
All the Reckless Start in Texas: Texas and its Revolution

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Introduction

The Republic of Texas was established in 1836 when Texas received independence from Mexico. Anglo Americans and Tejanos, or Mexican-Americans, had settled in this province and finally received their long-awaited freedom from Mexico after fighting a war, known as the Texas Revolution. This conflict began due to the increasing number of American immigrants swelling into the territory starting in the 1820s. Land opportunities in Texas and a craving for Manifest Destiny drew the settlers. President John Quincy Adams endorsed the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819; this treaty granted Florida to the United States, along with a border between New Spain and the United States, but Adams failed to include the southwestern portion of the United States. Instead, he recognized Spanish sovereignty over Texas; this angered Anglo-Americans with territorial aspirations.

Mexico eventually allowed colonization in the territory of Texas in the Mexican Constitution of 1824. Stephen Austin and many other leaders led a small group of colonists into the new territory; settlers paid a small fee per acre, and, in return, Austin and these leaders ensured good conduct in the settled areas. Anglo-American immigrants to Texas had a strong desire for land, as well as a plan to spread slavery. Most of the immigrants were from the South, bringing a strong democratic ideology and a skepticism of the Mexican government. Mexico believed that these immigrants were trying to persuade the American government to purchase Texas from Mexico, resulting in increased tensions. The Mexican administration failed to supervise the Texans; this promoted a rise in opposition.

The ensuing revolution broke out following the battle at the Guadalupe River in 1835. The revolution would last almost a year and end with the capture of President Santa Anna and the Treaty of Velasco, which granted Texans their independence and prompted more friction between Mexico and the United States. Ultimately, it was the Anglo-American's avarice for land and slavery, compounded by aggressive self-determination and anti-Mexican sentiment, which led to the Texas Revolution for Independence.¹

Americans Move to Texas

The immigration and colonization of Texas originated from Mexican leaders adapting concepts from their northern neighbor, the United States. According to historian Eugene C. Barker,

¹ Eugene C. Barker, *Mexico and Texas, 1821-1835: University of Texas Research Lectures on the Causes of the Texas Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965) and Theodore Reed Fehrenbach *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (Boulder, CO: Da Capo Press, 2000) highlight the idea of Texas being included in the westward expansion of Manifest Destiny, along with conflicts between superior and inferior races. Past research focused upon Anglo majority in Texas settlements. They failed to view minority opinion. Barker concentrated mostly upon Stephen Austin, while Fehrenbach viewed the Anglo majority.

Mexican leaders believed that since a republican government and free immigration had been crucial factors in the development of the United States, they could benefit Mexico as well. Inspired by this ideology, the Mexicans adopted a federal constitution in 1824, which invited immigrants from around the world.² With this decree from their Constitution, Mexico's Congress approved Stephen F. Austin's contract, allowing him to settle three hundred families in Texas around abandoned missions near San Antonio. The Mexican government endorsed the contract, believing that the colonists would be assimilated by the native citizens of San Antonio.³ Austin and his father Moses had planned to venture into Texas since 1819, but could not due to the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, initiated between America and Spain to prevent conflicts over Florida and other Spanish territories. The treaty proclaimed;

The Two High Contracting Parties agree to cede and renounce all their rights, claims and pretensions to the Territories described by the said Line: that is to say.—The United States hereby cede to His Catholic Majesty, and renounce forever, all their rights, claims, and pretensions to the Territories lying West and South of the above described Line; and, in like manner, His Catholic Majesty cedes to the said United States, all his rights, claims, and pretensions to any Territories, East and North of the said Line, and, for himself, his heirs and successors, renounces all claim to the said Territories forever.⁴

President John Quincy Adams had renounced the United States' claim to these territories in favor of Spain, which would eventually grant the territories to Mexico. This decision angered many Anglo-Americans who had planned to settle in the area, believing it took away their rights to settle Texas and other parts of the Southwest. Mexico eventually granted access to properties in Texas, which attracted the Austins and a group of Anglo-Americans settlers. In 1837, an Episcopal minister named Chester Newell traveled to Texas to conduct research on the recent troubles.⁵ The resulting study, *History of the Revolution in Texas, Particularly of the War of 1835 & '36*, penned in 1838, concludes that Austin's goal was, "establishing the Anglo-American race... to the South and West, in the then all, but impassable barrier between the civilized and free States of the North and the remains of despotism and barbarism of the South."⁶ Newell explained that Americans immigrated to Texas for many reasons, especially to help improve conditions and to gain wealth from the new lands that they purchased from Mexico. Historian Joe B. Frantz explains that, "[t]hey moved in for that most fundamental of motives, greed, as signified by the presence of nearly free land."⁷

Land in the United States became quite expensive in the early 19th century. In America, during that period, the price of American land, endorsed by Congress at around two dollars an acre was higher than most were willing to pay.⁸ The *Missouri Advocate* compared land values in the two republics; the company declared that the United States gave land that was worth nothing, while declaring that Mexico planned to provide far more valuable land to settlers at almost no cost.⁹

² Barker, *Mexico and Texas, 1821-1835*, 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ "Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819," The Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819, <http://www.sonsofdewittcolony.org//adamonis.htm>, accessed November 27, 2017.

⁵ Lawrence L. Brown, "Newell, Chester," <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fne20>, accessed 16 April 2018.

⁶ Rev. C. Newell, *History of the Revolution in Texas, Particularly of the War of 1835 & '36* (New York: Wiley & Putnam, 1838), 13.

⁷ Joe B. Frantz, *Texas: A Bicentennial History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1976), 49.

⁸ Barker, *Mexico and Texas, 1821-1835*, 17.

⁹ Andrew Clayton, "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 Republic*, eds. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew Whitmore Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 307.

Cheap Mexican land inspired more greedy Anglo-Americans to settle in Texas. The editor of *The Advocate* claimed that, “Mexico... does not think of getting rich by land speculation, digging for lead, or boiling salt water, but by increasing the number and wealth of her citizens.”¹⁰ In addition, Stephen Austin feared the United States would acquire Texas and introduce its more expensive land system.¹¹ This fear inspired Americans to act quickly and generated a huge demand for property in Texas. As many were southern slaveowners, they brought their slaves along. However, the colonization committee denounced slavery. They proclaimed slavery “dishonors the human race,” and proposed to embargo the slave trade. Yet they could not overlook the rights of property, so settlers in return had to accept the agreement that children arriving into the territory were free around the age of fourteen.¹²

Mexico Responds and Tensions Soar

The Mexican government had equivocated on the issue of slavery, one year restricting slavery and another year allowing it. Historian Theodore Fehrenbach, author of *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*, states that at one point, when trying to decrease the number of American immigrants, General José Tornel wanted Mexican President Vicente Guerrero to sign a law abolishing slavery in the republic. At the same time, Mexican officials exempted Americans from the law. Fehrenbach explains that, “the whole Mexican legal attitude towards slavery was confusing in the extreme.”¹³ Uncertainty persisted about the status of slaves. With the high rate of Anglo-American immigration into Texas and the introduction of slavery in the territory, tensions grew between the Mexican government and the new settlers.

There were many factors during the 1820s and the 1830s that increased these tensions. One of Mexico’s mistakes was assuming that these self-disciplined Anglo-Americans had planned to become Mexican citizens. The Mexicans permitted Anglo-Americans to create their own separate communities; however, what the Mexican government did not expect was that the Anglo Americans brought along their political views, religious beliefs, and teachings, which they refused to abandon.¹⁴ Being arrogant Anglo-Americans, they planned to stay that way and had no intention of becoming citizens of Mexico. Fehrenbach argued that, “[t]he real, underlying cause of the Texas Revolution was extreme ethnic difference between two sets of men, neither of whom... had any respect for the other.”¹⁵ To an extent, this was true: there were many differences between the Mexicans and the Anglo-Americans. Mexico certainly created some of the problems.

Barker studied the Mexican judiciary in Texas, which was not even created until 1834. The Judiciary Act passed in Mexico, Baker concludes, was defective and lacked sufficient courts. This resulted in injustices for the colonists, it created wariness between them and the Mexican judiciary system, and it caused “recurrent confusion and insurgency, accompanied at times by palpable disregard of the state constitution.”¹⁶ The weaknesses in the Mexican judiciary system would unintentionally commence a rebellion in their province.

In late 1826 and early 1827, a group of self-important men declared themselves to be an independent republic, called Fredonia. This Anglo-American group acquired treaties from Native American tribes, including the Cherokee. They terrorized and ruined the works of empresarios, or

¹⁰ Ibid, 18.

¹¹ Ibid, 18-19.

¹² Eugene C. Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin: Founder of Texas, 1793-1836* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1925), 55.

¹³ Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas*, 165.

¹⁴ Ibid, 167.

¹⁵ Ibid, 168.

¹⁶ Barker, *Mexico and Texas, 1821-1835*, 25.

colonization agents, throughout the Texas territory, and the rebellion would not be crushed until it clashed with Austin and his Mexican troops. George P. Garrison, in his book, *Texas: A Contest of Civilizations*, noted that if the colonists had sided with the Fredonia uprising, it would never have been suppressed, and that “[i]n such a case, there are three or four different turns that the history of Texas might have taken.”¹⁷ The Fredonian Rebellion, according to Randolph B. Campbell in *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State*, “had the immediate effect of a public relations triumph with the Mexican government for Austin and other Anglo-Americans.”¹⁸ The Fredonian Rebellion eased tensions for a time, but it revealed that Anglo-Americans were becoming very egotistic in their rapacity for land.

Throughout the late 1820s, more Anglo-Americans immigrated into Texas. On this land, they embraced the southern ideology and grew cotton; this cash crop developed immediately and increased the demand for slaves in Texas. As stated previously, the Mexican government had contradictory positions on the topic of slavery; officials permitted it one year and banned it another. Slavery in Texas had been threatened in 1829 on Mexican Independence Day, when President Vicente Guerrero declared slaves to be emancipated throughout the Mexican Republic. Many feared this action, especially Stephen Austin, who believed that slavery was of great importance to the colonization of Texas. Austin made his pro-slavery position clear in a letter he wrote to John Durst:

Mexico has not within its whole dominions a man who would defend its independence, the union of its territory, and all its constitutional rights sooner than I would, or be more ready and willing to discharge his duties as a Mexican citizen; one of the first and most sacred of those duties is to protect my constitutional rights, and I will do it, so far as I am able. I am the owner of one slave only, an old...woman, not worth much, but in this matter I should feel that my constitutional rights as a Mexican were just as much infringed, as they would be if I had a thousand, it is the principle and not the amount, the latter makes the violation more aggravated, but, not more illegal or unconstitutional.¹⁹

This argument convinced political chief Ramon Musquiz to side with Austin. Together, the two appealed to the governor, who in turn, protested to Guerrero. In response, Guerrero declared that his prohibition of slavery exempted Texas. Though he appeased the colonists, the rest of Mexico disapproved of this decision; Guerrero was overthrown in 1829 by Anastasio Bustamante. Bustamante, in opposition of Guerrero, had been suspicious of the colony of Texas.

The Mexican government grew increasingly apprehensive about the ever-increasing population of Texas, eventually passing the Law of April 6th in 1830. Scholar Joseph L. Clark has branded this law the Stamp Act of the Texas Revolution. He observed that it gave the government power to seize land, prevent further importation of slaves, and slow immigration to Texas. Mexican officials issued passports to enter the colony to regulate and cut immigration. Clark reported that Lucas Alaman, the secretary of Foreign Affairs, and Manuel Teran, commandant of the Eastern Internal States, claimed that, “the purpose of the law was to ‘save Texas from the imperialistic designs of the United States,’” the original plan disregarding any loyalty from the colonists to the Mexican government.²⁰ The Mexican government wanted to Mexicanize Texas, but the Anglo-Americans and their strong American ideals ignored this request. These newcomers had brought with them “a certain missionary arrogance”; they did not understand the prevailing institutions or

¹⁷ George Pierce Garrison, *Texas: A Contest of Civilizations* (La Crosse, WI: Brookhaven Press, 2001), 169.

¹⁸ Randolph B. Campbell, *Gone to Texas: A History of the Lone Star State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 110.

¹⁹ Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin*, 216.

²⁰ Clark, *A History of Texas: Land of Promise*, 132.

practices.²¹ The arrogance of the Anglo-Americans once again brought more pressure on their relationship with Mexico.

In Washington, President Andrew Jackson grew increasingly interested in Texas. Jackson wrote that he has “long since been aware of the importance of Texas to the United States... and of the real necessity of extending our boundary west of the Sabine.”²² When Jackson became determined to occupy Texas, he sent Joel Poinsett to convince Mexicans to recognize the Rio Grande River as their northern border, but these efforts raised suspicion. Poinsett tried to purchase the land, only to reawaken Mexican opposition. These impressions spurred only greater distrust in the United States-Mexican relationship.²³ In an effort to improve this scenario, Jackson replaced Poinsett with Anthony Butler with high hopes for Butler to succeed in his negotiations and bring Texas “into his outstretched arms.”²⁴

Unfortunately, Butler failed to acquire Texas, and Jackson decided to send Sam Houston. Houston obtained a passport and came to the Texas border to visit the territory that was occupied by Native Americans to learn more about their nature. Impressed by the potential of the region, he decided to immigrate and make peace with the tribes; he settled in Nacogdoches. While he was making peace, he sent word to Washington that many Anglo-Americans would prefer American occupation over Mexico.²⁵ “If Texas is desirable to the United States, it is now in the most favorable attitude perhaps that it can be to obtain it on fair term—England is pressing her suit for it, but its citizens will resist, if any transfer should be made of them to any other power but the United States,” he wrote.²⁶

Austin Takes Action

Although the Mexican government tried to prevent Anglo-American immigration into Mexico, Stephen Austin worked hard to exempt his territory. He eventually found a loophole through Mexico’s ruling involving Article 10 of the Mexican Constitution. This stated that no changes could be made to colonies that had already been established. Austin insisted that his contracts were equivalent to one colony, therefore satisfying the prerequisites of Article 10.²⁷ The Mexican government accepted his reasoning, and immigrants were allowed for another year into his colony. Troubles, however, began in other Anglo-American colonies, more specifically, Anahuac.

Colonel Juan Davis Bradburn, a Virginia-born officer in the Mexican army, accepted runaway slaves that had escaped from Louisiana into Anahuac, an action that essentially freed the slaves.²⁸ When two lawyers, who sought to re-enslave these runaways entered his territory, Bradburn arrested them on charges of giving false information. Anglo-Americans, outraged with this decision, traveled to Anahuac; they threatened Bradburn and his Mexican troops, demanding freedom for the two lawyers. The Anglo-American force used violence to release the captured men, and a fight occurred at Velasco, one of the last skirmishes prior to the Texas Revolution. This interference at Anahuac sparked flames to a revolution. Any Anglo-American involved in this predicament could be

²¹ Frantz, *Texas: A Bicentennial History*, 60.

²² Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 1822-1832* (London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1981), 202.

²³ *Ibid.*, 219.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 289.

²⁵ Thom Hatch, *Encyclopedia of the Alamo and the Texas Revolution* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc. 1999), 116.

²⁶ Sam Houston, Donald Day, and Harry Herbert Ullom, *The Autobiography of Sam Houston* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), 79.

²⁷ Campbell, *Gone to Texas*, 118.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

accused of treason if captured.²⁹ At the same time, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna created political instability in Mexico by leading a revolt against Bustamante and his government. This revolt prevented the Anglo troublemakers from receiving any punishment; in response, the Americans supported Santa Anna's revolt. Santa Anna succeeded in overthrowing the government, and he himself took office.³⁰

Meanwhile, in 1833, Stephen Austin and other delegates of Texas came together to frame the constitution for a new Texas state government. Austin traveled to Mexico City to argue for statehood, insisting Texas met the requisite qualifications. He believed that Texas had the right to self-government. He felt that the people were responsible to be independent and create their own state organization. He wrote to the *ayuntamiento*, or town hall, of San Antonio urging the people to unite. Austin asked for, "a measure to organize a local government independent of Coahuila, even though the general government withholds its consent," and he ended with *Dios y Teras*, which translated to "God and Texas."³¹ The government took this as "exceedingly rash" and arrested Austin, accusing him of recommending revolution among the Anglo-Americans. The imprisonment of Austin stirred fear among the Texans. Santa Anna took full power in the government of Mexico and began to prepare plans for an invasion of Texas. In a letter he wrote about taking Texas back for Mexico, Santa Anna defended Mexican sovereignty. He proclaimed that, "perhaps in good faith, that the only effect of fanning the fire of war in Texas would be a political change in accord with their opinion." Santa Anna then assailed the Texans, lamenting that, "[t]heir shortsighted ambition must be a terrible lesson to them."³²

Santa Anna noted the aggressiveness of the Texans and their craving for independence, rooted in American ideology; he planned to put out the flames of this uprising rumor. Stephen Austin returned to Texas after being released from prison in 1834 and at a meeting on September 8th, filled with anger, he told the Anglos that "[w]ar... is our only resource. There is no other remedy but to defend our rights, ourselves, and our country by force of arms. To do this we must unite, and, in order to unite, the delegates of the people must meet in general consultation and organize a system of defense."³³

Sam Houston supported Austin's cause. He wrote in a letter to James Prentiss that he believed Texas should become a sovereign state. Houston favored independence and added "if Mexico had done right, we could have travelled on smoothly enough."³⁴ However, Mexico failed to do so, and an army formed with Austin as the commander-in-chief, and the aggressive Texans declared war on Mexico to fight for their rights given in the Mexican Constitution of 1824. *The Richmond Enquirer*, declared that citizens "will have fighting to do, and that before very long... to defend their lives, liberty, and property, from the tyranny and oppression of a military despot—Santa Anna."³⁵ This newspaper advanced the strong American ideology of the Texans, declaring that "[o]ne brave United States rifleman can put ten of the cowardly slaves of Mexico to flight—yes, he can do it with a Bowie knife."³⁶ Another edition even mentioned that "Mexico will now feel how painful and mortifying it is to see one of its provinces revolted against her." The article also warned

²⁹ Ibid, 120.

³⁰ Campbell, *Gone to Texas* was the first study of slavery in Texas. His recent studies of Texas are focused more upon the minority views compared to Barker and Fehrenbach who aimed primarily at the Anglo Americans' thoughts.

³¹ Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin*, 370-371.

³² "General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna Defends Mexican Sovereignty over Texas," 1837 in *Major Problems in American Foreign Policy*, vol. 1, 7th ed., eds Thomas Paterson and Dennis Merrill (Boston: Wadsworth, 1995), 209.

³³ Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin*, 412-413.

³⁴ Houston, *The Autobiography of Sam Houston*. 83.

³⁵ "Texas In Revolution," *The Richmond Enquirer*, October 23, 1835.

³⁶ Ibid.

the other provinces of Mexico of the hostile Texan army, powered with restless ambition.³⁷ The bellicose Anglo-Americans showed how eager they were to defend their slavery and liberties from the Mexican government.

Conclusion

The Texas Revolution began as a conflict of greed and aggression. Anglo-Americans entered the country on the promises of free or cheap land, bringing their slaves and their strong Southern ideology. At first, the Mexican government welcomed the Anglo-Americans into Texas, hoping that they desired to become Mexican citizens. Some accepted citizenship, but most refused. Throughout the late 1820s and 1830s, Mexico failed to govern the colonists and tensions soared due to controversial decisions, such as abolishing slavery. Other events, including the Fredonian Rebellion and Andrew Jackson's speculation about the possibility of purchasing Texas, increased this tension between the Anglo-Americans and the Mexican government. The government then tried to prevent more Anglo-American influence by banning immigration into Texas. As the Mexican government descended into political anarchy during the 1830s, the Anglo-Americans planned to fashion their own sovereign state. Attempting to ease tensions, Stephen Austin traveled to Mexico to negotiate. The settlement failed and instead, Austin was arrested on suspicion of encouraging Texan independence. General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna took over Mexico with his own revolution, then threatened to take back Texas from the Anglos, causing fear among them and eventually calls for war. In these events, one can see the Texas Revolution emerging directly from the Anglo-American's desire for land and slavery in Texas, as well as their ideology and desire for self-determination.

³⁷ "Texas," *Richmond Enquirer*, September 9, 1836.