

# 1

## TEXAS SOCIETY AND POLITICS: PAST AND PRESENT

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and studying this chapter, you should understand and be able to do the following:

- 1.1 Discuss the impact of Texas's physical geography and early history.
- 1.2 Summarize the influence of the cotton economy, slavery, and western expansion in early Texas.
- 1.3 Evaluate the causes and consequences of the U.S.-Mexican War.
- 1.4 Discuss the reasons for Texas seceding from the Union.
- 1.5 Evaluate the Reconstruction Era and its influence on the Constitution of 1876.
- 1.6 Assess the long-term effects of Jim Crow segregation.

In 1947, Texas governor Beauford Jester published an article titled "Texans are a Race of People." The governor described what "set them apart from 'natives' of other states" and went on to discuss "the heritage of the brave men and women who laid the foundations of the civilization that became Texas." He explained that the people who settled Texas possessed a "pioneering spirit." He wrote of conflicts with the Mexican government, Texans' desire to be annexed to the United States, and the Republic that governed from the end of the Texas Revolution in 1836 until annexation by the United States was complete at the end of 1845. Jester described Texan efforts to control "hostile Indians" on the frontier and the dramatic story of Anson Jones, the last president of Texas, who lowered the Lone Star flag and raised the Stars and Stripes, and declared, "The Republic of Texas is no more." What Jester failed to mention in his brief, yet stirring, story was that Texas had a long history before the arrival of the first settlers from the United States in 1821 or that Texas history did not end in 1845. Texas's multicultural and multiracial history has often been ignored. Sadly, many in Texas have heard only a dominant view of Texas history, one that neglects the voices, experiences, and contributions of native peoples, Spanish and Mexican settlers, and enslaved and free Black people, as well as the contributions of white Texans who opposed slavery and the violence committed by some of these Texas "heroes" against anyone who did not fit the "Texas" mold (Jester, 1947).

Like Governor Jester, when most Americans think of the story of Texas today they focus on the story of the white, mainly Protestant, U.S. settlers who came to Texas. They focus on the Battle of the Alamo in 1836 and annexation by the United States in 1845.

Perhaps they think of the cattle drives of the 1860s and 1870s and of ranches, or maybe oil wildcatters in the early 1900s. Generations of children grew up hearing stories of the Lone Ranger, a masked former lawman who, after being attacked by outlaws, donned a mask and together with his faithful “Indian companion” Tonto fought for justice in the Old West. But less commonly told are the contributions of the Spanish and Mexican *vaqueros* (cowboys) who brought cattle ranching to the area, or of Black people who served in the calvary as “Buffalo Soldiers.” There were many Black and Latino cowboys, lawmen, and even some judges, but their stories are rarely told. Most of us have seen movies or television shows on the Alamo and its “heroes,” Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone, who fought bravely in its defense. But did those shows include the many **Tejanos** (Texans of Spanish or Mexican descent) who fought for the young Republic or died defending the Alamo? Television shows like *Dallas* and *Walker, Texas Ranger* have built on those popular images of who Texans are and what the Lone Star state represents. The shows feature white men as the “heroes” who build empires or bring criminals to justice. Texas, in the popular imagination, is replete with tall tales and legends—after all, “everything is bigger in Texas.”

Texans themselves have been quick to capitalize on the myths and legends. In the early 1960s, developers who wanted to build a Disneyland-style theme park near Dallas used the state’s contested past as a marketing hook and named it Six Flags Over Texas, simplifying the state’s long history to a narrative in which six different nations claimed control of Texas. The theme park’s gift shops sold miniature replicas of the “Six Flags of Texas”: Spain, France, Mexico, the Confederacy, the Lone Star, and the United States. Although the Six Flags legend oversimplified Texas history, it hints at two very important truths: first, that the region that encompasses Texas today was a contested environment, and second, that Texas has a rich, diverse and complex past, with inhabitants representing different nations, ethnicities, and beliefs.

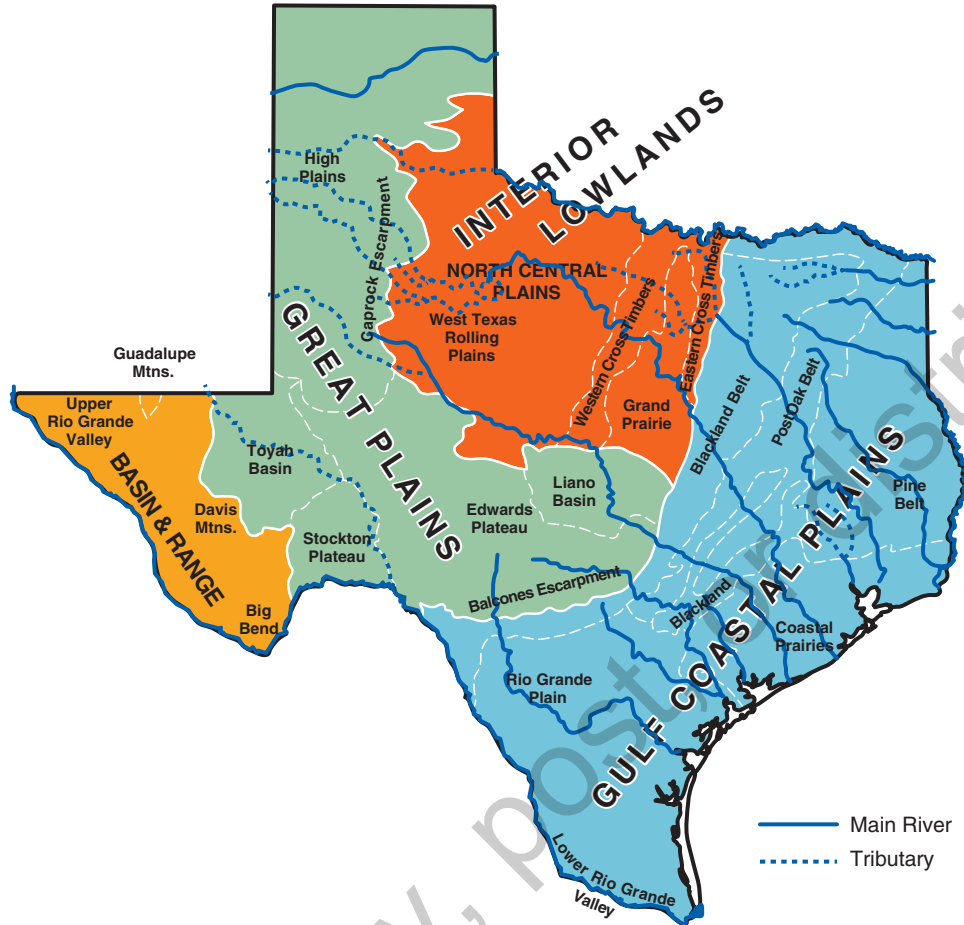
## TEXAS GEOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES

Texas’s varied physiography and environment accounts for some of the diversity. Texans like to boast that the Lone Star state is the largest of the 48 contiguous states. It is some 800 miles from Brownsville in the south to the northern tip of Texas and almost 800 miles east to west from Beaumont to El Paso. Guadalupe Peak in far West Texas has an elevation of almost 9,000 feet, descending to sea level at the coast. The terrain is a land of contrast: lakes and deserts, mountains and plains. Texas has fertile regions that get more than 60 inches of rain a year and desolate stretches receiving less than 10.

We can divide the state into four major environmental regions. Within each of those regions, we find various subregions. First, the North American Great Plains, which includes the High Plains in the Texas Panhandle, the rectangular portion of northwest Texas, and continues south into the Edwards Plateau and Llano Basin in Central Texas. Next, the Basin and Range is west of the High Plains and includes Upper Rio Grande Valley, the Big Bend Region, and Guadalupe Mountain range. On the eastern side of the High Plains is the Interior Lowlands, which includes the Rolling Plains, Grand Prairie, and Cross Timbers near present-day Fort Worth. Finally, the Coastal Plains stretches from the Southern Rio Grande Valley in the south to the Sabine River, and includes the Piney Woods, Blackland Prairie, and Post Oak Belt.

Many people think Texas is dry and dusty, which much of it is, but there are hundreds of rivers in the state of Texas. They crisscross the state, and some form part of the state’s geopolitical

MAP 1.1 ■ The Four Regions of Texas



Sources: "Vegetational Areas of Texas." *Texas Almanac*. Texas State Historical Association. <https://www.texasalmanac.com/articles/texas-plant-life> and "Secondary Streams of Texas." *Texas Almanac*. Texas State Historical Association. <https://www.texasalmanac.com/articles/secondary-streams-of-texas>.

borders. These include the Red River, Sabine, Neches, Trinity, Brazos, Colorado, Guadalupe, San Antonio, Nueces, and Rio Grande rivers. Rivers are important today for ecological reasons, as well as recreation, and have been important for crops, fishing, travel, and commerce. To Native Americans rivers were important for transportation, sources of water and food, and yet dangerous when flooded. Additionally, there is also underground water in aquifers that carry a tremendous amount of water across the regions they encompass. Texas has nine major aquifers and additionally another 21 minor aquifers. These underground water sources cover almost three-quarters of the state and provide 62% of the water supply that Texans use each day.

Understanding differences in the physiography of Texas helps us answer some questions that may not be obvious at first. Why did farmers who moved into western parts of the state have a more difficult time planting and harvesting crops than those in East Texas? Why was oil discovered in some places and not others? Why were Native American tribes different in different parts of the state? Why is San Antonio a city? Why did early Catholic missionaries have more success in converting Native Americans around South Texas than they did in East Texas?

Why did the Dust Bowl affect certain areas of western Texas and not others? The geographic reality of the state is key to understanding many political choices Texans have made, as some areas are very dry and barren, some have rivers and rainfall, and some have oil or natural gas or other mineral deposits.

### Native Peoples in Texas

The vastness and variety of the Texas landscape was also reflected in the people who lived here. Although the Six Flags legend begins with the Spanish flag, there were people who competed for Texas long before the Spanish arrived. The names, customs, beliefs, and other information about many of these people are lost to history, but through archeological evidence we've begun to learn more about them. For example, Caddoan people built mounds for religious and tribal activities near Alto more than 1,000 years ago. Although Caddos remained in the area until the 1840s, by the time the Spanish arrived in 1536 many of the other early cultures were gone; their descendants and other civilizations developed cultures, societies, languages, customs, and governing institutions in the region that is today Texas. Each was as diverse as the locations where they lived and hunted.

Spain's efforts to explore and establish missions and settlements over the next 300 years met with mixed results, depending on the various ethnic and cultural groups among the indigenous people. As a result, much of what is today Eastern Texas was ignored for many years. Some indigenous people saw the Spanish as good trade partners, others as allies against other competing tribes. Some accepted Catholicism, or perhaps tolerated it, or incorporated aspects into their existing religious practices. Others rejected both Spanish authority and religion.

Through the records of the Spanish explorers and missionaries, we have learned something about the various Native American groups in 1500s Texas. Along the coast were Karankawa people who fished and planted crops. Further inland were the settlements and villages of Caddoan tribes of East and Central Texas. In the West, were the Jumano and Apache. Later, as Native Americans adopted the horses left behind or stolen from the Spanish, groups like the Comanche drove south from the North American High Plains into Central Texas. Europeans divided these people into "tribes," although evidence shows that these groups were much more fluid than we commonly believe. Still, there is no question that the Native people who lived in Texas had civilizations, cultures, languages, and social and political structures that evolved over the centuries, and they continued to evolve and adapt to the time of United States emigration in the 1800s. From the 1500s on, Native people intermarried and acculturated with Spanish, Black, and other European (and eventually United States) settlers and traders. Some, however, retained their cultural identities. When in the mid-1800s the United States annexed Texas and other parts of the North American Southwest that had been part of Mexico, most of these people were simply called "Mexicans." Those who remained affiliated with Native cultures were largely driven off the land or killed. Some indigenous cultures were forcibly relocated to reservations outside of Texas. In the 1930s, the United States government began officially recognizing Native American "tribes." Today, the three federally recognized tribes with reservations in Texas, the Alabama-Choushatta, Kickapoo, and Tigua, are not native to Texas.

### Spanish and French Rule

Colonial New Spain was a multicultural society. Native Americans, African explorers, servants, and enslaved people lived alongside the Spanish. As these groups mingled, they also reproduced. Children born of parents from different ethnic groups were called *mestizos* and were born into a



caste system that placed native-born European Spanish at the top. The European-born Spanish, *peninsulares*, were the highest rank and rulers. Spaniards born in the New World, *criollos*, were ranked second, while Native Americans and Africans found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

The Spanish established different types of institutions as part of their effort to colonize: missions, presidios (military forts), and civilian settlements, including towns and ranches. Towns often grew up around the presidios and served as the residences of many of the presidio's soldiers and their families. They functioned as the official government seat of the settlement, often with a town council and *alcalde* (mayor). Other settlers seeking land and adventure also took up residence in towns, along with craftsmen and others with skills that serviced the presidios and missions. The government offered generous amounts of land to those willing to settle on the frontier.

New Spain was not isolated, and conflict increased when other European agents encroached on Spanish territory. In 1685, French explorer René Robert Cavelier, the Sieur de La Salle, and his expedition were marooned at Matagorda Bay. They established a settlement, Fort St. Louis, and claimed the Mississippi Valley for the French. When the Spanish learned of the fort and settlement, they dispatched soldiers to search for it, destroy it, and protect the Spanish claim to that territory.

In 1763, the French lost all claims on the North American continent as a result of the Seven Years' War. Spain took full control of the former French claims west of the Mississippi, while the British claimed the lands east of the Mississippi to their colonies on the Atlantic seaboard. The war ended the disputes between France and Spain over what is today East Texas and Louisiana. Over the next several years, Spain withdrew settlers, soldiers, and missions from East Texas because they believed the threat no longer existed. In 1766, the government of New Spain sent the Marqués de Rubí to explore the northern frontier. He recommended pulling back and reorganizing the frontier defenses. In Texas, Rubí suggested that only San Antonio remain, while the rest of the area should be abandoned. He also suggested exterminating the Apache. These suggestions became the basis for the New Regulations for Presidios issued September 10, 1772.

At about the same time that Rubí was examining the Spanish frontier, the aftermath of the Seven Years' War caused turmoil in the British colonies that would eventually lead to the American Revolution in 1776. With the Treaty of Paris in 1763 between the new United States government and Great Britain, the U.S. claimed the land from the Atlantic to the Louisiana Territory, which was, at this time, claimed by New Spain. In the meantime, the Spanish governor in Texas ordered the removal of settlements from East Texas. Some settlers later petitioned to return to East Texas and, led by Antonio Gil Ibarvo, eventually reoccupied the town of Nacogdoches in 1779. In the west, San Antonio officials tried to secure a trade route to the nearest frontier outpost, Santa Fe, but the route was deemed too dangerous to be successful.

In 1800, the French leader Napoleon Bonaparte forced Spain to return the Louisiana Territory to French control. A few years after Napoleon took control of the Louisiana Territory, he sold the land to the United States—the Louisiana Purchase of 1803—giving the United States a claim to the lands west of the Mississippi River. To reduce the possibility of conflict, in 1806, Spanish Lt. Colonel Simón de Herrera and U.S. General James Wilkinson formed the Neutral Ground Agreement, which called for a demilitarized zone between the Arroyo Hondo and Sabine River to prevent skirmishes and possible warfare over the disputed area. By the early 1800s, the young United States proved an aggressive competitor in challenging other claimants to the land that would become Texas, especially after technological developments that led to the profitability of cotton in the lower South and along the Gulf coastal region.

## KING COTTON, SLAVERY, AND ANGLO-AMERICAN SETTLEMENTS IN TEXAS

The marketability of short-staple cotton—the type of cotton that could be grown and harvested in the Gulf Coast states of the Southeastern United States—increased American attempts to acquire additional land in the region. In 1793, Eli Whitney submitted a patent for a cotton gin (short for engine). Workers could load cotton in the top of a box and turn a crank. The crank rotated a series of hooks through wire combs that pulled out seeds, dirt, and plant matter, resulting in cleaner, marketable cotton fibers. The ability to clean short-staple cotton more easily, and the availability of land in the black soil region of the southeastern United States, marked a turning point in the U.S. economy. Still, land and labor were necessary for agricultural profitability, and the increasing demand for land drove the price up for these limited resources.



An 1894 engraving depicting enslaved people picking cotton in the South.

mikroman6/ Getty Images

### A Texas Economy Based on Slavery

Prior to the development of modern fertilizers, cotton's significant demand on soil led to larger plantations. Crops needed to be rotated, requiring more land and more enslaved people to work that land. The need for land and more enslaved people fueled the quest for new territory (discussed below). As planters became wealthier, they were able to buy more enslaved people to work the land, marginalizing less wealthy and smaller landowners. By 1852, Texan cotton cultivation had produced nearly 30 million pounds of cotton, making it the eighth largest cotton producer in the U.S. The Southern population of enslaved people increased from 700,000 to nearly 4,000,000 between 1790 and 1860. In 1836 Texas had approximately 5,000 enslaved persons in a total population estimated at 38,470. By the census of 1860, Texas had 182,566 enslaved people, accounting for nearly a third (30.2%) of its population, but like the land, enslaved people—a mark of wealth—were concentrated in few hands.

Even on the eve of the Civil War in 1860, 75% of Southern male heads of households owned no enslaved people, and of the 25% of men who were enslavers, half of them owned fewer than five people in bondage. And the majority of free white settlers supported the system of slavery, even if they did not own any. The term “planter” referred to the 10% of the enslavers who “owned” more than 20 enslaved people; yet this 10% owned half of all the enslaved people in the South. Although statistically enslavers accounted for a small percentage, there were 400,000 enslavers nationwide on the eve of the Civil War.

Even though a minority of the population owned enslaved people, the slavery economy permeated the region. Enslaved labor in Texas, which produced cotton as well as sugar in the lower Brazos region, contributed to an increase in cotton production of 600% in the 1850s (Campbell, 1991).

As cotton played an increasing role in the American economy—accounting for half of the nation’s exports—slaveholders dominated Southern legislatures, passing laws in the Southern United States that protected the institution of slavery. Those who were enslaved could be bought, sold, and even mortgaged. They possessed no legal rights of family or marriage. They could be tried by a jury but could not testify against whites in court. The practice of enslavement promoted the view that Black people were inferior to whites, and most whites in Texas accepted that view.

Everyone in Texas and the South, even those without enslaved people, was dependent on the slavery economy. Some benefitted directly, such as traders of enslaved people, patrols, overseers, and plantation managers. Others benefitted indirectly; clothing manufacturers made clothes especially for enslaved people, ironworkers and forgers made chains and shackles, others leased enslaved people as laborers, while textile companies processed the cotton into linen and clothes, and banks and attorneys profited from the lucrative internal trade in enslaved people, cotton trade, land sales, and mortgages. Even northern shipping interests benefited from exporting Southern cotton. Economically, cotton became “king,” and along with the business of human labor bondage, King Cotton’s march across the Gulf Coast region was halted by New Spain’s claim on the lands west of the Mississippi.

### U.S. Expansion Westward

Disputes in the Ohio River Valley and American neutrality during the Napoleonic Wars led to another war between the United States and Great Britain in 1812. Following the War of 1812, the U.S. gained full control of the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys and began expanding west. In 1818, one of the heroes of the War of 1812, General Andrew Jackson, conducted raids into Spanish Florida that threatened the new peace. The U.S. and Spain then agreed to the Transcontinental (Adams-Onís) Treaty of 1819, which transferred Florida to the United States and established an international boundary between the U.S. and New Spain. Although both Spanish and U.S. authorities hoped that the Transcontinental Treaty would provide a clear boundary, many Americans were unhappy with the treaty line, especially Southern plantation owners who felt the U.S. should have asked for more territory in present-day Texas as they saw East Texas as fertile land for cotton and other crops.

New Spain grew increasingly concerned about the U.S. expansion into the West, fearing that unauthorized settlers were trying to establish claim on Spanish territory. In some cases, explorers were sent by the United States, while others initially had contracts with the Spanish government. Still others, however, were clearly trying to take control of East Texas from the Spanish and set up their own empire.

In 1819, largely due to land speculation caused by the desire for more cotton cultivation in the West and the increasing number of immigrants to the U.S. pushing settlement westward,

the American economy crashed, and many went bankrupt. After the Missouri Compromise in 1820, the U.S. government made it easier for small farmers to buy land in the Louisiana Territory, but the costs were still prohibitive for many hopeful planters. The Compromise also restricted enslavers to land south of the 36°30' parallel. Although Spain had claimed the northern region for some 300 years, it had few settlements above the Rio Grande River in present-day Texas and could not control the Apache, and later the Comanche, who raided across the region. Moses Austin, in pursuit of new cotton farmland where slavery would be permitted, approached the Spanish governor of Tejas about the possibility of bringing settlers from the U.S. to northeastern Mexico, south of the Transcontinental Treaty line. The Spanish governor at first refused Austin's request because of recent troubles with American **filibusters**, men who launched private invasions into Mexico to seize land in the region, many of whom were seeking to extend the area in which slavery was permitted. However, he eventually relented and granted Austin permission to recruit settlers from the U.S. to the Brazos River valley of Texas. The opportunity to get land in Texas attracted Southern planters, who were eager to expand their reach, and slavery, into new territories.

The Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815) in Europe had led to independence movements in Latin American that drew inspiration from the successful American Revolution a generation earlier. When Napoleon gained control of Spain in 1808 he placed his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, on the Spanish throne (1808–1813). Taking advantage of the chaos in Spain, political forces in New Spain overthrew the crown's representative, Viceroy Jose de Iturrigaray. On September 16, 1810 (celebrated today as *Diez y Seis de Septiembre*), Fra. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a Catholic priest, called for independence with a speech known as the *Grito de Dolores*. The stirrings for independence led to revolutionary activity in Texas, from both from Tejanos and the Texian settlers (Anglo settlers from the United States). In Texas, at least two attempted coups against the government were part of the larger revolutionary movement. Other revolts in New Spain sprang from the initial 1810 rebellion and continued until Spanish general Agustín Iturbide and rebel leader Vicente Guerrero agreed to a peace treaty, the Plan of Iguala, on February 24, 1821. The document called for an independent Mexican Empire, and in May 1822 Iturbide was crowned Emperor Agustín I. Within a year, however, facing great resistance, he dissolved the empire and abdicated the throne.

After Iturbide left Mexico, the Mexican congress called a constitutional convention. Not unlike the constitutional debates that marked the drafting of the United States' Constitution, Mexican politics was split into two opposing factions, the Federalists and the Centralists. In 1823, Mexico abolished slavery but allowed it to continue in Tejas. It also made importation of enslaved people illegal, causing concern among slave-holding white settlers in that region. In October 1824, the Federal Constitution of Mexican States, strongly influenced by the U.S. Constitution, became the basis for the new government. The new constitution created several new political divisions, including one in the new country's northeast, the State of Coahuila y Tejas.

### Austin's Settlement

Moses Austin died before he could bring his settlement to fruition. His son, Stephen F. Austin, became an **empresario**, a land agent contracted to bring settlers to the area. In 1821, the younger Austin began moving 300 families, known as the Old Three Hundred, into the lower Brazos River valley. The settlers agreed to become Catholics, abide by Mexican law, and become Mexican citizens. Not all of these agreements were followed by all settlers.

Austin and the Old Three Hundred were not the only Americans coming into Tejas or other Spanish territory. That same year, American William Becknell established a trade route between



St. Louis, Missouri, and the Mexican settlement in Santa Fe. This allowed the first legal trade between the two nations, and the resulting Santa Fe Trail was used extensively by American settlers traveling west.

Under Austin's terms, each settler would receive 640 acres for himself, another 320 acres if he was married, and 160 acres for each child. If he owned enslaved people, he would receive 80 acres for each one. For delivering the land, surveying it, and obtaining the proper title, Austin planned to charge 12 1/2 cents per acre. If a man and his wife settled under Austin's provisions, had two children and five enslaved people, they could expect 1680 acres of land, costing only \$210 payable by installments (or about \$53,728 in 2022 dollars). Early in 1823, during the brief reign of Emperor Agustín I, the Mexican government passed the Imperial Colonization Law of 1823, and Austin's was the only grant approved under that law. The provisions of the Imperial Colonization Law were even more generous than Austin's original plan. Every family received about 177 acres for farming. Ranchers received about 4,430 acres of land. Most of the original settlers received both at a total cost of less than \$35, less than \$900 in today's currency. *Empresarios*, like Austin, would receive almost 67,000 acres of premium land for their services. In August 1824, the new government formed by the constitution issued the National Colonization Law of 1824. Individual states in the Mexican union were responsible for colonization in their provinces, and so the state of Coahuila y Tejas passed its Colonization Law in 1825, which provided large tracts of land to *empresarios* to bring American settlers to the northern province of Tejas.

Others began applying for colonization grants in hopes of taking advantage of the vast land available in Tejas. Some from outside the U.S. applied to become *empresarios*, including at least two Mexican citizens. Ultimately, some 30 *empresario* contracts were awarded, but Stephen F. Austin was the most successful *empresario*, bringing to Tejas some 1,500 families. In 1827, the Constitution of the State of Coahuila y Tejas prohibited slavery and the further introduction of enslaved people into the state. It also declared all children born to enslaved people were free citizens at the time of birth. Despite this, many settlers continued to rely on enslaved labor. By 1830, Tejas had a population of 7,000 foreign-born and only 3,000 Mexican nationals. These settlements began to worry the Mexican government.

### Law of April 6, 1830

Although the brief "Fredonian Rebellion" of 1826, in which Stephen Austin and other older settlers rode with Mexican forces against a faction of U.S. settlers in Texas attempting to secede, is sometimes considered the first step in the Texas revolution, it was Mexican President Anastacio Bustamante's decree, the Law of April 6, 1830, that most concerned U.S. settlers in Texas as it forbade the importation of enslaved people and restricted further immigration from the U.S. In 1827, growing suspicious of the U.S. settlers in Texas, the Mexican government dispatched General Manuel de Mier y Terán to inspect the settlements and the Transcontinental Border line. His report on the East Texas settlements in Austin's colony raised alarms as it stated that many were immigrating unchecked with no intention of becoming Mexican citizens and Catholics, as the law required. It also noted the increasing number of enslaved people, despite slavery having been abolished. In response, the Law of April 6, 1830 restricted settlers and enslaved people from the U.S. This decision frustrated new settlers such as William B. Travis. They were also upset that the fort's commander, John Davis Bradburn, a Virginian who had joined the Mexican army, had protected two of their enslaved people who had sought freedom, causing fear that more might leave to Mexico.

Pushback against the Law of April 6, 1830 by the Anglo settlers led Mexico to rescind the order and once again turn a blind eye to slavery, but the threat remained clear in enslavers' minds.

A few months after the Law of April 6, 1830 was passed, Austin expressed his regrets for focusing his recruiting efforts solely on American southerners and for the number of enslaved people that were brought to the region. He wrote to Thomas F. Leaming in mid-June 1830 that, “the idea of seeing such a country as this overrun by a slave population almost makes me weep” because he worried about a large and growing Black population. Austin worried, “the white population will be destroyed some fifty or eighty years hence by the negroes, and that his [the slave owners] daughters will be violated.” Still, Austin defended slavery and won an exemption for his settlement to retain enslaved people by “freeing” them but quickly signing them—most of whom could not read—to 99 years of indentured servitude (Austin, 1825).

Although the prohibitions on further American settlement and slavery were eased, conflicts continued. In 1833, General Antonio López de Santa Anna became president and instituted a centralized government, reducing the autonomy of the states. U.S. settlers’ concerns about protecting slavery combined with Santa Anna’s growing centralization of power were matched by Mexico’s increasing frustration with U.S. settlers and fears of U.S. expansionism. This combination of political instability and increasing mistrust would eventually ignite the conflict that became known as the Texas Revolution.

Many Tejanos and **Texians** (Anglo settlers) picked up arms to fight for an independent state free from Santa Anna’s rule. Santa Anna sent troops to maintain order, but when the Mexican soldiers tried to take back small cannon that had been provided to a group of U.S. settlers for the defense of their settlement, the Texians dared the soldiers to “Come and Take It.” The Texian revolutionary force of 300 men marched to San Antonio and forced the Mexican garrison to retreat. In the meantime, Santa Anna instituted constitutional changes that essentially made him a dictator (see Chapter 2). Rebellions sprang up in 12 states across Mexico opposing his actions. Santa Anna moved to put down the largest of the rebellions, in Zacatecas, then moved troops into Coahuila y Tejas.

### **Santa Anna and the Alamo**

Although armed resistance had begun, politically there was a dispute among the Texan settlers whether to seek independence or simply restore the Mexican Constitution of 1824 that Santa Anna had dismissed. This division was also reflected in the Texian militia. Many wanted to attack further into Mexico in hopes of gaining more land. Despite pleas by Sam Houston, a former U.S. general and Tennessee governor who was soon appointed commander of the Texian Army (and would later serve as the Texas Republic president and as U.S. senator and governor after annexation), and others, in mid-January 1835 troops left Goliad to push farther south into Mexico. At the same time, news of Santa Anna’s forces moving north toward Texas caused settlers to flee east. Sam Houston called for Texians to abandon San Antonio and sent James Bowie to destroy the fortifications there so Santa Anna could not use the city as a base. Instead, when Bowie arrived in San Antonio, he decided to occupy it and established his base in the Alamo, an abandoned mission. A few weeks later, Travis arrived and called for reinforcements from throughout the South. Soon others reached the Alamo, including the famous Tennessee politician, David Crockett.

The Alamo defenders, both Texians and Tejanos, learned Santa Anna had crossed the Rio Grande and was moving toward San Antonio. When the Mexican forces arrived, they laid siege to the Alamo compound. Travis, now in command at the Alamo, sent additional messages for reinforcement. Meanwhile, James Fannin had taken control of the Goliad mission and fortress some 90 miles southeast of San Antonio. On March 2, 1836, the provisional Texian government, meeting in Washington-on-the-Brazos, adopted a declaration of independence, but the Alamo



defenders probably never knew about it. Before dawn on March 6, Santa Anna ordered the attack on the Alamo. He commanded a military band to play *El Degüello*—a military tune that signified no quarter would be given. The Battle of the Alamo was brief. Some 200 Tejano and Texian defenders were killed during the failed defense.

Santa Anna remained in San Antonio until the end of the month. News of the defeat reached General Houston in Gonzales; he ordered a retreat and began moving troops west toward San Felipe. On March 20, James Fannin, who remained in Goliad, surrendered to Mexican troops. Santa Anna ordered the 300 Texians who had been captured to be executed, despite protests from the Mexican general at Goliad. News of the Goliad Massacre, along with the fall of the Alamo, led to cries of “Remember the Alamo!” and “Remember Goliad!” among the Texians. Texian settlers began fleeing toward Louisiana in the United States for safety. The members of the Texian government, who had been at Washington-on-the-Brazos, moved 70 miles southeast to the Harrisburg settlement on Buffalo Bayou, near present-day Houston. Santa Anna began moving his forces toward Harrisburg in hopes of capturing the Texian government. On the afternoon of April 21, Houston attacked Santa Anna’s camp, launching the Battle of San Jacinto. The Mexicans were caught off guard and were immediately routed. Many were killed after they surrendered. Santa Anna was captured and promised to recognize the Republic of Texas.

### The Texas Republic

On May 14, interim president of the Texas republic David Burnet, a member of Austin’s settlement who had been elected by the new government at Washington-on-the-Brazos, and Santa Anna signed peace treaties at the port of Velasco at the mouth of the Brazos, the temporary capital of the new Republic of Texas. Serving as the Republic’s first vice president was a Tejano, Lorenzo de Zavala, who helped draft the constitution and designed the flag of the Texas Republic. When Texas voters cast their ballots that September, the first presidential election was a popularity contest. Burnet had chosen not to run, but Henry Smith, a former provisional governor, put his name on the ballot, as did Stephen Austin. Sam Houston entered the race in mid-August, just weeks before the September 5 election, but the hero of San Jacinto won handily. Smith withdrew from the race but received almost 750 votes. Houston defeated Austin with 5,119 votes to 587. Houston served from 1836 to 1838 and would serve again as president from 1841 to 1844.

### The New Republic’s Pressing Issues

The new republic had several pressing issues. First, in the election in September 1836 voters were asked whether they wanted to join the United States. The results were overwhelmingly in favor of annexation. But they also had to worry about the frontier. They had problems with Native American tribes, fears of



Lorenzo de Zavala was an important diplomat and politician in Mexico before fleeing to Texas. In Texas he participated in the drafting the Constitution of the Republic of Texas, designed the Republic’s flag, and served as the first vice president of the Republic.

Historic Collection / Alamy Stock Photo



Sam Houston, first and third president of the Republic of Texas, also served as one of the inaugural senators after Texas became a state.

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reprisals from Mexico, which (despite Santa Anna's treaty at Velasco) did not recognize Texas's independence, and, perhaps most important, finances.

### Harsh Treatment of Tejanos

Mexican Texans—Tejanos—faced many difficulties in adjusting to the new government. In many cases, Tejanos supported and fought in the Texas Revolution. Yet, many settlers associated all Tejanos with Mexicans, and discrimination increased problems between the two groups. Juan N. Seguín, who fought at San Jacinto, is but one example. As mayor of San Antonio, Seguín was falsely accused by white Texans of aiding Mexican troops who invaded the city in 1842. Forced to leave Texas under threat, despite support from former Revolutionary leaders, Seguín later returned and was elected county judge in 1869. Another influential family, the Martín de Leóns, *empresarios* who established a colony near Victoria and La Bahía, were subject to brutal treatment by white settlers and also ended up leaving Texas.

### Black People in the Texas Republic

For Black people, life was difficult. Half of enslaved Black people in the South labored on plantations, and another 40% on smaller farms working closely and sometimes alongside their owners. A minority of enslaved people held skilled jobs, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, or in factories, distilleries, and breweries. Others worked as domestic servants or were hired out as field hands or other laborers. In all cases, however, enslaved people were subject to harsh treatment, especially whipping. Most worked from sunup to sundown, lived in poor housing, and suffered from poor nutrition. Half of the children born to enslaved people perished before they reached the age of 2, and the adult lifespan of enslaved people was shorter than for white people, two telling indicators of the harsh lives most lived.

Not all Black people in the South were enslaved, however. Nearly 400 free Black people lived and worked in Texas in 1850, though their freedom was always in peril. Some were former enslaved people who had purchased their freedom and their families' freedom with money they earned and saved. Others were the children of mixed relationships who integrated into their white parent's family. Still others were free Black people from the North who traveled, worked, and lived in the South. Free Black people lived in constant danger of being enslaved. In days before identification forms and photographs, it was easy enough to claim that a free Black was actually a runaway slave, like New Yorker Solomon Northrop who was abducted in Washington, DC and enslaved in Louisiana for 12 years before he was able to escape. After Nat Turner's 1831 Rebellion in Southampton, Virginia, southern lawmakers passed increasingly strict laws on Black people and enslaved people.

For free Black people, the situation grew dim. Despite the fact that some had actively participated in the Texas Revolution, free Black people found their lives limited under the new

Texas constitution. By 1840, the Texas Congress had declared that free people of color had two years to leave the new republic or they would face enslavement. Some prominent white citizens filed petitions with the Texas Congress on behalf of their Black neighbors. Friends of Joseph Tate, a free Black who had served in the Texas army, filed a petition in 1839 requesting that Tate be granted a portion of land, as other veterans of the Revolution were promised, for his service to Texas. Henry Tucker's white neighbors pleaded that the lawmakers allow him to remain in Texas because he was a law-abiding citizen and "should he now be forced to leave the country he would be totally ruined which would be a great hardship as he made a great sacrifice migrating to this country."

If someone wished to free their enslaved population, they were met with resistance. Wyly Martin, who had been *alcalde* at San Felipe de Austin and chief justice of Fort Bend County following the Revolution, petitioned Congress to free his enslaved person, Peter. Peter had used his wagon team to transport supplies and munitions during the Revolution. He had later amassed a personal fortune of more than \$16,000 as a teamster. Martin argued that the Texas Senate "should do justice alike to black, yellow and white, without regard to color, and as this slave had done much service to the State during her hours of danger and invasion, he hoped the Senate would act favorably on his case" (Henry Tucker Petition, 1841). Martin's petition to free Peter and have him remain in the Republic caused a stir in the Texas Senate. Some saw no harm in granting Martin's request, but others disagreed. Senator Francis Moore Jr. stated that the request "sweeps from us our strongest ground, in refutation of the doctrine of the abolitionists, for we have always insisted that slaves and free negroes are incapable of self government." He worried that Peter had set a bad example by his good character. "Should we set this slave free with the privilege to remain," he warned, "others might claim and expect like accommodation, and the result would be dissatisfaction, insubordination, and finally insurrection" (Smithers, 1839).

In the end the Texas Senate relented. Joseph Tate, Henry Tucker, and other free Black people were allowed to remain, including Peter, who was freed and allowed to remain in Texas. The law was eventually rescinded, but it served as a reminder that for free people of color, their freedom was never certain.

### Conflict With Native Peoples

After the Republic of Texas was established, settlers began cautiously expanding westward but were limited by Native Americans who attacked and raided white settlements, often killing or taking prisoners for ransom. Sam Houston sought peace treaties with the Native Americans, and traders like the Torrey brothers assisted with Native American relations and financial assistance. Mirabeau Lamar, who succeeded Houston as president of Texas, however, took an aggressive stance against Native Americans and forced many to leave the Republic. Two major battles, against the Cherokee (Battle of the Neches) and the Comanche (Council House Fight), happened during Lamar's administration.

Not all settlements experienced conflict with the Native American population, however. In 1841, the Texas Congress authorized a new, but short-lived, *empresario* system. Before it was discontinued in 1845, a group of German settlers established themselves in Texas. This wave of immigration was led by Baron Otfried Hans Freiherr von Meusebach, who took the Americanized name John Meusebach. Meusebach successfully negotiated with the local Comanche tribe in the Texas Hill Country, and Fredericksburg had few troubles with Native Americans, a sharp contrast to the Anglo settlements.



## CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE U.S.–MEXICAN WAR

After the Texas Revolution, the Mexican Congress did not recognize Texas’s claim of independence. Nor did they accept the boundaries of the territory it claimed.

### An Uneasy “Independence”

For many years, Mexico considered the Republic of Texas to be in a state of rebellion, rejecting the peace treaties Santa Anna signed with Texas on the grounds that President Santa Anna was a prisoner of war at the time, thus invalidating the treaty. Other nations, including the U.S., were reluctant to recognize the new Republic. France, Belgium, and the Netherlands established diplomatic legations, which were below the level of an embassy. Some nations favored an independent Texas, seeing it as a wedge between the expanding United States and Mexican claims in the West. Great Britain opened a trade consulate. The British, who had relinquished claims in the Northwest Territory east of the Mississippi River to the United States, still saw the benefits of fur trade in Canada and held competing claims to the Oregon Territory with Russia and the United States until the 1840s. Likewise, Britain did not want to endanger its relations with Mexico by granting full relations with Texas. Although Texas did establish a legation in London, the British did not have one in Houston or Austin.

The United States also was cautious about recognizing Texas’s independence. President Andrew Jackson appointed Alceé La Branche as a *chargé d’affaires* (the chief diplomat when there is no ambassador). Although the U.S. subsequently appointed several other *chargé d’affaires*, it never appointed an ambassador to Texas.

### Manifest Destiny and Slavery

The Texas Republic and its citizens wanted to become part of the United States and sought annexation in 1836, shortly after its formation as a Republic. However, that would mean another slaveholding state would join the Union, giving pro-slavery forces more power in Congress. There were also serious questions about the possibility of war with Mexico should the U.S. annex Texas.

John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, Andrew Johnson’s former vice president, was a staunch proponent of annexation in the hopes of expanding the power of slaveholding territories. Other proponents of annexation, such as John L. O’Sullivan, publisher of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, saw acquiring Texas as key to the growth of the U.S. O’Sullivan claimed that those who opposed the annexation were hampering the “fulfillment of our manifest destiny allocated by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” O’Sullivan popularized the term “manifest destiny,” which became the catchphrase for westward expansion.

On several occasions in the years following the Revolution, Mexico sent forces into Texas, some as far as San Antonio, to assert its claims on the region. As the annexation effort gained steam in the U.S., Mexico reluctantly agreed to recognize Texas’s independence in 1845, on the condition that Texas remain independent from the U.S.

Despite Mexico’s offer of recognition of the Republic, U.S. President John Tyler signed the Joint Resolution for annexation in 1845. Mexican President José Herrera then accepted John Slidell as the American envoy to settle the dispute over Texas Annexation. When forces in Mexico overthrew Herrera the following year, however, it appeared that the opportunity for a peaceful resolution had passed. U.S. President James K. Polk ordered troops under General Zachary Taylor to Corpus Christi at the Nueces River, which Mexico marked as the beginning of Texas territory. Meanwhile, Mexican forces lined up along the Rio Grande, which Mexico claimed as its territory, while Texas and the U.S. claimed the border was Texas territory. Each side waited for the other to cross into the disputed territory between the two rivers.

Taylor's troops crossed into the disputed area to the Rio Grande. Tensions mounted and shots were fired, although it's unclear whether Mexican or U.S. troops fired first. President Polk, however, had already prepared a declaration of war. On May 11, 1846, he told Congress, "Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil." Congress declared war on Mexico, despite opposition and numerous "spot resolutions" that questioned whether the gunfire was actually on U.S. soil.

### Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

The U.S.–Mexican War was brief, from May 1846 until September 1847, with most of the fighting happening in Mexico and small skirmishes in New Mexico and California. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of February 2, 1848, ended the war and established certain guarantees regarding the citizenship of Mexicans and their property rights. The United States took the land north of the Rio Grande, as well as California and the New Mexico territory, and paid \$15 million to Mexico in return. Article VIII of the Treaty provided that Mexican citizens who lived in the territory now under U.S. control "shall be free to continue where they now reside, or to remove at any time to the Mexican Republic," either keeping or selling their property without any charge. They were allowed a year to "either retain the title and rights of Mexican citizens, or acquire those of citizens of the United States," and those who remained would automatically become U.S. citizens after the term. Furthermore, Article IX explained that those who remained in the US should be "admitted at the proper time (to be judged of by the Congress of the United States) to the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States, according to the principles of the Constitution; and in the mean time, shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without restriction."

As far as the U.S. government was concerned, the results of the U.S.–Mexican War raised questions about California and Texas and the expansion of slavery. Texas was a slaveholding state, and California, especially after gold was discovered, did not want slavery. This seemed to resolve some of the issues, with one slaveholding state and one free state, but the size of Texas led some to propose splitting the territory into multiple states. The Compromise of 1850 reduced Texas to near its present size; in return, Texas received \$10 million, which it used to help settle its debt from the Revolution and Republic periods. It also set aside some money for public schools. Still, the issue of slavery would continue to grow for both Texas and the United States.

## SECEDING FROM THE UNION

The massive amount of territory the United States acquired as a result of the U.S.–Mexican War led to almost immediate conflict over how the land would be developed. Texas would be a slaveholding state, but enslaved people were expensive, and even after annexation to the U.S., few Texans were enslavers. Depending on the sex, age, and skills of enslaved people, by the 1850s the price for a person in bondage averaged about \$1,500—roughly \$55,000 today. There was also a large Hispanic population scattered throughout the territory, including the Tejano population in Texas.

### The Power of the Slaveholding Class

In Mexican Texas, slavery had been relatively uncommon compared to southern states in the U.S. After the U.S.–Mexican War, however, slavery increased. By 1860, the statistics in Texas resembled those across the American South. Slightly more than one of every four Texas families (27%) enslaved people, but only half of those enslaved five or more people. About 10% of all

Southern slaveholders were “planters,” enslaving 20 or more people. In Texas, only 54 families enslaved 100 or more people, accounting for less than 0.3% of all enslavers in Texas. Yet, large planters were very powerful economically and politically. They produced 90% of the state’s cotton crop and controlled 60%–70% of the state’s wealth, and therefore they influenced its political direction. They were determined to maintain slavery.

The issue of slavery led to a division among United States citizens and lawmakers, especially between Southern and Northern states, but also in Western states. It would be a mistake, however, to think that all Southerners approved of slavery and all Northerners opposed slavery. There were great varieties of opinion across the nation in the 1850s. This was especially evident in the debates over the land gained as a result of the war with Mexico. A revised fugitive slave law was also controversial. These issues had come to a head in the Compromise of 1850, which resulted in the admission of California as a free state to offset slaveholding Texas and a negotiated settlement for the return of enslaved people who fled the South across the Ohio River into free states.

### Lincoln’s Election and Southern Secession

The presidential vote in the election of 1860 was highly polarized and split among four candidates. Most Southerners voted for John Breckenridge, the Southern Democrat candidate. Meanwhile most northern voters sided with Lincoln, the Republican candidate; many Southern Democrats pledged to leave the Union if Lincoln was elected. The middle states of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee supported the Constitutional Union representative, John Bell, and the Northern Democratic candidate, Stephen A. Douglas, only carried Missouri. With Lincoln’s victory, the secession movement came to a head. Just a month after the election, on December 20, 1860, South Carolina seceded from the Union. Governor Sam Houston, who supported slavery but opposed secession, ignored requests to call a special session of the state legislature to consider joining the five other states, led by South Carolina, that had left the United States. With no support from the governor, Texas secessionists took matters into their own hands and called upon the counties to send delegates to a pro-secession Special Session. Ninety-two counties sent representatives to Austin on January 28, 1861. In the meantime, Houston convened the legislature. Instead of disavowing the secession convention as Houston hoped, the lawmakers turned the Capitol over to the secessionists and legitimized the proceedings.

The delegates heard from representatives of other Southern states who urged Texas to join them. The secession vote in Texas shows that there was some opposition to the call to split from the Union. The predominantly German counties of Central Texas, as well as parts of North Texas and the deep East Texas county of Angelina, were opposed to secession. On January 29, a majority of delegates voted to leave the U.S. but asked for a public referendum on the vote. On February 23, Texans went to the polls and voted 44,317 to 13,020—more than three to one—to leave the United States. Governor Houston called the action illegal, but on March 5 the lawmakers took an oath to the Confederate States of America.

Governor Sam Houston refused. “Fellow-Citizens,” he wrote, “I have refused to recognize this Convention. . . . I believe it guilty of an usurpation,” he declared. “I am ready to lay down my life to maintain the rights and liberties of the people of Texas.” But as far as secession, he continued, “I refuse to take this oath. In the name of the nationality of Texas, which has been betrayed by this Convention, I refuse to take this oath. In the name of the Constitution of Texas, which has been trampled upon, I refuse to take this oath” (Houston, 1861). The Convention delegates responded by declaring the office of the governor vacant on March 16th and appointing Lt. Governor Edward Clark as the new governor of Texas. Sam Houston, hero of San Jacinto,



president of the Republic of Texas, United States Senator, and governor of Texas, retired from public office and died in 1863.

### Reasons for Secession

“States’ rights” has become a popular response to explain why 11 states left the United States in 1861, but what rights were they fighting for? To answer that question, we look at the secessionists’ own explanations.

In 1861, the framers of the Texas **Declaration of Causes**, the official explanation for leaving the Union, pointed out that Texas had been accepted into the Union as a slaveholding state, “maintaining and protecting the institution known as negro slavery—the servitude of the African to the white race within her own limits—a relation that had existed from the first settlement of her wilderness by the white race, and which her people intended should exist in all future time.” The Declaration of Causes argued against the “debasing doctrine of the equality of all men, irrespective of race or color—a doctrine at war with nature, in opposition to the experience of mankind, and in violation of the plainest revelations of the Divine Law” (Declaration of Causes, 1861).

Some argue that because most Confederate soldiers were not enslavers, they were not fighting to protect slavery. However, letters from soldiers reveal that most were aware that the politicians that left the union did so to protect slavery and that the war was over the continuation of slavery as an institution. Confederate leaders made that very clear. Alexander Stephens, vice president of the Confederate States of America, stated in his March 1861 “Cornerstone Speech” that the Union “rested upon the assumption of the equality of the races.” Stevens declared, however, “This was an error.” He went on to state, “Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition.” The Confederacy, he proclaimed, “our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth” (Stephens, 1861).

### The Civil War in Texas

By mid-February 1861, U.S. troops were ordered to leave Texas, and the state began to form volunteer army regiments, not only to fight in the war in the east, but also to occupy the now-abandoned frontier forts that protected the western frontier against Native Americans and United States troops. Although very few Civil War battles occurred in Texas, volunteers from the Lone Star State fought in every major battle of the war. One of the early attempts to weaken the Confederate States was the blockade of the waters around the Southern states. Galveston, Corpus Christi, and other Texas ports were also targeted by the Union Navy. Texans also smuggled cotton to Europe via Mexico. Although Mexico was occupied by the French during the Civil War, Southern cotton made its way to Brownsville and on to a nearby port in Mexico to avoid the U.S. blockade and bring needed revenue into Texas. Confederate forces under Lee surrendered in April 1865, but other Confederate troops continued to fight throughout the summer. The last battle of the Civil War was fought near Brownsville; Confederate soldiers captured U.S. troops at the Battle of Palmito Ranch on May 13, 1865. The last vestiges of the Confederate forces surrendered at Galveston on June 2, 1865. That same day, U.S. General Phil Sheridan took command of Texas.

On 17 June, U.S. President Andrew Johnson named Andrew Jackson Hamilton the provisional governor of Texas. Two days later, U.S. General Gordon Granger arrived at Galveston and announced the end of the war and of slavery. This day has become known as **Juneteenth**. African Americans in Texas and the United States have celebrated it annually ever since as the day enslaved people in Texas were told they were free. Although Lincoln had announced the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, and many enslaved people had been freed as U.S. troops advanced across the Confederate South, many in Texas were still living in bondage in June 1865. Juneteenth celebrations have expanded around the world in recent years to honor the end of slavery and the long and continuing struggle for equality and freedom.

## RECONSTRUCTION

The years following the Civil War, from 1865 to 1877, during which the nation began to rebuild, are known as **Reconstruction**. But even before the war ended, efforts to restore the union were already underway. Both President Lincoln and Congress put forth competing plans that would allow Confederate states to rejoin the United States if their voters swore oaths of loyalty to the U.S. Before his assassination, Lincoln set a threshold of 10% of voters, while Congress wanted 50% to swear their allegiance to be readmitted and to limit participation in politics to those who could demonstrate continued loyalty to the Union during the war. The U.S. made it clear that, even in defeat, members of the former Confederacy would need to earn their readmittance. John H. Reagan, Postmaster General of the Confederacy, had been the highest-ranking Texan in the Confederate government. On August 11, 1865, while imprisoned in Boston following the war, he wrote to his fellow Texans. Reagan encouraged Texans to accept defeat, renew their loyalty to the United States, abandon slavery, and recognize the right of Black people to vote. He warned, “unless you agree to this you can neither get back into the Government as a citizen, nor into its courts to assert your claims to slaves or any other species of property. The only wise and safe course for you to pursue is to accept promptly, unreservedly, and in good faith the terms and policy offered, and to go forward in the work of reorganization and restoration to the Union” (Reagan, 1906). In the end, however, Texas lawmakers ignored Reagan’s counsel and enacted Black Codes to limit former enslaved people, called Freedmen, and their rights.

### Texas’s Response to Reconstruction

In January 1866, Texans voted to elect a new state government, and in August the new Texas Legislature met in Austin. It was a conservative group, yet the governor, J. W. Throckmorton, was a moderate. However, the legislature ignored the Reconstruction process and refused to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery. By implementing Black Codes, they aimed to keep Black Texans in a position very similar to slavery. Adding insult to injury, Texas voters elected former Confederates to fill political offices at home and in Washington, D.C. Despite this, President Andrew Johnson declared the reconstruction process complete in Texas.

All former Confederate states shared Texas’s defiant attitude, and the U.S. Congress took measures to stem the opposition. They refused to seat the Southern congressional delegations, passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and overrode President Johnson’s veto of a bill extending the work of the Freedmen’s Bureau, which had been established to aid former enslaved people. Later, Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment to safeguard African Americans’ liberties and keep Confederates from being elected. When President Johnson vigorously opposed Congress in the 1867 midterm elections, it responded with three laws designed to limit the president’s authority.

One of those laws, the Military Reconstruction Act, implemented martial law, putting the Army in charge of the states. Governor Throckmorton was removed from office, and Elisha M. Peace was named provisional governor. A biracial constitutional convention met from June 1868 to February 1869, resulting in a strong state constitution with a centralized government, desegregated school system, and limited rights for African Americans in Texas. In the elections of 1870, voters elected Republican E. J. Davis governor, and President Grant restored Texas's status on April 16, 1870, readmitting it to the Union as a state.

Former Texas Confederates despised the Republican Davis administration. They especially complained about the “Obnoxious Acts” and, particularly, the use of the state militia and state police force, which employed African Americans as soldiers and police officers. Most Texans even opposed spending tax dollars to educate African American children in public schools. Democrats and former Confederates also complained that Davis changed the dates of Texas elections to correspond with federal congressional elections. Davis argued that this would make it easier for voters, so that they would only have one election per year, but opponents said it was a way of tricking voters.

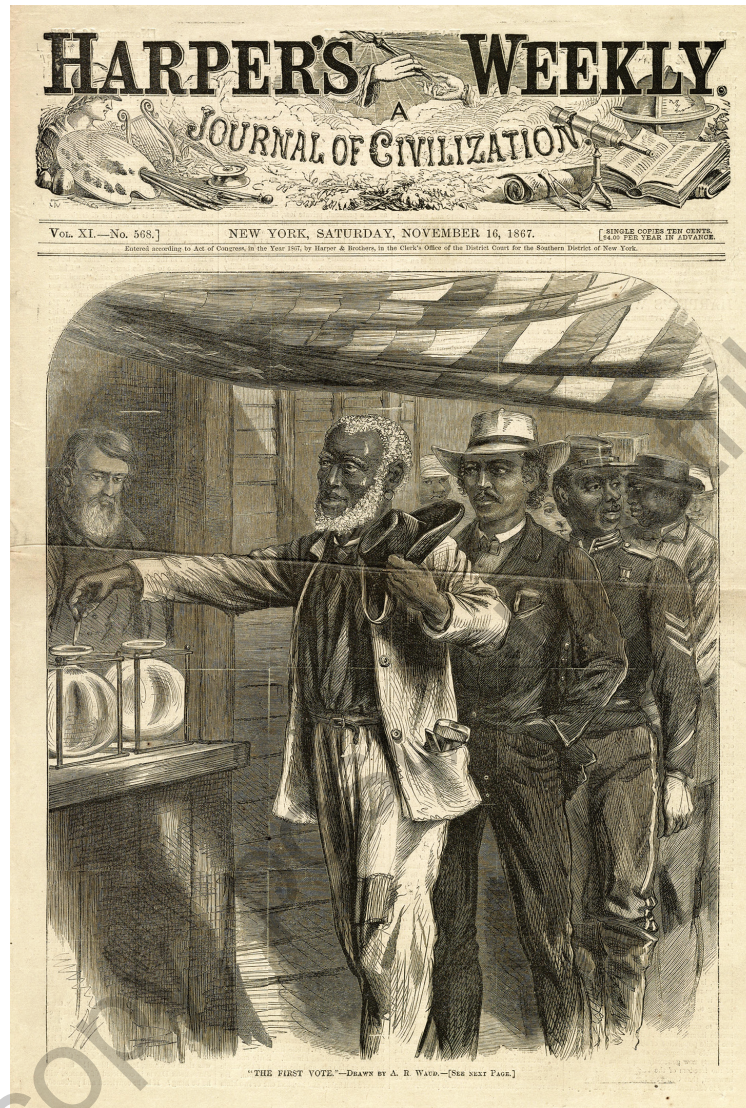
In the election of 1873, voters elected Richard Coke as governor by a vote of almost 2 to 1. Davis refused to leave, however, because the Texas Supreme Court decided the election was invalid after a Republican challenge of the vote in Houston. Coke's followers got the keys to the capitol building, but armed forces went in to protect Davis. Other armed men came to Coke's assistance. Davis appealed to President Grant for military assistance, but the president refused. Davis and the Republicans left office, and for most of the next century Texas, like most Southern states, was dominated by the Democratic Party.

### Black Life During Reconstruction

Most historians see the Reconstruction period as a complicated series of successes and failures. For the almost 200,000 enslaved it was a transitional period to freedom and full citizenship. Freedmen, the term applied to formerly enslaved people, sought to establish families now that marriage was legally recognized, reconnect with family members who had been separated or sold away, find jobs and homes. In many cases, Black families were able to purchase homes and land from former enslavers or friendly landowners. Some used money they had saved while they were enslaved. Most, however, secured property by selling crops, especially cotton, and splitting the proceeds with the landowner. This practice, “sharecropping,” was a common way for cash-poor people to own land. More than 500 “Freedom colonies” were established in East Texas and other parts of the state where Black landowning families formed communities separate and independent of whites. From the 1870s to 1910, Black people increased property ownership from 2% of all Texas farmland to 30%. If far enough away from white communities and towns, the Freedom colonies elected their own mayors and councils, established police, and set up businesses. Across the former Confederate states, more than 1,500 Black elected officials served their communities after the Civil War. In Texas, 52 Black men served as legislators and constitutional convention delegates. Publicly funded education was one of the lasting legacies of the Reconstruction period. For the first time, Southern states, including Texas, established state-supported public schools, albeit segregated. Freed people eagerly embraced the opportunity education promised. Communities, churches, and families built schools where children attended during the day and parents often attended at night and weekends.

Despite these accomplishments, violence against African Americans intensified. Numerous gangs of masked or hooded whites terrorized and intimidated Black people. Although popularly referred to as the Ku Klux Klan, there were actually other Klan-like groups in Texas. Some, like





Congress passed several Reconstruction Acts that allowed Freedmen to participate in the reestablishments of Southern state governments following the Civil War, including allowing Black people to serve in constitutional conventions and vote. The right to vote nationally was guaranteed in the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870.

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the Knights of the White Camelia and Knights of the Rising Sun, were more organized. Other smaller gangs also aimed at controlling and attacking African Americans and Republicans.

### The Redeemers

The Republican Party remained very small in the South but survived as an opposition party in those areas with support of the United States military and Freedmen's votes. Resentment against losing the war, Republican leadership, Black emancipation and citizenship, military enforcement, increased taxation, and other complaints were reflected at the ballot box. The conservative Democrats who won the Texas election of 1872, like other conservative Southern Democrats in the former Confederate states, called themselves **Redeemers**, claiming that they had saved their

states from the corrupt rule of Republicans. In reality, the Redeemers hoped to regain political power and reestablish white rule. A national economic crisis, the Panic of 1873, gripped the nation and helped Redeemers gain strength. One of the first issues Texas Redeemers wanted to address was the Constitution of 1869, which they believed created a state government that was too strong, centralized, and costly.

An attempt to change the constitution failed in 1874, so a new convention was called the following year and representatives elected, many of whom were farmers. Texas's new constitution addressed many of the farmers' concerns by limiting the power of the state government, limiting big business, especially railroad corporations, and weakening and segregating the state school system. Although amended many times over the past century and a half, the Texas Constitution of 1876 remains the state's governing system. It is one of the longest in the nation because of numerous amendments. Efforts to revise or streamline the constitution have failed.

The Republican Party, although severely weakened, continued to challenge Democratic control over state politics. Most African American voters belonged to the Republican Party, which had championed abolitionism before the Civil War and was the party of Lincoln. The Democrats, heralded as the party of the Confederacy, used their dominance to restrict the growth of Republican Party, oppose the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), limit civil rights, and establish the white primary, in which only whites were permitted to vote.

## JIM CROW SEGREGATION

Jim Crow laws meant that Black people lived as second-class citizens. They were segregated and pushed to the back of buses, forced to eat at the back of restaurants, and excluded from white-only hotels and clubs. They faced voting restrictions and were kept from running for office by white-only primaries. Even so, in larger communities a Black middle and professional class emerged. Black business owners, educators, ministers, attorneys, and others were able to form in a segregated society, particularly near former freedom towns established after slavery. On a more national scope, the Harlem Renaissance highlighted the cultural contributions of jazz and blues music, which originated, in part, in Texas. Texas's best-known jazz and blues musicians included Mance Lipscomb, Blind Lemon Jefferson, and Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter. Blues, Cajun, and jazz in New Orleans and Mississippi spread to Texas Black communities, particularly after World War II, with Texas musicians such as Melvin "Lil Son" Jackson and Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown. The music was picked up by white performers such as Jimmie Rodgers, "the father of Country Music" who took the songs from black railroad workers who sang as they worked, and, later, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Elvis Presley. There were also great athletes like Jack Johnson "the Galveston Giant," the first Black world heavyweight boxing champion (1908 to 1915). His success upset many in the white boxing community; they were appalled that an African American would be the world champion. The NAACP, which had only recently formed in New York, soon opened a branch in Texas because there were many complaints about the way African Americans were treated there.

Many of the communities that gave rise to the Black middle class are long gone, demolished by "urban renewal" or gentrification, as we will discuss in later chapters. Discrimination made it difficult for Black people to pursue higher education, except in historically Black colleges and universities established under the 1890 land grant of the Second Morrill Act, such as Prairie View A&M. Similarly, discrimination led to difficulty in securing employment or promotions for many Black people throughout the South and in Texas.

## Violence and Repression

Throughout the South, African Americans were at risk of violence. In 1916 in Waco, several thousand spectators gathered to lynch a man named Jesse Washington. He was castrated and otherwise mutilated by the crowd, hanged, and finally burned alive. The event drew criticism from across the nation. The incident led many in Texas to begin to speak out about lynching. In Houston the next year, Black soldiers at Camp Logan rioted to protest bad treatment by local police officers and segregation on public transportation, which led to a mutiny that spread through downtown Houston and resulted in attacks on police officers. As a result of the mutiny, the Army hanged 19 Black soldiers and sentenced 41 to life imprisonment.

Mexican Americans, or Tejanos, faced similar problems of discrimination and suspicion. In 1901, for instance, a Central Texas farmer named Gregorio Cortez shot and killed a sheriff in self-defense. While law enforcement searched for Cortez, many other Mexican Americans were harassed and killed based on the assumption that they were members of the Cortez gang. Refugees from the 1910 Mexican Revolution fled to Texas, as did political opponents of the Mexican regime who used the Lone Star State as a base.

In 1915, the so-called Plan of San Diego was discovered on a captured Mexican revolutionary in Texas. The plan encouraged African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans to join together against the United States and to take back the Southwest—Texas, New Mexico, and California—and return it to Mexico where they would live in peace. Two years later, during World War I, the U.S. intercepted a message from Germany to Mexico stating that if Mexico would side with Germany and attack the United States, Mexico would get back all the land it had lost after the U.S. Mexican War. Fear that Mexicans and Mexican Americans wanted to reclaim the land lost by Mexico in 1848 led to discrimination and lynching in South Texas. Somewhere between 300 and 5,000 Mexicans and Mexican Americans were murdered during this period.

One of the most notorious examples of anti-Mexican violence was the 1918 **Porvenir Massacre**. On January 28, 1918, Texas Rangers, local ranchers, and the U.S. Army arrested 15 men and teenage Mexican Americans and executed them outside the town in retaliation for a raid by Mexican revolutionaries on the Lucas Bright ranch. This led to outrage at the atrocities, which were reported by Army officials, and a legislative investigation led by state representative José Canales. As a result of the Canales investigation, the Texas Rangers were nearly disbanded, but were instead reorganized. Incidents of discrimination and persecution of Mexicans and Mexican Americans led to the 1929 organization of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in an effort to stop the discrimination.

## CONCLUSION

Historians and political scientists have long argued that a culture's emphasis on a mythical past limits the political strength of minority groups. In some sense, Texans have a notion of a mythical past. In 1926, the *Dallas Morning News* began publishing a comic strip on the history of Texas, *Texas History Movies*. After nearly 430 installments, having covered events through roughly 1880, on Saturday, June 9, 1928, the editor stated "The history of Texas has been carried through to the beginning of the modern period and it is here that it must end. This is not to say that the history of Texas ended about the year of 1880. In truth, the story of Texas has just begun. But events subsequent to 1880 do not lend themselves readily to the cartoonist's art. The history continues, just as stirring, just as romantic, but not quite so picturesque" ("Texas History Movies," 1928). In *Sleuthing the Alamo*, historian James Crisp notes the portrayal of Texas history in *Texas*



*History Movies* was so much in line with the heroic, conquering image of Anglo culture that Texans wanted to portray about themselves and their past that the series was published by an oil company during World War II as a textbook for Texas schoolchildren and continued to be used in Texas middle-school classrooms for three generations (1928–1959). The comics depict white men as gallant saviors, protecting white women and civilizing Native Americans. They all but erase the role of the state’s enslaved population. The cartoons were about the “settlement and winning of Texas by Anglo-Americans between 1821 and 1846” and told history in a way that perpetuated the myths and stories of Texas and white male rule (Crisp, 2005).

The long-term effect of *Texas History Movies* is significant as the images and stories shaped our identity as a people, socializing Texas schoolchildren in views of Texas that were one-sided, and many of the cartoons would be viewed today as racist and misogynist. These deeply embedded images that we receive from legends, stories, songs, films, and television shows shape a collective, but false narrative of Texas. Some people hold onto those old narratives because they describe an environment in which their ancestors “tamed” a “hostile” environment, overcame, and became successful. However, the story is told from the view of white settlers. By contrast, questioning the long-cherished stories and revealing a more diverse, complex understanding of the Lone Star past than promoted by Governor Jester in the mid-twentieth century or comic book texts, minorities and other underrepresented groups have begun to challenge the political, economic, and cultural limitations of the past. Other less powerful people have told different stories throughout the centuries, many ignored or forgotten.

Educational experts have shown that once we learn something it becomes very difficult to change our thinking, even when confronted with facts. This is called confirmation bias. When faced with contrary facts, we try to fit the new facts into old beliefs; if they don’t work, we reject the new information. One need look no further than the recent imbroglio over Confederate war memorials and statues, with those seeking to maintain the statues and memorials arguing that they are protecting Texas history and its heroes, while those seeking to remove the memorials claiming that it is time to realize that the “heroes” were defending slavery and should not be so honored. Political socialization—how we develop a political identity, opinions, party affiliations, and views of our political institutions and their roles—begin with symbols instilled very early through our families, churches, and schools. In Texas, many schools require students to recite the Flag Pledge each morning: “Honor the Texas flag; I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas, one state under God, one and indivisible.” But symbols are found, too, in our school systems with texts that reinforce dominant myths and narratives. For decades there have been battles over what will be included or excluded from public school curricula. The battles continue today, as we have seen with efforts to pull books or ban discussions of race, slavery, or topics that may be “offensive” to some children and their parents.

Texas identity and the myths surrounding the Texas Republic, the Alamo, and the causes of the Civil War shape who we are today, but they also shape beliefs others have about us. Moreover, who are Texans? Only those born and raised here? The Texas population today is very different than it was in the 1830s. How do the images and myths of the past influence our politics today? Does the view that Mexicans stormed the Alamo influence our attitudes today about Mexican immigrants and the need to build a wall to protect us? And why are so many politicians eager to “forget” about race, slavery, and racism and so eager to ban books or prevent teachers from discussing those topics? Why do some of these same politicians, who argue it is racist to speak about race, draw voting districts for elections that carve up Black and Latino populations to reduce their chances of electing legislators from their communities? Whether we like it or not, how we view our past shapes how we view and act on our present.

What do you think it means to be a Texan? Owning a cowboy hat? Owning a cattle ranch? Growing up on a farm? Going to a rodeo? Driving a truck? Working for the oil or natural gas industry? Going to a high school football game on Friday nights? Or is it something more? And, what should it mean for the future of Texas?

Is Texas unique? Has it grown, as Governor Abbott suggests, because of an “economic miracle”? In 2015, Abbott said, “Businesses succeed in Texas because we’ve build a framework that allows free enterprise to flourish. Less government, lower taxes, smarter regulations and right-to-work laws—these are the pro-growth economic policies attracting employers to Texas from states that overtax and over-regulate” (Abbott, 2015). And what are the costs and benefits of such policies for the people of Texas?

Certainly, there is much to be proud of as Texans. The state is growing dramatically in population and diversity. It is creating jobs and opportunities. But there are also disparities in health care, income, housing, and education. We hope as you read this book you will better understand how Texas government functions, how policy is created, and what role you can play in improving our great state.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Ask yourself, What does it mean to be a Texan? Who are those that first come to mind? Who do you include as Texans today?
- Reflect on what you are proudest of about our past. Who are your Texan heroes? How should we celebrate those heroes?
- Read more about the history of Texas. We have many references in this chapter and throughout the book. Pick up some and read them.
- Have discussions with friends and family about Texas, its culture, and its diversity.
- Don’t be afraid to ask questions in the classroom and don’t be afraid of new ideas or differing viewpoints. That is how we learn.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider the various people and groups that have migrated to Texas since 1800. Discuss how they interacted with indigenous people. How did their experiences influence their concepts of law and government?
2. How did agriculture, especially cotton, influence the need for land and westward expansion in the early 1800s?
3. When President James K. Polk asked for a declaration of war against Mexico in 1846, he claimed, “American blood was shed on American soil.” His argument was challenged by others at the time. Was his argument correct? What were the immediate results for the United States? What were the long-term results of the U.S.–Mexican War for Mexicans living in the territory?
4. What forces led the Texas Secession Convention to vote to leave the United States? Why did Governor Sam Houston refuse to pledge loyalty to a Confederate government?

5. Following the Civil War, John H. Reagan suggested that Texans needed to allow Black Texans to vote and respect their rights to full citizenship. His advice was largely ignored. What were the long-term effects of segregation and voting suppression?
6. In your view, how do the myths about Texas and its past shape our views about what it means to be a Texan today?

### KEY TERMS

Declaration of Causes (p. 17)  
empresario (p. 8)  
filibusters (p. 8)  
Juneteenth (p. 18)  
Porvenir Massacre (p. 22)

Reconstruction (p. 18)  
Redeemers (p. 20)  
Tejanos (p. 2)  
Texians (p. 10)

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