popular annexation was among Texans, felt that it was his duty to at least pursue it one last time before accepting such an offer from Mexico. Acknowledging that Texans' once "fond hope" of annexation to the US had been "checked and deferred," he admitted that such an arrangement, "effected upon a proper basis" and ensuring "mutually and reciprocally to the benefit of both countries, will ensure to Mr. Tyler the lasting gratitude of the people of Texas." However, Jones warned that, "Should the present session of the Federal Congress pass by without fixing upon some definite, tangible and eligible mode for carrying into effect the projected scheme of *annexation*," it was "highly probable" that Texans "would feel compelled to consider their connexion with the measure dissolved."<sup>629</sup>

The United States would not only agree to annex Texas but it agreed to virtually all of its provisions, namely that "the territory properly included within, and rightfully belonging to the Republic of Texas, may be erected into a new State," with all rights and privileges as such. Yet, there was also a peculiar additive. Texans could either remain a part of a single state or break up into smaller states if they chose and had sufficient population. This was an agreement that both appealed to the desires of most Texans' commitment to local autonomy and was designed to appease reluctant anti-slavery legislatures who had steadfastly opposed Texan annexation for fear that it would enhance the pro-slavery lobby. The treaty continued that "such states as may be formed" out of

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<sup>629</sup> Allen to Raymond, 10 January 1845, *DCT*, Vol. I, 337-39.



the portion of territory lying south of the Missouri Compromise “shall be admitted into the Union with or without slavery, as the people of each state asking admission may desire.”<sup>630</sup> Despite it being a compromise, these were terms that most Texans could accept. Yet, the legation that had helped hash out the agreement, reminded the United States Congress that annexation remained not yet a foregone conclusion, for only the people possessed “the right to abolish our form of government and erect another in its stead.” Thus, “Texas maintains her independence and separate attitude, and will continue to do so until the final consummation of the measure of annexation.”<sup>631</sup> Legislatures were sternly reminded that they were still dealing with an independent nation. Furthermore, this was not the only option Texans were entertaining. They by now had two offers on the table - recognition from Mexico on the condition that Texas never annex itself to the United States, or annexation to that country on terms that honored Texans’ federalists impulses. Jones decided to submit the decision to Congress, which unanimously accepted the latter. Jones’ biographer, however, insists that the Senate voted this way because it was “too afraid of the people.”<sup>632</sup>

Whether this is true or not, we can conclude that Texas joined the US against the wishes of Great Britain, Mexico, and many of its own most prominent citizens. One such individual was Guy M. Bryan, the nephew of the late Father of Texas, who later wrote

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<sup>630</sup> “The Annexation Offer Accepted,” 4 July 1845, *Documents of Texas History*, 148.

<sup>631</sup> Van Zandt to John C Calhoun, 23 September 1845, “Notes from the Texas Legation in the US to the Department of State, 1836-45,” National Archives, Washington D.C.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*

that he and many others wept “at the sad feeling of the death of the republic, to which, for so many years, our hearts clung.”<sup>633</sup>

Furthermore, the domestic and foreign fissures that emerged around the annexation debate would only get worse. Indeed, when Tyler ordered Texas to recall its foreign minister following the placement of federal troops along the Rio Grande, insisting that Texas had by that point “become in fact, if not in form, one of our States,”<sup>634</sup> Texans swiftly reminded him that “During these proceedings past[,] present and to come, Texas maintains here independent and separate attitude and will continue to do so until the final consummation of the measure of annexation.” The United States may have “sent a portion of its army into that country[,] but it was by invitation of the representatives of *the owners of the soil[,] the people of Texas.*” The annexation of Texas would usher in a new era for both that country and the United States, but in many ways, its new relationship would be no more seamless than the long road to annexation had been. Texan rights, and indeed the sovereignty of all southern rights, would be a source of considerable debate in the years to come. For now, the Texan representative was content to remind his new overseer that Texan sovereignty would never be lost, “it will only flow in a different channel.”<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> Guy M Bryan, “Autobiography” undated, Guy M. Bryan Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>634</sup> James Buchanan to W.D. Lee, 6 September 1845, Vol. *DCT*, I, 399-400.

<sup>635</sup> David S. Kaufman to James Buchanan, 30 September 1845, *DCT*, Vol. I, 402-6.

**CHAPTER 7**  
**“We Are Not Yet What We Ought To Be”**  
**Statehood, Secession and America’s “Adopted War”**  
**1845-1861**

On February 28, 1845 John Quincy Adams recorded in his journal that “the heaviest calamity that ever befell myself and my country was this day consummated.” He was referring to the passage of a Senate resolution to adopt Texas as a state of the Union. Despite the fact that over forty years prior he had gleefully predicted the day when the citizens of his young nation would spread across the entire hemisphere, Adams bemoaned the recent acquisition of Texas as “a signal triumph of the slave representation” and an “apoplexy of the Constitution.”<sup>636</sup> Indeed, by 1840, western expansion had taken on a decidedly sectional character as the slave South desperately attempted to acquire new territory with which to perpetuate its peculiar institution and strengthen its political standing. Northern Whigs, however, saw western expansion as anathema to building national cohesion and authority. Abolitionists like Adams knew that the survival of slavery depended on such expansion. Almost no issue fueled this debate more than the question of whether or not to annex Texas to the United States. The strongest opposition to secession came from the anti-slavery lobby of which Adams was a member, and who saw the potential acquisition of such a large slave state as a massive setback. But the fear that Texas would align itself with Britain and cut off North

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<sup>636</sup> John Adams, *Diary of John Quincy Adams, 1794-1845*, Allen Nevins ed., (New York: Longman’s Green, and Co., 1929), 574.

American access to the Pacific was real enough to keep the annexation debate alive, and fuel a rising tide of sectionalism.<sup>637</sup>

David M. Potter has written that the 1840's represented a high-point of national unity, a period when the United States "showed a considerable degree of homogeneity and cohesion." But this could be illusory when it came to Texas, where a strong tradition of localism and hostility to the North seethed under a nationalistic veneer. The absorption of Texas would spark an intense debate in Congress over the appropriate size and extent of a republic and whether or not it should permit slavery to extend into newly acquired territory. In fact, the slavery debate often manifested in the question of territorial expansion throughout the 1840's, so much so that, in 1843, Adams even threatened northern secession if Texas were annexed. The following year, John C. Calhoun threatened southern secession if it were not.<sup>638</sup>

The debate came to a head in the 1844 presidential campaign between Henry Clay and James K. Polk, a die-hard southern expansionist who campaigned on a promise to "re-annex" Texas and "re-occupy" Oregon. Polk won in large part due to the fervor of pro-expansionist public sentiment then sweeping the nation, and shortly thereafter Congress voted to annex Texas. Sam Houston was one of two gentlemen elected to represent Texas in the House, and during his tenure there - which lasted until his seceded

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<sup>637</sup> David Potter, *Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1963), 8.

<sup>638</sup> D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 158-161.

from the Union in 1861 - he not only remained a staunch unionist, but he presented a biased and often inaccurate perspective of his state, its history and people.

Houston represented Texas' "return" to the US as basically inevitable due to the two countries' shared racial and political heritage. He roundly dismissed early Texans' relationship with Mexico as eternally fraught due to cultural incompatibility and Mexican political incompetence. But Houston also proffered a strong narrative of Texan exceptionalism, arguing that his state served a crucial role as the United States' gateway to the West and beacon of unadulterated republicanism. Houston became one of the strongest advocates of US acquisition of Mexican land, effectively transferring Texas' territorial ambitions to the United States. Having twice served as the president of Texas, Houston knew better than anyone that Texas needed a strong central government and infrastructure. However, his pro-annexationist, pro-unionist, anti-Mexican positions were not universal, although they may have been popular during the brief time that Texas was a US state, just before the Civil War. In many ways, this period represented more of a blip in the long history of Texas where localism and states' rights almost always trumped nationalism and federal consensus. Texas' secession from the US, compelled by many of the same motivations that had prompted it to secede from Mexico, was far more predictable than its annexation. And at the very moment that the United States appeared strongest, it was in fact paving the path for its own destruction.

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Texas annexation and its attendant wave of US expansionism was central to Polk's election, and the ultimate dream of spreading US dominion to the Pacific was a capstone of his campaign and presidency. Polk's first earnest efforts towards this end happened in November 1846 when he dispatched John Slidell on a diplomatic mission to renew relations with Mexico, in the words of one historian, "under the assumption that the annexation of Texas was a *fait accompli*." The chief aim of Slidell's mission was to convince the Mexicans to sell California and New Mexico to the United States for a price to which both nations could agree. Mexico rebuffed the offer. Having failed diplomatically, Polk determined to succeed militarily. He ordered US troops to occupy several points along the still contested territory of the Rio Grande, setting the stage for what many in the United States would call a clear act of provocation. When a minor disagreement with Mexican troops resulted in a skirmish, Polk declared immediate war on Mexico. American troops rapidly advanced across a region long weakened by Indian raids and political rebellion. It took American forces only ten months to seize control from Matamoros to San Francisco, and as far south as Saltillo. Assuming that the Mexicans could now be convinced to surrender the territory for a "generous" cash payment, he offered such. When Mexican leaders refused, Polk ordered American troops to advance all the way to Mexico City.<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>639</sup> For more on the US invasion of Mexico, see 144-46; David Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), Chapters 14 and 15.

David Pletcher has claimed that seizing California was Polk's primary objective in inciting the war with Mexico.<sup>640</sup> But it would not have been possible without the annexation of Texas, and Texas never could have waged such an assault on Mexico by itself. Thus, as the war progressed, many in the South began to question, as Adams had, the wisdom of annexing a region that Mexico still considered theirs. It was Houston's job to allay such fears. At a speech at Tammany Hall during the height of the war, he assured a skeptical audience that, whatever they thought of the ensuing conflict, the benefit to the United States was well worth it. Annexation had helped the US even more than it had Texas. "[T]he best of the bargain was yours." He, in fact, insisted that "you ought to be satisfied," not only "in the extent and richness of soil" but "in the blessings of those institutions we possessed." Houston claimed Texas as the beacon of unadulterated American democracy – more American than America itself and a true testing ground of the United States' most cherished institutions and values. Texans, according to Houston, "had nothing to learn."<sup>641</sup>

Houston contributed in no small way to the burgeoning "Texas Creation Myth" that, as historian Brian DeLay writes, provided "a historical precedent for the belief that Anglo-Americans could do what Mexicans could not."<sup>642</sup> This meant not only

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<sup>640</sup> According to Pletcher, Polk insisted that the session of Upper California must be a "sin qua non of any Treaty," thereby implicitly confirming "earlier indications that California and New Mexico had been goals of conquest from the beginning of hostilities, if not earlier," 501.

<sup>641</sup> Sam Houston, "Speech at Tammany Hall," date unknown, Sam Houston Papers (SHP) Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>642</sup> Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New York: Yale University Press, 2008), 230.

conquering and subduing their Indian population, as DeLay points out, but protecting and extending republican democracy. Mexico, instead of the political Promised Land that it had once been, became, in the eyes of many Americans, a political failure, and the United States its savior. The Texas Revolution, therefore, was re-cast as a conflict between noble-minded democrats and a despotic and racist regime: “The object of Mexico, in her system of despotism and oppression exercised against us, was, if possible to sweep us from the soil, to annihilate the whole race of us, and not to suffer one, of the Saxon blood to leave the impress of his foot upon the soil which we inhabited.” Houston portrayed the Revolution as basically a race war and, in support of this claim, he effectively dismissed the crucial role that Mexican federalists had and still were playing in fighting the centralists. “We continued hoping that the Mexicans themselves would rally to support us, and redeem the country from despotism, violence, and oppression,” Houston declared. But this was not to be.

By dismissing Mexican federalism as inept and ineffectual, he highlighted the necessity, not only of Texan annexation to the US, but of America’s need to save Mexico – all of Mexico - from itself. Texans’ experience with Mexico became the best justification for the rising tide of Manifest Destiny then sweeping the nation.

As surely as to-morrow’s sun will rise and pursue its bright course along the firmament of heaven, so certain, it appears to my mind, must the Anglo-Saxon race pervade the whole southern extremity of this vast continent, and the people whom God has placed here in this land spread, prevail, and pervade throughout the whole rich empire of this great hemisphere.



The prospect of an independent federalist republic in northern Mexico, had no place in Houston's vision. Indeed, Mexican federalism itself had no place in Texas history, effectively erasing the very thing that had attracted so many Americans to Texas in the first place, thereby making their annexation to the US seem all the more inevitable.<sup>643</sup>

In a way profoundly different from how Austin and the early settlers had, Houston characterized Mexicans as unable to make anything of their territorial riches nor even to protect themselves from the ravages of uncivilized Indians. In fact, the Mexicans were little more than Indians themselves. Therefore there was "no reason why we should not go on in the same course now, and take their land." The northern part of Mexico would benefit the most - the vast desert region "where only a few thousand souls are living in such wide dominion - where the wild Indian extends with impunity his ravages, and, unchecked he penetrates into the heart of Mexico." The United States, Houston insisted, were the only people who could tame the wild Mexican North, and they would be doing it as much for the benefit of the Mexicans as for themselves. "Let the white man - let the American interpose- let him say to the Indian, 'Stay, savage, we will protect these helpless people. We will do it!'" Mexicans had proven themselves "incapable of self-government."<sup>644</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid.; For more on US expansionists pointing to Mexico's failure to conquer and subdue its Indian population as justification from their acquisition of Mexican territory see DeLay, Chapter 8.

But not only was the spread of United States' dominion across the continent inevitable and justified, according to Houston, it was virtually impossible without Texas. Indeed, in many ways this was Texas' war. The United States', by declaring war on Mexico, had done little more than simply absorb a conflict that Texas had been engaged in since its independence. "So, sir, I must say that annexation did not bring about the war. In fact, by the annexation, the United States adopted the war." Houston effectively dismissed the notion, prevalent in the United States, that the war with Mexico was essentially a border skirmish blown out of proportion. In this way, he reclaimed the war for Texas, but also, inadvertently for Mexico. If we follow Houston's line of reasoning to its logical end, and accept that what Mexican leaders were really reacting to was what they believed to be US encroachment of their territory, then we must also conclude that the United States' war with Mexico was hardly a coterminous event that lasted eighteen months. Rather, it was the United States' first intervention into a foreign civil war.<sup>645</sup>

But Texas was perhaps most important as a strategic gateway to not only the rest of the continent but the world. Texas "was the link that coupled the Union with California, and connected it with Asia." Texan annexation enabled the United States to become the grand continental empire that many of its Founding Fathers had envisioned – "That is the soil of America, the treasure is that of America, and the commerce beyond

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<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

that is extending to the Pacific, and will give us that of the world is that of America, in my opinion, if we remain a united people.”<sup>646</sup>

Indeed, all of this was only possible if the republic remained unified. Ironically, the very thing that promised to make the US the greatest nation in the Western Hemisphere, also threatened to tear it apart. Yet, as Houston insisted, the North and the South needed each other and only together formed the geographical cohesion necessary to properly take advantage of the continent’s riches. But perhaps the best reasoning that Houston put forth for why United States should remain united was, in his mind, because its citizens shared a common racial identity: “Why should we not remain united? Are we not homogenous? There is one language, there is one altar, there is one religion, for every man worships God according to the dictates of his own conscience, and there is a common Lord and a common Savior. What is there to distract us?” But when it came to Texas, this of course meant erasing its Hispanic past and prior differences with the United States. As far as Houston was concerned, white Americans were ultimately of the same mind and therefore ought to share the same country. “Have we not unity of interest from the North to the South, from Bangor to Point Isabel? Go from the Atlantic to the waves of the Pacific, pass the mountains that have been deemed impassable, and that now interpose no barrier, and you will find a unity of interest that is inseparable.”

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<sup>646</sup> Sam Houston, “Lectures on the Trials of Frontier Life,” 28 January 1851, SHP.

Houston effectively placed Texas at the center of the emerging Manifest Destiny rhetoric. Texas was precisely what had made a cohesive Anglo-Saxon continental US possible.<sup>647</sup>

Granted, Houston did acknowledge a few “dissentiate men” in Texas who departed from his characterization. Men “who went about preaching the doctrines of fools, and avowing that the country was given away without a recompense.” Dismissing them as “perverse in disposition” and claiming that their “moral ubliquity ought to be branded with eternal shame,” these men would dissolve the Union. But they were not to fear, for none had “ever bared his arm to the enemy, or raised a hand to strike for liberty.” Thus, loyalty to the Union was the consummation of everything Texan, according to Houston. To betray it would be to betray the precise principles for which the Texas Revolution had been fought. Yet, as the national political discourse would show, many disagreed with him.<sup>648</sup>

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As US forces stood in the Halls of Montezuma, United States leaders stood in the Halls of Congress debating how much of Mexico they would take. Some advocated claiming all of the country, others insisted that the US should pursue no territorial claims west of the Rio Grande. As one historian writes “No *national* government had ever faced such a range of apparent possibilities for extending its territory and reshaping itself on such a scale.” Polk himself wanted to annex both Californias and all of Mexico. He was

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<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

supported by a number of pro-expansionist, mostly southern, senators including Houston.

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In addition to his assertion that Mexico's people were "mad with anarchy and misrule," desperate for political guidance, Houston looked forward to the acquisition of Mexico mostly for what it would mean to his state specifically. If Mexico were absorbed, her people civilized, and her commercial intercourse developed, Texas may very well replace New York as "the Empire State of the Union." Most specifically, he foresaw such an acquisition fitting nicely within his aim for a Southern Continental Railroad that would run right through Texas:

Situated as we are at present, her trade is of little benefit to us. Remove the present obstacles in its way, and immense benefits must accrue to Texas. Accessible now by ocean communication, the wants of trade would demand railroads penetrating from our borders into the heart of her territory.

All of this, according to Houston, presaged the United States' ultimate dominance on the world stage. With possession of nearly the entire northwestern hemisphere, Houston saw his country becoming "a shining light to the nations of the earth, to guide them onward to the path which we have chosen."<sup>650</sup>

But such propositions sparked debate about the proper size and extent of a republic. The United States was not a monarchical empire, opponents insisted, and had to remain territorially limited if it was to achieve both sufficient regional sovereignty *and*

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<sup>649</sup> Meinig, 146-47.

<sup>650</sup> Houston, 9 July 1859, SHP.

federal control- indeed, if it was going to remain united at all. Many believed that a vast continental nation, spanning from sea to sea, was simply anathema to a republican form of government. “I would ask, sir, what is the honorable gentlemen’s standard extent for a republic? Does it require a continent . . . Does the Goddess of Liberty require a vast expanse of impenetrable mountains and inhospitable deserts for her sustenance? . . . Mark you, sir, liberty depends upon the qualities of men, not upon expanses of geography.”<sup>651</sup>

In a series of predictions that now seem prescient, many argued that the addition of such a large expanse of Mexican territory was both unnecessary and potentially problematic. “[W]hat was it wanted for?” inquired Reverby Moorehead, “Have we not enough not only for the men of the present day, but for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions, that may come into existence hereafter?” He predicted, not entirely inaccurately, of the problems that such an acquisition might render - “civil war with all its inconceivable evils, or the disruption of this Union. The cement which keeps us all together, in a union which dispenses to all everything that any contrivance of human society can dispense, is to be dissolved.” As John C Calhoun himself put it, “Let us not push the territorial limits of this Government to such an extent as to bring upon us a collision of interests and feelings which will shake the very foundations of the Government.” Besides the territory, there was also the added population. Interestingly, anti-Mexican racism offered one of the best arguments *against* the acquisition of Mexican territory – namely the conviction that Mexicans as a people could not be

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<sup>651</sup> Meinig, 160.

sufficiently integrated into the US republic. Declaring Mexicans “an ignorant, a fanatic, a disorderly people” having “none of the elements of character in common with the people of this country,” opponents asked

What are you to do with them? Are you to govern them as you do your slaves in those States which now tolerate the institution of slavery? Are to treat them as serfs belonging to the land which you acquire, attached to the soil? Or will you put them on a level with the people of this country? Will you give them the privileges which your people enjoy, and enable them to regulate and control the destinies of your Government?

This last option seemed particularly unlikely given that “it is now universally accepted that the people of Mexico are entirely destitute of the capacity of self-government.”<sup>652</sup>

For those who opposed annexation, the republic’s functionality depended on its ability to sustain a sense of homogeneity and cohesion, both in terms of geography and population. Although the inherent inferiority and political ineptitude of the Mexicans seemed one thing that both the pro and anti-expansionists could agree on, only those opposed to annexation seemed genuinely doubtful about the ability to integrate ethnic Mexicans into the national fold.

While expansionists, and especially Texans, tended to place most of the blame for Mexico’s unfortunate state of affairs at the feet of its leaders, anti-expansionists tended to blame the Mexican people. “[I]t may be that,” continued the Senator, “in displaying those elements of character which render them now the most unstable, unsettled, inefficient

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<sup>652</sup> Reverby Moorehead, 6 February 1847; John C Calhoun, 9 February 1847, *Abridgement of the Debates of Congress, From 1789-1856* Vol. 16 (New York: 1861), 49-51, 56-60.

population on the face of the globe, you may have the same difficulty in governing them that the authorities in Mexico have.” In fact, American leaders would experience the same difficulty, but it would not come from its newly acquired Mexican population. It would come, rather, from their own southern white population.<sup>653</sup>

The geopolitical composition of the northwestern hemisphere remained a hotly contested issue throughout the late 1840's and into 1850's. Even Zachary Taylor, the great Mexican War hero, by 1849 informed Polk that he thought “California and Oregon were too distant to become members of the Union, and that it would be better for them to be an Independent Gov[ern]ment.”<sup>654</sup> But by 1850, this view was becoming increasingly less popular.<sup>655</sup> Dismissing Taylor's opinion as the “exceedingly ignorant” thoughts of a “well-meaning old man,” Polk himself expressed “serious apprehensions” about what “would be lost to the union by the establishment of an Independent Government” in the Far West. This is why, once he became president, Polk pushed to make Oregon and later California a part of the United States.<sup>656</sup>

And Texas was his greatest ally. Houston took the lead in spearheading the Oregon campaign, demanding the United States take an activist role in acquiring the region from its continental rival, Great Britain. Speaking from his own experience as the former president of a weak republic without the resources or infrastructure to protect its

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<sup>653</sup> Calhoun, *Ibid*, 56-60.

<sup>654</sup> James K. Polk, *The Diary of James K. Polk*, ed. By Milo Milton Quaipe, (Chicago: 1910), 375-6; Meinig, 160.

<sup>655</sup> Meinig, 160.

<sup>656</sup> James K. Polk, *The Diary of James K. Polk, 1845-49*, (Chicago: 1910), 376.



settlers, Houston knew how crucial a strong state was to the vision of Anglo-American geopolitical proliferation. Of Oregon, he wrote that “Numbers have already migrated there, and numbers more have it in contemplation to follow there. Until something is done as an evidence for our regard for these pioneers, their situation must be exceedingly infelicitous, as well as insecure.” Houston reminded his fellow senators that great empires rarely slept, so that the assumption that Anglo-American settlers could slowly and quietly take over foreign territory, as many imagined would be the case, was simply unrealistic. Houston rejected the Jeffersonian notion of Anglo-American political proliferation through settlement alone. “What sort of policy would it be?” he asked, “It has been said that we have induced them to go there. If so, should not their situation claim our peculiar regard?” In short, Houston understood Anglo westward expansion as a specifically state project, “I cannot conceive how the United States can extend to them personal protection, and, at the same time, withhold political protection; for without political, personal cannot be extended.”<sup>657</sup> He suggested that without the presence of a strong state, settlers would simply be absorbed by whatever culture and institutions already existed, ignoring the fact that, as in the case of Texas, that was precisely what they wanted.

Indeed, what Houston offered was a profoundly shortsighted and incomplete understanding of the complex series of events that led to Texas becoming a part of the

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<sup>657</sup> Sam Houston, “Speech of Mr. Houston of Texas on the Oregon Question,” April 1846, SHP.

Union. He simplified the aims of Texas leaders and its people by failing to acknowledge that there were some who preferred independence to annexation and put forth no small effort in seeing this actualized. Annexation failed, according to Houston, because “Texas was treated with coldness, reserve, or palpable discouragement.” It was this reaction from the United States, not a desire to preserve its independence or even rejoin Mexico, that prompted Texas to turn to Great Britain. According to Houston, the period of Texan independence was nothing more than a bump on the road to the ultimate and inevitable end, absorption by the US. And the ultimate decision to annex was now playing a crucial role in the politics and leadership of the United States, where “like Aron’s rod, it swallowed the rod’s of all political sourcerors.”<sup>658</sup>

Houston’s representation of the situation in Oregon implied a very different history for Texas. At the core of his Oregon speech rested the assumption that Anglo-American settlers needed and in fact wanted the protection and presence of the US state in order to carry out their mission of perpetuating Anglo-American institutions, laws and culture. But it departed from earlier expansionist language advanced by Henry Clay and John Adams who saw these individuals as doing most of the imperial work themselves. Adams himself stated that he envisioned the pre-ordained push westward as resulting in many republics based on Anglo-American political tradition and structure.<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Ibid.

<sup>659</sup> Meinig, 160.

But Houston had his affect. In 1849 the United States annexed Oregon. Thus, between 1846 and 1850, that country grew by approximately 1.2 million square miles. It was impossible not to be impressed, as superintendant of the US Census James DeBow certainly was, when he surveyed the changes:

The territorial extent of the Republic is, therefore nearly ten times as large as that of Great Britain and France combined; three times as large as the whole of France, Britain, Austria, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, and Denmark, together, one-and-a half-times as large as the Russian empire in Europe; one-sixth less only than the area covered by the fifty-nine or sixty empires states, and Republics of Europe; of equal extent with the Roman Empire or that of Alexander, neither of which is said to have exceeded 3 million square miles.<sup>660</sup>

Indeed, the country's recent acquisition ushered in an era of profound national pride. How could it not? In only a few years the United States had grown by approximately 64%. It had replaced Mexico as the politically and geographically dominant region in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>661</sup> However, the exact form and nature of this republic, was still unresolved. Specifically, the question of who would be considered under this rubric of liberty and who would not began to emerge. And where would federated self-government end and centralized national government begin? Despite the contemporary mood of national pride and political arrogance, the great accomplishment ushered in a period of profound sectional disagreement as the United States began, almost

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<sup>660</sup> J.D.B. DeBow, "Compendium of the Seventh Census," *Statistical View of the United States Embracing Its Territory, Population, Its Moral and Social Condition, Industry, Property, and Revenue*, (Washington DC: 1850), 31.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid, 158-160.

immediately upon the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, to confront the very same set of challenges that Mexico had, how to hold together a modern federated republican empire.

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The vision that men like Houston and Polk shared of a strong and unified continental republic lasted for about ten years, and it largely ignored the very real sectional divide concerning slavery and state's rights that seethed throughout the 1850's. Houston himself actively denounced the first signs of impending crisis by adamantly renouncing John C Calhoun's 1849 nullification efforts. In a letter to a close friend he bragged that "Rusk and myself smoked Johnny and would not indorse for him. We are not done with him yet – but I think he has nearly done with himself." Of all the US politicians who had come before him, Houston was the most admiring of Andrew Jackson – populist, antcentralist yet unfailingly unionist. He accused the South Carolinians of acting out of self-interest and ambition. "You know that I am as unifier as General Jackson was, and cannot look with one grain of allowance upon any fanatical project while selfish and unholy ambition is to be gratified at the expense of the Union of the Republic. We are among the last to come into it, and being in, we will be the last to get out of it." He also recognized quite rightly that Texas, the most western state in the Union, had far more to lose from secession than wealthier and securer seaboard states like South Carolina which, "from her central position, the sea upon one side, and a

cordon of slave states between her and danger, has had but little reason for apprehension.”<sup>662</sup>

When the southern states considered holding a convention in early 1851 to discuss secession, Houston roundly denounced them, insisting that it amounted to an admission that their rights were not protected under the Constitution.<sup>663</sup> Houston believed that Texas was far better served by staying in the Union than separating from it. Despite his states' rights sentiments, Houston believed that federal funding was absolutely crucial to Texas' economic survival and chief among his schemes to develop and enrich the region was a transcontinental railroad.

But not all Texans were as steadfastly committed to unionism as Houston. As one prominent scholar has argued, during the 1850's Texans experienced a constant and unrelenting tension between their commitment to localism and their sense of loyalty and obligation to their newly adopted nation. But localism, if not stronger, was more broadly felt and had a much longer tradition in Texas than almost any other part of the Union. Walter Buenger writes that “Lincoln's election and the ascendancy of the Republican Party made Texans question as nothing had before the ability of the United States to function as an American nation should function.” This, however, overlooks the circumstances surrounding the first Anglo settlements of Texas which were founded on the belief that the United States had failed as an experiment in democratic republicanism.

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<sup>662</sup> Houston to Henderson Yoakum, 31 January 1849, SHP.

<sup>663</sup> Houston to John Letcher, 24 January 1851, SHP.

By the time the Civil War came, Texans' had been questioning the US efficacy and integrity for some time.<sup>664</sup>

Although they constituted a minority, there were strong and vocal proponents of Texas secession very early on, not least of which was the former president of the Republic of Texas and Houston's arch-rival, Lamar. While Houston was calling for a larger more expansive Union that stretched across the continent, Lamar was urging southerners to consider withdrawing from it. Indeed, it was the battle cry of many Texans who had opposed annexation. In an 1850 letter to a group of southern leaders in the wake of the nullification crisis, Lamar wrote that

The course then, gentlemen, which I would advise the South to pursue in the present crisis is plainly this – she should say to her northern brethren – ‘your continued aggressions upon our rights, peace, and safety, can no longer be borne – the institution of slavery which you seek to destroy is identified with our existence; it is to us a matter of life and death; and if you do not forever and immediately abandon your purpose of wresting it from us, and reducing us to utter ruin and despair, *we shall consider the confederacy as resolved by your act*, and will protect ourselves accordingly.’

Just two years after Texas had joined the Union, Lamar was calling for it to separate again. “This appears to me the only alternative left to the south,” he declared, “We see that the northern states are bent upon our destruction; that all their movements tend that way; that they are determined to force us into the abolition of slavery, and of

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<sup>664</sup> Walter L. Buenger, *Secession and the Union in Texas* (Austin, University of Texas: 1984), 128.

consequence to plunge us into greater horrors than ever befell a civilized people.” While union seemed natural to Houston, it was impossible to Lamar.<sup>665</sup>

And where Houston saw it as the key to the industrial and commercial success of the South, Lamar saw it as the primary obstacle. In his address to the Southern Commercial Convention, Lamar complained that the southern states had “failed from the operation of improper legislative action, or from a culpable neglect of concerned action, to keep pace in the great progressive march of the age. We are not yet what we ought to be,” asserted Lamar, “either in thought or act, as members of our great confederacy.” Throughout the 1850’s Lamar counted himself among a growing number of southern elites who saw in their states the promise of unrivaled commercial and cultural dominance – a promise that it appeared was being increasingly sabotaged by a restrictive, onerous and northern-dominated federal government.

We want our highways and thoroughfares linking all parts of the country in one prosperous whole, expediting commerce and intercourse, with the velocity of Steam. We want our great lines of ocean steamers channeling the sea and making it a pathway for direct communion from our own now neglected ports to the emporiums of the older world. We want a full employment and development of the vast resources of commerce and commercial grandeur and opulence, that are concentrating from every zone and longitude – from the islands of the deeps – from Amazonian territories – and from the new found Pacific world, into the bosom of our own Gulf of Mexico, and making it the Mediterranean of the West.<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> Lamar to S. J. Ray and others, 16 August 1850, *The Papers of Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar (LP)*, Vol. VI, Harriet Smither ed., (Austin: 1973).

<sup>666</sup> Lamar, “Address to the Southern Commercial Convention,” January 1855, *LP*, Vol. VI, 329-30.

Secession offered a perfect remedy to annexation- a chance to return to independence and all of the promise that Texas once possessed.

Like their leaders, Texans remained split over the question of annexation. The *Galveston Weekly*, in response to South Carolina's convention, wrote that, unlike the first time that had threatened secession in 1776, "the perils of secession are now greater," and "the causes less urgent."<sup>667</sup> Yet the *San Antonio Ledger*, in response to Texans' frustrations toward the federal government's inability to provide sufficient frontier protection and deliver on promised internal improvements, wrote that Texas "quietly provides for placing herself exterior to the Union" and looked forward "to resuming her place once more among the nations." If such an act ever became necessary, the *Ledger* asserted, Texans would "rely confidently on the assistance of all that portion of the citizens of the other states who contend that secession is a rightful remedy."<sup>668</sup>

Yet, most Texan leaders fell somewhere between Houston and Lamar. George W. Smythe, who served in the US House of Representatives from 1853 to 1855, while sympathizing with states' rights proponents, cautioned against extreme interpretations of the Constitution from both sides. "Two errors almost equally fatal with regard to our Constitution have found advocates among us," Smythe wrote in one of his speeches,

The one represents us as a great national consolidated republic. The other as a mere assemblage of independent, sovereign communities bound together by a league, treaty or contract which they or any of them, have a right to abrogate

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<sup>667</sup> *Galveston Weekly News*, 24 June 1851.

<sup>668</sup> "Secession in Texas" *San Antonio Ledger*, 2 March 1854.



whenever an accession of sufficient importance presents itself, of which, they are to be the inclusive judges. These two errors are equally fatal. The latter destroys our system as completely by attenuation as the former does by consternation.<sup>669</sup>

Like Houston, Smythe focused most of his energies in office on internal improvements such as a national railroad and understood that a state like Texas perhaps had more to lose than gain by separating itself from the Union. And as frustrating and imposing as the federal governments' presence was when it came to such projects, he assured his constituents that it was well worth it, for Texas could hardly accomplish them by herself or as the member of a southern confederacy.

Lamar, for his part, knew that his views were "too unpopular and startling to be breathed in the lowest." Yet, he remained confident "that they will be finally triumphant." Lamar believed he knew Texas better than Houston, indeed better than most Texans knew themselves.<sup>670</sup>

He might have been right. As the decade progressed, Texans became increasingly frustrated with a federal government that not only proved increasingly hostile to the slave South, but failed to deliver on its promises for internal improvements and – particularly important to Texans – border security. Leading this growing contingent of Texans was Houston's co-senator, Thomas Jefferson Rusk. In August 1856 the two men held a public debate in Nacogdoches in which Rusk "spoke in a very feeling and eloquent

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<sup>669</sup> George W. Smythe, "Articles and Speeches," date unknown, George W. Smythe Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>670</sup> Lamar to S. J. Ray and others, 16 August 1850, *LP*, Vol. VI,

manner of the feelings that had existed between him and his colleague for the past 20 years.” But that was the limit of their courtesies. Rusk adamantly defended the Kansas-Nebraska Bill which Houston had many times denounced, pointing out that “agitation had existed on the slavery question ever since the Passage of the Ordinance of 1787 and had never been resolved.” He attacked Houston for not sufficiently enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law and allowing potentially hundreds of slaves to escape through Texas to Mexico. Rusk also condemned the Missouri Compromise for granting Congress the right to legislate on slavery both in the territories and the states, an objection which Houston had repudiated. Finally, the senator claimed that, while he was “for the Union,” he also believed that “if a state of things should ensure that equality which is guaranteed to the South by the Constitution will be destroyed, and the rule of a fanatical majority usurp its place, he would strike back.”<sup>671</sup>

Throughout his career, Houston remained a steadfast unionist, making every effort to keep Texas out of the sectional debates of the 1850’s and reminding Texans that they had “entered not into the North nor into the South, but into the Union.” Whereas men like Lamar and Rusk highlighted similarities between Texas and the seperatis South, Houston emphasized their differences – differences which made Texas far more dependent on the federal government than most other states.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> “Houston and Rusk in Debate at Nacogdoches,” 4 October 1856, *Texas State Gazette*, SHP.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid*

Yet, throughout most of the 1850's the federal government largely failed to protect Texas from Mexican and Indian incursions, a fact which even Houston could not deny.<sup>673</sup> As a result, his popularity, much of which relied on his image as the "Hero of San Jacinto," began to plummet as the decade progressed. Meanwhile, Texas saw the emergence of a group of young radical leaders, who were friendlier to secession. One of these was Guy M. Bryan, the nephew of the late Father of Texas. The son of Austin's sister, Emily, and his business partner James Bryan, Guy was born on the Missouri frontier the same year his grandfather obtained his first colonization contract from Spain. His family moved to Texas ten years later, following the death of his father and his mother's remarriage to Stephen Perry. He was a teenager during the revolution and attended Kenyon College in Ohio before returning to Texas. In 1846 Bryan, on behalf of his family, complained in a letter to George Burnett that "The 'old settlers' – those who founded and they who labored with the founders of our country to bring it into existence and build it up" were "being forgot." Meanwhile, "the eleventh hour men" - those who had arrived with the "heat and burden of the day" - were receiving "all credit and all reward." Despite his youth, Bryan made it clear where his identity and allegiance rested. "[T]o me and to every 'old settler' this must be cause of deep regret." The entire source of his family's grievances were not made evident, but it is clear that Bryan feared that his uncle's generation were being misrepresented in the public memory, and he appealed to Burnet to rectify the wrong. "It is due to the dead and to the living that a fair and honest

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<sup>673</sup> Houston to Jacob Thompson, 17 February 1860, *Ibid.*

statement of the past should be made,” he wrote. “[Y]ou knew [my uncle], his nature, his character his deeds, and devotion to his country.” In order to correct such misperception, Bryan requested that Burnett author a biography of his uncle. “[O]ur family are anxious that *you* should write his life . . . without which no *correct* history of Texas can ever be written.”<sup>674</sup> Bryan was not specific about what aspects of his uncle’s memory he found objectionable, but considering that the letter came soon after Texas’ annexation – an event that Bryan opposed - it likely had something to do with how Texans of the 1850’s imagined Austin’s hopes for them.

Bryan, however, would have his chance to re-direct the course of Texas politics. In 1847 he was elected to the State House of Representatives where he served until 1853. He then served four years in the Senate until 1857, at which point he was elected to represent the Western District of Texas in the United States Congress. By the time Bryan had made it onto the national stage, Texas and the rest of the South were beginning to move decisively away from the unionist politics of men like Houston and Smythe. Bryan, like many successful politicians at this time, was not shy about taking a more explicitly pro-southern line, and this made him popular among his constituency which had by now grown tired of a federal government that, over a decade after annexation, still failed to deliver on its promises of frontier defense and internal improvement. Reporting on the national congressional election in spring of 1857, the *Texas State Gazette* reported

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<sup>674</sup> Guy M Bryan to George Burnett, 2 April 1846, Guy M Bryan Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

that Bryan “is well known to the people.” He is an old Texian” with “considerable brilliancy of mind and great industry, and will doubtlessly faithfully attend to the interests of his constituents.”<sup>675</sup>

Bryan soon became associated with a young and aspiring group of politicians who, by the end of the 1850’s, were beginning to vocalize the states’ rights platform. One of these was H.R. Runnels, the lieutenant governor who had entered state politics in 1847 as a representative to the state legislature for Bowie County. In 1859, Runnels made a bid for Governor. Shortly thereafter, Houston entered as his opponent. In a lengthy address to the Texas House of Representatives that was then published in the *Gazette*, Runnels insisted that the federal government “derived its just powers from the consent of the governed, and when it shall have ceased to fulfill the object of its creation, and only then, will arise a sufficient cause for its dissolution.” Runnels concluded, “Equality and independence in the Union, or independence outside of it, should be the motto of every southern state.”<sup>676</sup>

But it was the Son of Texas who most eloquently compared the plight of the South under the current “Black Republican” administration with that of the Texans under Santa Anna. “Centralization of the power in the hands of the ‘Agent’ caused Texas to appeal in 1835 to the state of the Mexican union, on behalf of the violated constitution of

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<sup>675</sup> “The Democratic Nominees,” *Texas State Gazette*, 30 May 1857.

<sup>676</sup> H.R. Runnels, “Message of Gov. Runnels,” *Texas State Gazette*, 12 November 1859.

1824.” When the appeal was “disregarded” by their states, Bryan explained, Texas declared independence “in the same spirit as that which influenced the declaration made on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1776.” Bryan drew a straight line from the founding of the Union to the founding of Texas to what would soon be the founding of the Confederacy, all of which, he seemed to insist were motivated by the underlying principle of “state sovereignty.”

Yet, Bryan also acknowledged Texas’ differing status from the other states “in consequence of her position before annexation” and “the contingencies and manner of annexation.”<sup>677</sup> Texas, according to Bryan, had entered the Union under circumstances different from the rest, on a conditional consent that could be revoked at any time. Texans found his line convincing and as the state democratic convention drew near, the *Southern Intelligencer* reported that “From indications of public sentiment, not so plainly seen as sensibly felt, the Hon. Guy M Bryan will be the nominee of the Houston Convention.” Of Bryan and his friend Matt Ward, another descendent of the early settlers, the *Intelligencer* wrote, “The shades of the uncles . . . must have been gratified at the singular phenomenon, exhibited by the overtopping grandeur of these lineal desendents of the deceased.”<sup>678</sup>

Bryan, as it turns out, was not elected, although his friend Runnels was. Upon the news, Houston decided to run for state governor on the Know-Nothing ticket. The Hero of San Jacinto received considerably less praise from the press than his opponent.

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<sup>677</sup> Guy M. Bryan, “What Shall be Done?” *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, 1 November 1860.

<sup>678</sup> “Good Signs in the political Zodiac,” *Southern Intelligencer*, 16 March 1859.

[W]hen Sam Houston comes around, if he must, to wean the democracy of Texas from their allegiance to principles, by reciting the story of his sufferings and service in the revolution and by pouring forth the melting strains of his wizard voice in depicting the days of ‘auld laude syne,’ there is one hat that will not waive and one hat that will not vociferate his cheers.”<sup>679</sup>

Indeed, in light of Houston’s struggles to compel the federal government to invest more of its attention and resources to frontier defense and his accompanying refusal to back the rest of the South, his political currency as an old war hero began to wane. The *San Antonio Ledger* reported that Houston was losing in Nacogdoches, Corpus Christi and much of the rest of the east. “Everywhere Old Sam goes now he loses votes,” the paper reported, “Many of his *old* friends are entirely disgusted with the old toothless lion, and even the *ass* gives him an occasional kick.”<sup>680</sup>

In September, Houston and Bryan engaged in a debate in Hempstead where, the latter “took issue with General Houston on the Kansas Nebraska Bill, as well as the Missouri Compromise, sustaining the action of the Democratic Party and the South.” While Houston struggled gallantly through the debate, “It was evident that [Bryan’s] sentiments received an endorsement of a large majority of the meeting.”<sup>681</sup> When Houston failed to muster the votes to return to office, the *Gazette* cited his position on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which has “shown us clearly the northern identity of his political association.” The evidence was clear, according to the paper, “and the result shows that

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<sup>679</sup> “The Democratic Nominees,” *Texas State Gazette*, 30 May 1857.

<sup>680</sup> “The Canvass,” *San Antonio Ledger and Texan*, 25 July 1857.

<sup>681</sup> “Gen. Houston at Hempsted,” *Texas State Gazette*, 4 September 1857,.

the people of Texas repudiate the course pursued by Sam Houston on this Southern question.”<sup>682</sup> Ultimately, Houston lost the election to Runnels by a vote of 32,552 to 28,678.<sup>683</sup>

Houston returned to Washington in December to resume his term as Senator. Relations with the Indians, however, only worsened as the decade drew to a close. “Everyday brings us intelligence of new murders upon the frontier,” Houston wrote in March 1860, “[I]f we cannot propitiate the Indians then what shall we do?” Houston, then the governor, continued in vain to call for a treaty clarifying that a violation against Texas was a violation against the United States, and eventually he had to admit that federal efforts to defend the frontier had failed miserably. “The army is in fact inefficient, a few nights since the Cavalry at Camp Cooper amounting to some seventy horses were unhorsed by the Indians and the men left with their saddles, spurs, and accoutrements, prepared for a spring campaign. So you see how things work,” he wrote to US official.<sup>684</sup> Conditions had become almost intolerable. “Our frontiers are at this time in a truly alarming condition,” he wrote.<sup>685</sup>

Relations with Mexico had also grown increasingly strained and Houston found himself reprimanding a group of Texan militia who had gathered at the border in

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<sup>682</sup> “Houston men – Know Nothings – Lovers of Your Country – Let us Reason Together,” *Texas State Gazette*, 15 September 1857.

<sup>683</sup> Campbell, *Sam Houston and the American Southwest* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 92.

<sup>684</sup> Houston to Hamilton, 17 March 1860, SHP.

<sup>685</sup> Houston to AS Blain, 20 March 1860, SHP.



preparation for a Mexican invasion. He warned them that their expeditions “would not be received in the service of the United States and their movements at this time are calculated to excite erroneous impressions as to the design of Texas, and thus defeat the Call.” Just as Austin had done before him, Houston struggled to assert his authority over increasingly frustrated and rogue citizens whose regard for the federal government was conditional. Despite his own lack of confidence, Houston insisted that the public continue to refrain from taking matters into their own hands, assuring them that the authorities would deliver on their promise. Incursions by private citizens only invited further aggression. “The most calamitous disasters that have befallen Texas, have grown out of expeditions not sanctioned by Law, and indisobediance to order,” he argued. Houston then informed the federal government of what their continued inaction might render. The Texan frontier citizens, “Notwithstanding all his moderation,” may soon “be required to resort to the indefeasible right of self-defense to protect his fellow-citizens.” Houston’s warning indeed amounted to a threat if matters were not immediately addressed.<sup>686</sup>

Eventually, however, Houston had to admit Texans should be allowed to do the job instead. In a letter to the Secretary of War, he wrote that “The misfortunes to which we have been subject, since annexation have, I think, demonstrated the fact that it is

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<sup>686</sup> Houston, “The State of Texas,” 21 March 1860, SHP.

entirely useless to think of rendering protection to Texas by the regular army.” He proposed instead that the government permit the Texas Rangers to take over.<sup>687</sup>

Yet, despite acknowledging the United States’ ultimate failure to defend Texas against Indian and Mexican incursions, Houston continued to denounce secession and to insist on the inherent superiority of the Anglo-American political system. Houston stated that he had arrived in Texas with the “belief that the Constitution and the Union were to be perpetual blessings to the human race,” and “that the success of the experiment of our fathers was beyond dispute.” He hoped “that these bright anticipations should be realized” and that the US should continue as “not only the proudest nationality the world has ever produced, but the freest and most perfect.” Houston continued to insist that all of Texans’ freedom ultimately depended on remaining a part of the Union. Not only was American politics and society superior, but they were destined to sweep across the rest of the continent, encompassing a nation broader and more diverse as any democracy before it. “In its onward march, sweeping the valleys of California, and leaving its pioneer waves in the waves of the Pacific,” Houston declared of his rapidly expanding republic, “I have seen this might progress and it still remains free and independent. Power, wealth, expansion, victory, have followed in its path, and yet the aegis of the union has been broad enough to encompass all. Is not this worth perpetuating?” For Houston, the United States’ recent expansion was the best proof of its superiority – not martial prowess, or violence, or a weak neighbor. This, if nothing else, justified its cohesion. If

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<sup>687</sup> Houston to John B Floys, 14 April 1860, SHP.

Texans thought they had it bad now, Houston warned them that it would be far worse if they ever went their own way.

Will you exchange this for all the hazards, the anarchy and carnage of civil war? Do you believe it will be dissevered and no shock felt to society? You are asked to plunge into a revolution; but are you told how to get out of it? Not so; but it is to be a leap in the dark – a leap into the abyss whose horrors would even fright the mad spirits of disunion who tempt you on.

Yet, for many Texans, secession and independence were far from shots in the dark.

Houston's appeals to Anglo solidarity and his insistence on the inherent superiority of the United States was, of course, not universal.<sup>688</sup>

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As 1860 drew to a close, talk of secession began to sweep the South, including Texas, the views of men like Bryan and Runnels echoed in the state newspapers. "The States (each in itself) are *sovereign*," wrote the *Gazette*, "The federal government is the creature of the States; it is the *agent*, and whenever the agent shall usurp power not delegated in the agreement, the principals to the compact are released from it, and are no longer bound."<sup>689</sup> In December, John Wharton announced for secession.<sup>690</sup> That same month the *Dallas Weekly Herald* declared "Let Texas declare her independence, and let

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<sup>688</sup> Houston, "Address at the Union Mass Meeting," 11 September 1822, SHP.

<sup>689</sup> "Secession," *Texas State Gazette*, 1 September 1860.

<sup>690</sup> "Our Wharton for Secession," *Texas State Gazette*, 1 December 1860.

her never consent to pass homage to an administration, the chief of which, in days past, laughed over the destruction of the lives and property of her citizens.”<sup>691</sup>

As for Houston, his steadfast defense of unionism made him subject to harsh condemnation from Texas newspapers and increasing alienation from his constituency. Yet he continued to defend his position, insisting that he had Texans’ best interest at heart. *The Flag* reported on a speech he gave in Nacogdoches during his recent campaign in which “he alluded to his history, and stated that it was not disconnected with that of the country, and trusted that its future pages would vindicate him.”<sup>692</sup> *The Flag* came to his defense. “There will be many false charges and doubtless a black record manufactured and circulated against the Old General.” Yet, the paper reminded its audience that “almost every act of his life notwithstanding has been that of the greatest devotion to his country.” Of Runnels, the paper wrote, “what acts of his life shall we look to as designating him as the man for the position to which he aspires?” Regarding the common accusation that Houston “endorses the measures of the present administration which we oppose,” the *Flag* conceded that “we regret it as much as any one. We expect not perfection in this life knowing that it is human to err and will take him for the good he has done.”<sup>693</sup>

Yet, a contributor to the *San Antonio Ledger and Texan* had a different opinion.

“I am one of those who have always been a friend to, and voted for, Gen Houston,” yet,

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<sup>691</sup> “Texas on Secession,” *Dallas Weekly Herald*, 12 December 1860,.

<sup>692</sup> Synopsis of SH’s speech at Nacogdoches,” *The Harrison Flag*, 9 July 1859,.

<sup>693</sup> “General Houston,” *The Harrison Flag*, 1 July 1859.

“I have been mistaken in the man.” Regarding frontier security, his policy was “not acceptable,” especially concerning his behavior towards the militia, whose autonomy he was accused of imposing upon. “If General Houston respects the rights of the dear people as alleged by him, then how is it that he makes and unmakes companies in proportion as they elect officers to suit his dictatorial will?” asked the author, “[I]s not the law explicit that the militia have the exclusive right to elect these officers?”<sup>694</sup>

Indeed, Texans had an additional reason besides states’ rights compelling them to secede. In March of 1861, the *Herald* reported that “the Confederate Congress already stands pledged to give protection to our exposed Frontier.” Furthermore, it would facilitate rather than hinder local efforts to police the frontier. “If the State will call out a permanent force, it will be recognized by the Southern Congress, and liberal appropriations made for its support, as soon as Texas joins the Confederacy.”<sup>695</sup>

As much as Houston wished otherwise, he had to admit that Texas was heading decisively towards a convention and to try and prevent such would be political suicide. In December, he clarified his position once again, denying that he “would use my executive powers to thwart the will of the people of Texas.” Houston cautioned against reaction to Lincoln’s election and clarified that he in fact supported a Convention composed of representatives of the people – how could he not as their governor? But he also expressed confidence that whatever resolution said Convention rendered, it would

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<sup>694</sup> “Sam Houston,” *The San Antonio Ledger and Texan*, 9 June 1860.

<sup>695</sup> “What the Frontier has Gained by Secession,” *San Antonio Ledger and Texan*, 13 March 1861.

not be secession. “Let the people at the ballot-box select men to reflect their sentiments in a convention of Southern states, and no one can complain. As one, I cannot believe our troubles are beyond remedy, and am willing therefore to see the wisdom of the entire South assembled to devise some means for their settlement.”<sup>696</sup>

On January 28, a group of elected representatives from throughout the state of Texas convened in Austin. Chief among their duties was “to determine what shall be the future relations of this State to the Union, and such other matters as are necessarily and properly incident thereto.”<sup>697</sup> The historical importance of what they were doing was not lost on the President who declared that they had convened “to consider and dispose of questions equally as momentous and more varied than those that were solved by our revolutionary forefathers of ’76!” At stake was “not only the right of self government,” but “the immemorial recognition of the institution of slavery wherever it is not locally prohibited” and, as had been the case in their earlier conflict with Mexico, “the true theory of our general government as an association of sovereignties.”<sup>698</sup> Indeed, the legacy of the Texas Revolution loomed heavily over the entire Convention, especially on January 30<sup>th</sup> when it was resolved that veterans of the conflict be invited into the House to observe the proceedings “provided they are in favor of another revolution.”<sup>699</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> Houston, “Address from Governor Sam Houston to the People of Texas,” 3 December 1860, SHP.

<sup>697</sup> “Joint Resolution,” 28 January 1861, *Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas, 1861* (Austin: 1912), 13.

<sup>698</sup> Jno. D. Stell, *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>699</sup> Mr. Rogers of Harris, 30 January 1861, *Ibid.*, 29.

That same day the Convention issued a Joint Resolution, the first section of which expressed objections eerily similar to the complaints lodged against Santa Anna's government fifteen years prior.

[W]hereas the action of the Northern States of the Union, and the recent development in federal affairs, make it evident that the power of the Federal Government is sought to be made a weapon with which to strike down the interests and prosperity of the Southern people, instead of permitting it to be as it were intended our shield against outrage and aggression.

The delegates pointed to the federal government's failure to meet their specific needs and interests as justification for their secession. They declared annexation "hereby repealed and annulled" and Texas "absolved for all restraints and obligations incurred by said compact" and declared it "a separate sovereign State."<sup>700</sup>

Frustration over the loss of their imperial dreams also played a role in the delegates' decision. They attacked the federal government for excluding the southern states "from all the immense territory owned in common by all the States on the Pacific Ocean, for the avowed purpose of acquiring sufficient power in the common government to use it as a means of destroying the institutions of Texas and her sister slave-holding states." This was particularly offensive since they saw themselves as the United States' gateway to the West.<sup>701</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> "An Ordinance to Dissolve the Union Between the State of Texas and the other states," 30 January 1861, *Ibid.*, 35-6..

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*

But Texas also had the additional grievance of experiencing the federal government's neglect when it came to its own frontier protection. The Federal Government, they claimed, "while but partially under the control of those our unnatural and sectional enemies," had for years "almost entirely failed to protect the lives and property of the people of Texas against the Indian savages on our border, and more recently against the murderous forays of banditti from the neighboring territory of Mexico." Thus, the burden of border security had largely fallen on Texan shoulders, pointing out that "when our State government has extended large amounts for such purpose, the Federal Government has refused reimbursement therefor." Texas, they claimed, had been rendered "more insecure and harassing than it was during the existence of the Republic of Texas."<sup>702</sup> Meanwhile, the Confederacy had "positively assured that their protection would be far more perfect" under its jurisdiction.<sup>703</sup>

Even as they highlighted their commonalities, representatives from other southern states admitted that the Texans were unique among the Confederate states. "We are not unmindful of your illustrious history when fresh from the fields of victory and glory in which you established your own independence," wrote Confederate leaders in a welcome letter to the Texans.

[Y]ou presented a spectacle unexampled in the history of the world. With a territory sufficiently extensive for empires, with a soil rich in the production of everything necessary for the happiness of man, and with a climate as lovely as can

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<sup>702</sup> Ibid.

<sup>703</sup> E. Clark to Jefferson Davis, 4 April 1861, Republic of Texas General File, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.



be found on any spot of the habitable globe, without money and without price, you united your destiny with a sisterhood, whose duty it was to foster and protect you

The Texans were victims of a “common enemy,” but unique in that they suffered specifically from “neglect and insult.”<sup>704</sup>

The authors concluded by emphasizing the specifically southern heritage of most Texans. “The hearts of Southern fathers and Southern mothers, of Southern brothers, and sisters, relatives, and friends have followed you to this distant land, and though saddened by the wide interval between you and them,” they looked forward “to the time when all will again live under this same form of government, and be protected by its strong arm.” Unlike Houston, who denied that Texas shared more in common with the South than with the rest of the nation, delegates of the Convention stated that “Their interests, their pursuits, their laws, their institutions, their customs are the same and the same destiny awaits each and all.”<sup>705</sup>

Indeed, as Texans emphasized their ties to the rest of the slave South, not only did they see direct parallels between their secession from Mexico and their secession from the United States, but they now understood their relationship with both countries to be effectively the same. “The Mexican yoke could not have been more galling to ‘the army of the heroes’ of ’36 than the Black republican rule would be to the survivors and

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<sup>704</sup> Commission from South Carolina to the Texas Convention, 1 February 1861, *Journal of the Secession Convention of Texas*, 50-52.

<sup>705</sup> “In Private Session,” *Ibid.*, 72.

sons of that army at the present day,” declared one delegate.<sup>706</sup> And they expressed the conviction that Texans would be no less willing to pick up arms against their North American oppressors than they had against their Mexican ones. “I trust the guns will soon be again upon the soil they so nobly assisted in rescuing from Mexican tyranny,”<sup>707</sup> one delegate confidently predicted, and concluded that “The possibility of settling our difficulties by a reconstruction of the Union” would receive “about the same encouragement as a proposition to re-annex Texas to the State of Mexico.”<sup>708</sup>

Indeed, the specific principles on which Texans’ based their rights to secede from the Union were, almost to the word, those on which they declared their right to withdraw from Mexico. “All political power is inherent in the people, and all free government are founded on their authority, and instituted for their benefit, and they have at all times the inalienable right to alter, reform or abolish their form of government in such manner as they may think expedient.” Their decision to secede from the United States, just like their decision to secede from Mexico, was compelled by their enduring pursuit of extreme federalism.

When permanently successful, such a remodeling of government, embracing our complicated system of reserved State rights and delegated Confederate authority, may give a better guarantee than all history that our people at least are capable of instituting and maintaining free government.

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<sup>706</sup> *Ibid.* 122.

<sup>707</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>708</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

Finally, in true Texan form, leaders attempted to impose their new system over those territories they believed rested under their jurisdiction, recommending “to the citizens of the Territory of Santa Fe or New Mexico the propriety of immediately proceeding to form a State constitution recognizing the institution of slavery,” and requesting “for admission into the confederacy of Southern States.”<sup>709</sup> Texans’ territorial and imperial ambitions would receive renewed vigor under a new alliance.

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The United States was not alone as it faced a rising tide of sectionalism that threatened its existence as a unified republic. As a country that had struggled since its inception to achieve some semblance of national cohesion, Mexico continued to find itself plagued by civil war throughout the 1850’s. But the South’s decision to secede from the Union, and especially Texas’, had a critical impact on questions that had plagued the Mexican nation for decades – specifically the question of northern secession. Mexico had an even harder time holding itself together after it lost two-thirds of its territory to the United States. The northern states of Nuevo León, Tamaulipas, Durango and Coahuila proved particularly problematic, especially with the rise of several federalist movements with strong separatist impulses and, not surprisingly, close ties to Texas. In fact, in 1847 Lamar called on the northern Mexican states to do something that they had been attempting for a decade - declare themselves an independent republic. “The remote and exposed situation of these States has prevented their enjoying equal

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<sup>709</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

advantages with the other sections of the union,” he wrote in an editorial for *La Bandera*, a federalist newspaper based in Matamoros. “On the contrary, they have been wholly neglected by the General government.” Lamar promised that “If these States, tired of their injuries, which they have suffered for so long a time, should desire to liberate themselves from the tyranny of the General Government, to rise from their present humiliations and to place themselves on an equality with the other esteemed nations[,] I cannot deny my most lively support.” Just as Lamar would emphasize the cultural, economic and political disparity between the northern and southern United States, so he made a similar distinction between the Mexican north and the rest of the country. “The states of the north of Mexico have no interests in common with those beyond the Sierra Madre. Neither have they any reasons for involving themselves in the present war between Mexico and the United States; and even less of submerging themselves in the civil disputes that are continually occurring in that nation.” Lamar imagined the Sierra Madre as a border, akin to the Mason-Dixon Line, which “Nature seems to have designed” as “a great national boundary” extending all the way to the Pacific, and forming “a great republic whose prosperity and illustrious institutions would be the admiration and envy of the world.” But just as he emphasized the differences between the northern and southern states of both countries, Lamar highlighted the similarities between the southern US and northern Mexico: “It is very natural and right that I, in

common with thousands of others, should have a lively interest in the prosperity and welfare of these States, considering their proximity to my own country”<sup>710</sup>

Lamar ultimately argued that northern Mexico should follow the course that he advocated for the southern US and that, ultimately, that country would follow. The northern Mexican states, declared Lamar, had “the opportunity of erecting a temple of liberty that might surpass in firmness, beauty and duration any that have preceded it.”<sup>711</sup> In Lamar’s opinion, Mexico still held all the promise that the earliest settlers had seen in it, but it now rested principally in the northern states and could only be realized with an independent northern republic. Mexican secession, like southern secession, was an attempt to return to the founding principles and original promise of the early republic.

But Lamar’s claims were not the isolated voice of an arrogant, and perhaps even implicitly imperialistic, Anglo-Texan. The notion of northern secession had been circulating since prior to the Texas Revolution, and in the wake of the war with the US it reached its zenith, finding expression in the form of the charismatic Santiago Vidaurri. Much about Vidaurri’s origin and early life remain a mystery. But we do know that he rose to political prominence in 1837 when he was appointed chief assistant to the conservative governor of Nuevo León. In 1841 he became the secretary to the newly appointed liberal Governor Manuel María de Llano. That same year he became

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<sup>710</sup> Lamar to the editors of *La Bandera*, ? 1847, *LP*, Vol. 6, 143-4.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*

acquainted with Texas when, ironically, he served there as a spy for General Arista on the eve of the Santa Fe Expedition.<sup>712</sup>

Despite his service to the centralists, in 1855 Vidaurri joined a group of liberal reformers trying to rid their country of what they believed to be a corrupt, inept and despotic central government responsible for Mexico's humiliating defeat by the United States. Most of these men had been born after independence, raised under the Constitution of 1824 and aimed to restore many of its liberal principles including renewed state's rights and less church influence. Their aims culminated that spring when Vidaurri seized Monterrey and issued the *Plan de Restaurador de la Libertad* which called for the return of full state sovereignty (including locally controlled militias) throughout Mexico, as had been established in the 1824 Constitution.<sup>713</sup> The official organ of Vidaurri's movement declared that

Nuevo León, Coahuila and Tamalulipas are cooperating to restore the power to live under the protection of the law, under rules defined and derived from the will of the nation and not under the pressure and influence of armed force as has been the case in the last two years. Remember that this is truly Mexican, and that enough has been sacrificed to the caprice of a man, the fate of this noble and magnanimous nation, as well as the brilliance that comes from the praiseworthy army.

Vidaurri did not stop there. In a particularly bold move reminiscent of the Texas Revolution, he declared Nuevo León independent until the restoration of federalism.

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<sup>712</sup> Ronnie C. Tyler, *Santiago Vidaurri and the Southern Confederacy*, (Austin: 1973), 13-18.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-20.

“The State of Nuevo León resumes its sovereignty, liberty and independence,” declared *El Restaurador*, while the national Congress is called in conformity with the Convocation of December 10 1841, establishing the system and form of Government that should rule the republic.” The paper concluded that “Despotism cannot exist in Mexico.”<sup>714</sup>

Not surprisingly, Texans greeted Vidaurri’s victory with glee and encouraged him to go a step further, declaring Nuevo León completely independent, thereby creating a buffer zone between the US south and Mexico that would protect them from centralist incursions and allow them to retrieve escaped slaves. But Vidaurri was uninterested in this and easily repelled Texans who crossed the border. This gained him favor in the eyes of Mexico City liberals who, when they returned to power in 1856, allowed his state to absorb Coahuila. In August of the following year, Vidaurri issued a revised constitution for Nuevo León y Coahuila which, among other things, outlawed slavery. But he proved an unreliable military chief when he refused to follow the order of President Juárez in suppressing conservative forces in the north, after determining that it would mean almost certain defeat for his militia. Before long, Vidaurri found himself alienated from national liberals who ultimately believed that he cared more about his own power and security than the rest of the nation.<sup>715</sup>

Faced with imprisonment or worse, Vidaurri went into exile in Texas where he made several important contacts, including José Agustín Quintero. As for the Texans,

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<sup>714</sup> *El Restaurador de Libertad*, 25 May 1855, Benson Center for Latin American History, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>715</sup> Tyler, 21-32.

they received this “fine looking, intelligent man” with “distinguished consideration,” according to the *San Antonio Herald*, which reported that “his object is to study our government, and to rest from the labors of war.”<sup>716</sup> Indeed, Texas had long served as an inspiration for the Mexican federalists, and, during his time there, Vidaurri realized, according to one biographer, that “his goals and aspirations for Nuevo León y Coahuila more nearly resembled those of Texas than southern or central Mexico.”<sup>717</sup> As Vidaurri’s relationship with the Mexican central government deteriorated, Texas would become more important, not only as political inspiration, but as a critical, if not clandestine, trading partner.

When the US Civil War commenced in 1861 the two regions’ economic codependence became indispensable as southerners soon found themselves faced with the almost certain prospect of a northern blockade of their ports. Additionally, southerners wanted Mexico’s promise that it would not allow the Union to launch an invasion through northern Mexico. After a botched attempt at establishing diplomatic relations between the CSA and Mexico by John T. Pickett, who wound up insulting liberal officials, the State Department sent Quintero to Monterrey to meet with Vidaurri. The two men had met in Austin during Vidaurri’s exile two years prior, and now convened for what they called a “confidential intercourse.” Vidaurri graciously agreed to police and secure the border and to allow the CSA desperately needed access to weapons,

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<sup>716</sup> *San Antonio Herald*, 23 November 1859.

<sup>717</sup> Tyler, 36.



ammunition, and other wartime necessities. While he acknowledged that he lacked the authority necessary to negotiate on such a subject since he was not a federal authority, he pointed out the exceptionality of the case and, convinced that the Supreme Government would support an arrangement designed to achieve peace and friendship with foreign nations, concluded that he would “constitute [him]self an official organ of the Government to assure your Excellency that this sane principle [of non-aggression] is being observed by the Mexican Government, its representatives, and its people.” Vidaurri concluded his correspondence by assuring “Peace between the two neighboring countries and the condemnation of any hostility from every side.”<sup>718</sup> In May of 1861, *The Dallas Weekly Herald* reported that a Mexican counterpart “renews the assurances of Gov. Vidaurri’s desire to be on good terms with Texas, and his determination to punish parties coming into Texas on marauding purposes.”<sup>719</sup> Vidaurri’s assurances led Quintero to state in his letter to Texas Governor Edward Clark that “I have been entirely successful in my mission” and that “the Southern Confederacy has made a powerful ally on this frontier by securing the friendship of the state of New Leon and Coahuila.” In addition to security and friendship from northern Mexico, Quintero also confirmed that “we could buy any quantity of powder and lead we might desire” from their southern neighbor. “Should you think proper to send an order it will be immediately filled.” For Vidaurri, the mission was a success because it allowed the northern states a virtual

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<sup>718</sup> Santiago Vidaurri, “Correspondence of Santiago Vidaurri, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>719</sup> *Dallas Weekly Herald*, 29 May 1861.

monopoly on the Texas market and opportunity to solidify his position in the North once again in the face of the centralizing Juárez government.<sup>720</sup>

But Vidaurri's aims did not end there. He had also expressed to Quintero the possibility of annexing his state to the Confederacy. In mentioning his reasons for this he stated that he had always admired American federalism and the South possessed the technology and labor force necessary for the proper exploitation of northern Mexico's limitless resources, namely its mines. Furthermore, the Confederacy could provide northern Mexicans with the protection and security that they had long demanded but failed to receive from their federal government. Davis, however, believed that it would be an "imprudent and impolitic" move for the South and promptly dismissed the proposal. For one, such an act would have almost certainly lead to war with Mexico as well as prevent intervention and recognition by Europe. That point aside, the president of the Confederacy believed, quite rightly, that the South already had its work cut out for it.<sup>721</sup>

While the CSA's absorption of Nuevo León never came to fruition, it nonetheless demonstrates the enduring power of federalism both north and south of the border, and the variety of geopolitical arrangements still available well into the nineteenth century. Indeed, if the South had won the Civil War, the result would have been a Confederate States of America that included, not just the slave South, but recently acquired Mexican land to its west and south - a massive republican empire based on forced labor and

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<sup>720</sup> Tyler, 45-52, Quintero quoted on pg. 51.

<sup>721</sup> Ibid., 52-57, Jefferson Davis quoted on pg. 56.

states' rights, with a far smaller and less effectual United States to its north and Mexico to its south. The North American continent would have looked very different indeed, and the relationship between the United States and Mexico perhaps even more so.

## EPILOGUE

“If he who, by conquest, wins an empire, (and) receives the world’s applause, how much more is due to those who, by unceasing toil, lay in the wilderness the foundation for an infant colony, and build there upon a vigorous and happy state!”<sup>722</sup> So wrote Henderson K. Yoakum in his 1856 tome on the history and early settlement of the most recent addition to the United States. The acquisition of Texas paved the way for the US’s imperial rise by the middle of the nineteenth century. Henderson’s remarks, of course, refer to that first generation of early Anglo settlers who, according to many, made it all possible. But not only were these early settlers far from the forbears of US westward expansion, but the long road to United States continental domination was replete with contingencies, ironies and missed opportunities.

The United States’ continental empire would collapse just fifteen years after its consummation, torn asunder by the very impulses that had compelled Austin and others to come to Mexico in the first place. White American men would make one more attempt at a loosely confederated republic, committed to the principles of states’ rights, racialized slavery and martial citizenship. But they would fail. Just like Mexico and Texas had. The Civil War taught the Confederacy the same lesson that Mexico’s painful and protracted civil wars had taught that country – the limits of regional sovereignty and

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<sup>722</sup> Henderson K. Yoakum, *The History of Texas From Its First Settlement In 1685 to its Annexation to the United States in 1846, Volume 1*, (New York: Redfield, 1856), 209.

racial exclusion and the necessity of a strong central state to modern republican governance.<sup>723</sup> While Mexico struggled to condense and rebuild itself, and the Confederacy's political experiment was eviscerated, the United States of the North would emerge larger, stronger and more unified than ever, finally able to absorb, contain and control its sprawling young empire.

Yet the story of the United States' ultimate imperial rise after the Civil War is not entirely one of democracy triumphant. Certainly, the end of the war enabled the Union to liberate four million slaves, but it also accelerated the extermination and confinement of native groups throughout the West. In another stroke of historical irony, Texans ended up owing their livelihoods to the very government that they had waged war against. It was the post-war US military that finally, in 1867, moved the thousands of southern plains Indians, who the Texans had been fighting for decades, out of their state and onto reservations.<sup>724</sup>

And it was the post-war US government that would manage to deliver the numerous internal improvements that Texans craved and needed, namely the long dreamed of Southern Pacific Railroad, transforming Texas society and economy, solidifying its ties to a country that it had always seemed not quite a part of. Meanwhile, many ethnic Mexicans who had remained in the Southwest after the signing of the Treaty

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<sup>723</sup> Stephnanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), Chapter 1 and Epilogue.

<sup>724</sup> Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the US-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale, 2008), 306-10.

of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, managing to preserve or carve out a place for themselves among the region's commercial class, now found their once central role significantly undermined by the Railroad Company which, as Karl Jacoby explains, "Almost overnight, ruptured the long-standing circuits of exchange in the region, shifting the dominant flow of trade from its north-south axis to its east-west orientation."<sup>725</sup>

But perhaps nothing served to undermine the once fluid and cooperationist relationship between Anglo Americans and Mexicans, *and* symbolize the strength and cohesion of the Reconstructed United States than its southern border. Beginning with the first battles of the Mexican revolution in 1910, the once natural boundary line between the United State and Mexico along the Rio Grande became the stark physical barrier that we know today, rising up out of a stark desert and bisecting the former direction of trade, politics and belonging. Perhaps ironically, it was the Union victory and subsequent federal policies that ended up hardening the racial divide between whites and non-whites in the new American Southwest. As Rachel St. John writes, the US-Mexico border became "not just where two nations met, but where two nations were divided."<sup>726</sup>

As the United States began closing its border and transitioning from a territorial empire into a political and cultural empire, the popular myth of Texas and its righteous revolution as an emblem of Anglo-American democracy triumphing over Mexican

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<sup>725</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>726</sup> Rachel St. John, *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western US-Mexico Border* (Princeton: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chapter 5, quote on page 145.

despotism and dysfunction would fuel the national and imperial imagination of America as an exporter of a universally preferable and transferable system of government. The United States would not only carry the banner of democracy and freedom into the Caribbean and the Pacific at the turn of the nineteenth century, but into Southeast Asia in the mid-twentieth, and the Middle East in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Supporting this national myth of political self-righteousness is the story of Texas – a story that, as most understand it, is about a group of freedom-loving Anglo frontiersmen defending their political ideals against a corrupt and despotic regime, and proudly helping to turn the United States into the most powerful nation in the world. Yet, it is far more complicated. It is just as much about a small group of white property-owning US citizens who saw the profound limits of their nation’s political capacity less than forty years after its founding.

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