Annexation marked a milestone in the history of Texas. Freed from any realistic threat of Mexican reconquest, and bolstered by the economic, military, and diplomatic benefits that flowed from American statehood, Texas enjoyed greater latitude to chart its own course. In the years between annexation and the Civil War, the state became more closely aligned with the culture, politics, and economy of the Deep South. Slavery and cotton assumed greater importance, setting the stage for Texas to follow a distinctly Southern path in the decades after the war.

Following annexation, Texas remained a magnet for immigrants seeking new beginnings. The first federal census taken in Texas in 1850 revealed that 212,000 persons (including slaves) inhabited the state. This population was ethnically and culturally diverse, but as Table 5.1 on population origins shows, Anglo Americans from the southern United States accounted for more than half of all Texas residents.

Actually, the South provided two different streams of immigrants. People from the Lower South—the states from South Carolina west to Louisiana along the Gulf Coast—clustered in eastern and southeastern Texas. Not surprisingly, this section of the state hosted commercial farms that used slave labor to grow cotton, sugar, and rice. In contrast, inhabitants from the Upper South—the border states separating the Deep South from the North, ranging westward from Virginia to Missouri and Arkansas—gravitated toward the north and north-central counties of Texas. Most of these people ran family farms, depending less on cotton and more on the production of foodstuffs, primarily corn and wheat.

The 1850 census also listed Anglo Texans who had come from states outside the South—some 10,000 of them. The largest number of these persons hailed from the Midwest; fewer had arrived from New England or the mid-Atlantic states.
Table 5.1 Origins of the Texas Population, 1850

| GROUP                      | NUMBER | PERCENT OF STATE TOTAL | PERCENT OF GROUP LIVING IN URBAN AREAS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Anglo-American</td>
<td>114,040</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Anglo-American</td>
<td>9,965</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negro</td>
<td>58,558</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish-surname</td>
<td>11,212</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-surname</td>
<td>1,071</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German element</td>
<td>11,534</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other foreign elements</td>
<td>3,900</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,512</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The Seventh Census of the United States, 1850

*“Urban” includes towns of 1,000 or more population that were listed in census.

*Includes the Texas-born children of northern Anglo-Americans.

*Includes both slave and free colored.

*Includes American-born with Spanish or French surname.

*Includes foreign-born persons and their American-born offspring.

*Includes all persons who were born in California and the Territories or whose origins could not be determined.


Ironically, Texas Mexicans already found themselves relegated to numerical insignificance, constituting only about 5 percent of the total population in 1850. They remained concentrated in their original cultural strongholds of the Béxar-Goliad region and South Texas (on the rancherías along the Rio Grande).

The Germans who had arrived in Texas in the mid-1840s as part of colonization programs such as the Adelsverein Society added to the diversity of the state’s population. By 1847, the society had transported 7,000 Germans to Texas, and John O. Meusebach had founded the town of Fredericksburg. Henri Castro brought some 2,000 immigrants (including numerous experienced farmers) many of whom were from the France-Germany border region of Alsace-Lorraine. Other Germans had come to Texas on their own initiative, and by 1850 the German-descent population stood at around 11,500. By this time, German rural communities stretched along an ethnic corridor extending from the coast, at Galveston, through the towns of San Antonio and Austin, and on to western counties such as Gillespie, Mason, and Kerr.

Other European groups added to the growing pluralism of the state’s population. Irish settlements along the coastal counties of San Patricio and Refugio, which traced their origins to Mexican land grants, were prospering as of 1850. Immigrants from the United Kingdom at midcentury totaled approximately 2,900. Norwegians, numbering about 100 in 1850, lived in north-central Texas in counties such as Kaufman, Van Zandt, and Henderson, and in a little colony they founded in Bosque County in 1854.

On the eve of the Civil War, the Texas population had tripled to more than 604,000. Its growth since 1850 had been dramatic, and the cultural diversity and
Rural Growth

Under Mexico, Texas had been shaped by the basic premise of Mexican federalism: the state and not the federal government should administer the state’s public domain. Desiring to perpetuate that tradition, Texas had insisted upon retaining its public lands under the terms of annexation. As a state, therefore, Texas perpetuated the land policy of the republic and thereby continued to attract immigrants. In 1854, the legislature passed the Texas Preemption Act, through which the state offered homesteaders 160-acre parcels of land for as little as fifty cents an acre (as compared to the concurrent U.S. price of $1.25 an acre).

Throughout the 1850s, Texas remained primarily an agrarian society. In 1850, there were 12,107 farms in the state; this number leaped to 35,563 by 1860. During that same decade, the number of improved acres rose from 639,821 to 2,590,895. The production of cotton increased from about 58,000 bales in 1849 to 431,463 bales in 1859. While sugar and wool increasingly became cash commodities raised in Texas, cotton remained the state’s staple.

Cotton thrived on plantations, the largest units located in the area extending from the lower valley of the Colorado River to the Sabine, a region populated by settlers from the Lower South. Between 1848 and the eve of the Civil War, lands worked by slaves produced lucrative returns for planters, the profits auguring the westward expansion of cotton and slavery. It must be understood, however, that only about one-third of all Texas farms at midcentury had slaves as part of their workforce and that Texans constituting a planter elite (landholders who owned more than 100 slaves) amounted to a small minority. In reality, the 20 percent of planters heading the list of slave owners held 96 percent of the entire Texas slave population. Most Texas slave owners held fewer than five bondpeople.

And not all of those who wrested their living from the soil relied on cotton. As mentioned, north and north central Texas farmers grew wheat, oats, and other foodstuffs, an agricultural pattern resembling that of the Upper South. In the part of the state extending from the Brazos River west to the frontier beyond San Antonio, Anglo landowners using slave labor coexisted with small farmers (mostly European) who cultivated vegetables, grains, and fruits, engaged in viticulture (wine-making), and delved into ranching. Over time, many of the small farmers of this region, among them Germans, slowly accepted the nuances of southern culture and began to support chattel slavery.

The ranch retained its economic importance, primarily along the Coastal Prairie but also in the southern portions of the Piney Woods and northeastern counties. Te-
Janos continued to ranch along the Rio Grande border, but as Anglos drifted into the area in the wake of the war with Mexico, disputes over the ownership of cattle and ranchlands arose between the two peoples. Among the newcomers who built cattle-ranching empires in the region were H. L. Kinney, Richard King, and Mifflin Kenedy.

From the three early settings of Anglo cattle ranching in eastern Texas, ranchers during the 1850s migrated southwest toward the Guadalupe, San Antonio, and Nueces river valleys—rich pasturelands dominated by Tejano ranchers as late as 1836. Ranching also pushed into the central-western frontier of the state towards the counties of the western Cross Timbers, among them Eastland, Erath, Comanche, and Palo Pinto, as well as into the Upper Hill Country counties of San Saba, Lampasas, Llano, and Mason. With this spread, ranching traditions originally imported from the southeastern seaboard of the United States made their way westward.

**Urban Industrialization**

As of 1850, only 10 percent of Texans lived in towns with a population greater than 100 people. Galveston was the largest town in Texas, with a population of 5,000. Its location on the Gulf made it a natural center for shipping, storage, and wholesale commerce, though the port city also sustained itself through manufacturing, banking, and cotton compressing. Only four other towns had a population of more than 1,000 at this time. In order of size they were: San Antonio, which acted as a point of departure for passenger stage coaches and freight-company wagons heading for Mexico and California; Houston, an inland port that acted as a conduit to the Gulf; New Braunfels; and Marshall. Austin, the seat of government, had barely 600 inhabitants at midcentury. But even the largest Texas towns lacked the comforts and conveniences generally associated with urban living. Crudely built or improvised one- or two-room structures acted as stores or municipal buildings, and such urban amenities as libraries, theaters, and recreational facilities were conspicuously absent.

By 1860, the number of Texas communities boasting a population of more than 1,000 had increased to twenty, and San Antonio, with 8,000 inhabitants, had surpassed Galveston as the state's largest city. North Texas still had no major city by the onset of the Civil War; not even Dallas showed prospects of its eventual role as a commercial and financial center.

Urban economics reflected the state's agrarian basis. Cotton, sugar, and wool constituted the main urban exports. Industry was in its infancy. The iron foundries of Galveston and Houston ranked among the major industrial employers in Texas, yet neither employed more than forty people. At the beginning of the Civil War, therefore, the state's economy more closely resembled the South's than that of the urbanized industrial North. In comparison to New York and Pennsylvania, each of which boasted more than 22,000 manufacturing establishments, Texas had few industrial plants—only 983, which averaged about four workers each.

**Transportation**

Conditions for travel remained as poor as they had been during the period of the republic, which slowed a nonetheless growing economy. The state government entrusted internal improvements to the counties, but inadequate resources com-
pelled local authorities to let bad roads languish. Besides the sorry shape of the roads, few bridges existed. Water travel remained problematic, for the rivers were shallow and narrow in sections and often clogged with debris, and navigation into the Gulf remained treacherous.

Travel by stagecoach was not much better. In the early period of statehood, it continued mostly as an intrastate mode of transportation, moving passengers, mail, and light freight. By the onset of the Civil War, thirty-one lines handled stage traffic within Texas. After the discovery of gold in California, entrepreneurs founded stagecoach lines between San Antonio and far-off El Paso, but not until 1857 did the first interstate line, the San Antonio–San Diego (California) Mail Line, begin business, though its coaches usually experienced horrendous difficulties along the way to the West Coast. To cross the 100 miles of the Colorado Desert (in south-
eastern California), for example, passengers had to transfer from the coaches to muleback. For obvious reasons, the company quickly earned the epithet of the "Jackass Line." In 1858 the dependable Butterfield Overland Mail Company followed up with another stage line from Texas to California. During the Civil War, stagecoach operations between Texas and the West Coast ceased regular service.

Freight haulers battled inclement weather and other obstacles as they attempted to move goods on their mule- or ox-drawn wagons between San Antonio or Austin and the Gulf Coast. Nonetheless, hundreds of freighting teams operated during the 1850s, many of them handled by Tejanos who earned a reputation as excellent arrieros (teamsters). Because of their skill and lower charges, Texas Mexicans briefly dominated the transportation of food and merchandise between the interior and the Gulf.

Railroad building in Texas lagged behind that of other states in the 1850s. At midcentury, when the total railroad mileage of the United States stood at 9,021, Texas had virtually no tracks. A modest start was made in 1853, when the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos & Colorado Railway Company commenced operation on thirty miles of track between Harrisburg and Richmond in central Fort Bend County; the line continued expanding until 1861, by which time it had reached Brazoria County. Then, in 1854, the state government sought to further railroad building by passing a law that offered railroad construction companies sixteen sections of public land (or 10,240 acres) for every mile of track they laid. This effort proved ineffectual. By 1860, the state still only had about 400 miles of track, much of it stretching from Houston to inland terminals along the Brazos, Colorado, and Trinity rivers.

**Texas Society at Midcentury**

**Inequality**

Judging from the pace of immigration and the increase in population, many people perceived Texas as a land of opportunity. Not everyone's expectations were fulfilled. Recent studies on antebellum Texas indicate that the egalitarian ideal in Texas was mythical, although the same could be said for the South or the nation in general.

The census of 1850 disclosed a sharp inequality in the distribution of wealth among the free population of Texas, and the pattern persisted throughout the next decade. At midcentury, most of the state's real and personal property (including slaves) and total wealth lay in the hands of a small elite that constituted less than 10 percent of all Texans; this group seems to have expanded slightly by 1860. On the eve of the Civil War, 7.1 percent of the population held 56 percent of state's wealth. Slave owners in particular were among the wealthiest Texans, given their high investment in cash-crop farming. Moreover, they exerted undue political influence, for they held a disproportionately large number of political offices.

Obviously, there also existed a large body of Texan plain folk who did not share the available wealth. Protest against economic inequalities was apparently neutralized, however, by opportunities for upward advancement, the ability of free adult (Anglo) males to express opinions at the ballot box, and the equalizing forces of the frontier, which, as mentioned, tended to deemphasize class consciousness.
Labor organizations, one traceable indication of widespread discontent, surfaced only faintly. Several workingmen's associations appeared during early statehood, but no labor unions were founded in the state between 1838 and 1857. Then, in 1857, pressmen employed by two Galveston newspapers unionized and asked for pay increases. In 1860, Galveston carpenters organized Carpenters Local No. 7, but they primarily concerned themselves with altruistic activities such as mutual assistance, as did the printers' union (which had not received its requested wage hike). Otherwise, labor unionism hardly existed in Texas by 1860. The relative absence of industrial development, the small number of workers concentrated in manufacturing enterprises, and the faith that many workers had in upward mobility made Texas infertile ground for the growth of labor unions.

On the other hand, there remained as part of the cultural landscape those people whom modern-day social scientists classify as minorities; many found their opportunities to acquire property restricted, their chances for upward mobility limited, and avenues for legitimately expressing their discontent firmly blocked. Black slaves (and free blacks), Mexican Americans (Tejanos), and the people of the Indian nations then being forcibly removed from their ancient lands comprised the state's minorities.

**Black Texans**

Free blacks enjoyed no better standing during the early era of statehood than they had during the days of the republic. Only about 350 free blacks resided in the state according to the 1860 federal census, though one newspaper put the figure unofficially at about 1,000. The status of these people remained ill-defined: they possessed no civil rights before the law, and their presence continued to be unwelcome by the white majority.

Although only a handful of blacks lived as free persons, the number of blacks in Texas increased rapidly. In 1850, the U.S. census counted 58,161 blacks in Texas; the next census listed 182,566. The increase made slaves the fastest-growing segment of the population; indeed, slaves constituted more than 30 percent of the state's inhabitants by 1860. Most enslaved persons lived in East Texas, an area inhabited predominantly by people originally from other parts of the South. Three identifiable regions—the bottoms of the Brazos and Colorado rivers east towards the Houston area, the counties along the Sabine and (middle) Trinity rivers, and the fertile lands along the Red River—contained large concentrations of slaves on the eve of the Civil War.

In the fifteen years before 1860, slavery in Texas persisted for various reasons, primarily because it proved profitable. Indeed, Texans during the 1850s considered slavery as essential to the economic survival of the state and even predicted for Texas a future as a slave empire. Throughout the state, bondpeople were considered a form of capital. Texas society recognized slaves as valuable assets, to the extent that they could be converted to cash even more readily than could real estate. Planters used slaves to earn extra income (by hiring their work out), to negotiate loans (by using them as collateral), to acquire currency in emergency situations, to pay off debts, to exchange for land, or to bequeath to heirs. The government, moreover, turned to slaves as a source for
raising revenue. Since the law considered slaves a species of property, masters paid taxes on their slaves, just as they would on their land and range animals.

Slave labor brought planters great wealth during the 1840s and 1850s. In the eastern third of the state, slaves annually picked cotton crops that yielded substantial financial dividends, and cotton production as part of the state’s market economy far exceeded the value of other commodities such as corn, wheat, oats, vegetables, cattle, hogs, mules, and horses. At the same time, slavery and the cotton harvest stimulated related sectors of the economy, for planters needed grains, slaughter animals, and certain manufactured goods to run their plantations.

But Texans, like their counterparts in the Lower South, also saw slavery as a necessary means to restrain a people of color. Whites in antebellum Texas viewed themselves as virtuous, compassionate, and pious; they viewed slaves in the other extreme, as a people inclined to be dirty, evil, lascivious, paganish, depraved, and bestial—connotations associated with the color black in European culture. These attitudes, reinforced by racist thinking that Africans were an inferior and inassimilable people, helped slave owners rationalize the need for a system of repression and justify their abhorrent treatment of other human beings. In the eyes of many Texans (and other southerners), slavery even benefited those enslaved, by uplifting them from the “primitivism” of life in the African homeland. Hence, slavery necessarily fueled racism as long as it existed.

As to the legality of slavery, the Constitution of 1845 considered Texas slaves personal property that could be bought, sold, and separated from their families at the will of the owners. The document defined slavery as a perpetual condition, and it forbade blacks from marrying or forming a family, bearing arms, assembling, or using the courts in a case involving a white person. To control slaves, the law specified the allowance of whippings for those found guilty of crimes such as petty theft or violating the rules of “proper” public behavior, such as insulting a white person. If a slave committed a heinous crime, the law called for the administration of the death penalty, and whites often used lynch law in retribution for a host of real or suspected infractions.

While bondage revolved around the exploitation of human beings, the peculiar institution was never, neither in urban areas nor on the plantations, so totalitarian that it denied slaves the ability to develop their own social identity. Conversely, African American culture capably dealt with the cruelty of slavery. From Christianity, slaves borrowed those tenets that assured them that all humankind was equal before the Lord and worthy of God’s forgiveness and redemption. The hope that they, along with the white master, had an equal chance for achieving God’s reward lessened the worldly burden that slavery cast upon them. In death, at least, they would find the freedom that eluded them in life.

In their family structure, slaves arranged social units. While not recognized by law, family ties were legitimized within slave society in a variety of ways, including the common ritual of having an engaged couple symbolize their marriage by jumping in unison over a broomstick. The slave family was an important source of defense (offering individuals love, kinship support, and self-worth) against the dehumanizing evil of slavery, including the physical and sexual abuse of their
family members by white masters. And blacks were quick to take advantage of slave owners’ attitudes toward certain facts of the human condition: planters allowed informal marriages and encouraged the creation of families, for this led to reproduction (and hence to more valuable property for the owner), gave masters greater control over their slaves (by instilling in them the fear that something bad might befall—at the master’s behest—a loved one should they disobey), and made workers tractable, dutiful, and more productive (because familial relationships naturally made them happier). Within slave family arrangements, fathers and mothers sought to assert their respective roles. Husbands supplemented the family meal by hunting and fishing or taking on odd jobs, when the master permitted it. Wives tended to the many (and demanding) domestic duties in the slave household, although only after having finished their assigned work.

Many slaves did not resign themselves to complete submission to slavery. To be sure, some coped by not resisting at all, even accepting the scriptures of slavery and respecting the wishes of their masters. Others compromised with the institution but worked out personal understandings of life that helped them preserve a sense of self-worth. But most bondpeople displayed their discontent in several subversive forms. Thousands ran away from Texas plantations, some of them heading south to Mexico, others to the southern states—their place of birth—to look for loved ones. Others sabotaged the institution by causing mischief, purposely breaking tools, burning sheds, maiming or killing the plantation’s domesticated animals, or simply slowing down on the job.

The most desperate display of slave discontent was the slave rebellion. Although no record exists of major slave risings in ante-bellum Texas, a wave of insurrection hysteria passed over the state in the 1850s, culminating in 1860 with what is known as the “Texas Troubles.” This episode, instigated during the summer of 1860 by a string of suspicious fires in northern Texas (including blazes in Dallas and Fort Worth), led whites to fear that slaves, encouraged by abolitionists, were fomenting a widespread insurrection. Scholars have yet to prove the actual existence of an organized plot, but about ten white men (many of them from the northern United States) and more than thirty African Americans were executed for their alleged roles in the so-called conspiracy before the statewide paranoia subsided.

**Mexican Americans**

Also largely excluded from wealth and opportunity in midcentury Texas were persons of Mexican descent, who, according to some estimates, numbered anywhere from 13,900 to 23,200 (including those in the El Paso area). Since 1836, Tejanos had tried to find a niche in Anglo Texan society by accepting elements of the new order. But because of racial prejudice and the dominant group’s need to maintain them as part of a pliable and inexpensive labor force, Tejanos faced constant obstacles in their quest for equality.

Harassment and violence such as had occurred in the aftermath of the war for independence continued into the period of statehood. From several towns of Central Texas, Mexicans were banished on suspicion of having assisted runaway slaves in reaching freedom in Mexico. In 1857, Anglo-American freighters
launched hostile action against Mexican American teamsters, their major competitors in transporting goods from the interior to the Gulf. In what became known as the Cart War, Anglos destroyed the arrieros’ carts, confiscated their cargo, sabotaged their equipment, and murdered some of the drivers. The violence ended only after the Mexican government, the U.S. secretary of state, and volunteer Texas companies interceded to restore order. Following the episode, the Mexicans recovered a share of their old business, although the technology of the post–Civil War era would soon make traffic by cart an outmoded concern.

Similar episodes of interracial friction occurred in South Texas between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, an area that ambitious Anglos began entering in force following the war with Mexico, displacing Tejanos from their lands and traditional positions of influence. Resentment against the interlopers finally produced violent conflict in Brownsville, sparked by an encounter in 1859 at a city cafe between the town’s marshal and Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, a local ranchero and the descendant of old grantees on the border. Cortina resented whites for their racist sentiments toward Mexicans, for the way they used the courts to dispossess Mexican Americans of their rightfully owned land, and for their determined drive to supplant the local Mexican American leadership of the South Texas political structure. When on the morning of July 13 the marshal hurled racial epithets at Cortina as he came to the defense of an elderly ranch hand whom the marshal was in the process of beating, the rancher drew his gun and shot and wounded the lawman. Things simmered down for a while, but Cortina returned to Brownsville on September 29, bent on avenging old wrongs inflicted on the Mexican people. He killed two whites (whom Cortina believed had been involved in the deaths of Mexican Americans), then in two proclamations, issued from his mother’s ranch upriver from Brownsville, denounced all those engaged in persecuting Tejanos. Mexican Americans rallied to his cause (and others to his banner), viewing Cortina as a champion fighting the injustice of the whites. But

Leneros, Tejano wood haulers with their donkeys. Photo by Duncan Texas State Library and Archives Commission #73-1028.
Texas Rangers and federal troops finally suppressed the so-called Cortina War early in 1860. The whole incident resulted, however, in a number of tragic deaths, some property damage, and an enduring trend of racial distrust and antagonism.

**American Indians**

Also existing on the fringes of white society were the state’s Native Americans. While all Texas Indian groups maintained an interest in trading with whites, they also expected to be left alone to farm or hunt in their traditional territories—something that became increasingly difficult as settlers continued to encroach upon their lands. By the late 1840s, whites had pushed the line of settlement so far west that the federal government, now responsible for protecting what had become U.S. frontiers, established in 1849 a cordon of military forts stretching from modern-day...
Tarrant County to Eagle Pass in southwestern Texas. Westward expansion moved so swiftly, however, that in the early 1850s the military established another line of defense even deeper into Indian lands, this one composed of Forts Belknap (in Young County), Phantom Hill (north of Abilene), Chadbourne (in today's Coke County), McKittrick (in what is now Menard County), Terrett (midway between the present-day towns of Junction and Sonora), and Clark (near Brackettville). In order to guard travelers en route to El Paso, Forts Lancaster, Stockton, Davis, and Quitman were built in extreme West Texas. As of 1860, the westernmost boundaries of the state extended for more than 500 miles, from the Red River (the settlement of Henrietta) to the Rio Grande border (the village of Eagle Pass).

To guarantee Indian autonomy on some of the Comanche land, the U.S. Indian agent in Texas, Major Robert Simpson Neighbors, recommended establishing reservations; this, he reasoned, would allow westering settlers to bypass the Indian farm communities. The state legislature concurred, and in 1854 it made as much as 53,136 acres available to the federal government for the foundation of two such reservations that were to become the new “homelands” for about 1,500 Texas Indians. The Brazos (or Lower) Reserve was established in present-day Young County (close to Fort Belknap) for some of the Norteños such as the Caddos, Tawakonis, Wacos, and Tonkawas. The Comanche (or Upper) Reserve was founded farther west, on the lower Clear Fork of the Brazos River in what is now Throckmorton County, for the Comanches.

The reservation plan met with mixed success. On the Brazos Reserve, the Norteño tribes willingly and successfully farmed, attended school, raised livestock, and frequently assisted the military authorities in campaigns against the Comanches. The idea of living on a reservation appealed to some Comanches, but most of them had no desire to live penned up as the whites’ dependents, and they continued to raid farmsteads. The settlers’ encroachments (which were fast ruining Comanche hunting grounds) threatened the way of life to which these Indians clung. Angry at the holdouts, the state and the federal governments pursued a more aggressive policy toward the marauders, mustering Texas Rangers and civilian volunteer units for a new Indian offensive. These forces took the fight north of the Red River to the very camping grounds of the Plains people. Captain John S. “Rip” Ford, for one, led an expedition into the Comanche strongholds in northwestern Oklahoma, his forces decisively winning a battle at the Canadian River on May 12, 1858. The victory, the first in which whites had shown the power to damage the Comanches, infuriated the warriors and only hardened their resolve to resist. Subsequently, Texas settlers experienced frightening retaliation for Ford’s triumph and other battles won by federal troops in the Comanche ranges north of the Texas border.

Clashes between Indians and whites continued even more frequently throughout 1858 and into 1859. Some of the Indians found it difficult to adjust to changes from their traditional nomadic lifestyle. Whites, suspecting the nearby reservation Indians—instead of the hostile northern tribes—of stealing their horses and livestock and scalp-lining and murdering whites on the western and northern regions of the state, began to call for the eviction of the Indians from the reservations. Carrying their threats further, they waylaid and killed those Indians who ventured
out of the sanctuaries, even when the Indians had the permission of U.S. military authorities to be off their reservation. In May 1859, a band of some 300 Anglo vigilantes led by former Indian agent John R. Baylor, an inveterate Indian-hater, attacked the Brazos Reserve. Baylor’s actions convinced the military authorities that the experiment with reservations had failed. Its hand forced by the wave of lawless hostility, the federal government closed down the Texas reservations in 1859 and transferred the internees to western Indian Territory (Oklahoma). Shortly thereafter, not satisfied with having driven the Indians from Texas, Baylor’s ruffians assassinated the sympathetic Indian agent Robert Neighbors in the village of Belknap.

On the eve of the Civil War, the only Indians allowed to maintain an official presence in Texas were the peaceable Alabamas and Coushattas, for whom the legislature provided a small reservation in southeast Texas. Meanwhile, the north and western frontier line of settlement continued to scorch, as Kiowa—an Indian people from the northern Plains who first appeared in the Texas Panhandle in the early nineteenth century—and Comanche raiding parties stepped up their strikes, inflicting more attacks on Texans than they had in the prior decade.

Women

The Texas population at midcentury consisted predominately of youthful individuals, a characteristic generally associated with frontier environments; some 77 percent of resident Texans were under forty years of age according to the census of 1850. Also indicative of a frontier setting were skewed sex ratios: men in 1850 outnumbered women by 15,704, and in 1860 by 36,000. This sexual imbalance, along with the lax social controls of a sparsely settled frontier, could not help but influence the nature of midcentury Texas society. Many marriages were, in large measure, the product of economic necessity. But with women in such short supply, Texas was less patriarchal than the older states “back east.” In Texas, women found it easier to dissolve or abandon unhappy unions. A greater spirit of male-female cooperation often existed, and women, who worked to ensure such things as the efficient functioning of the farm, were often permitted to cross into decidedly male roles. Influenced by Hispanic legal precedents, the laws of antebellum Texas enhanced the economic autonomy of women.

These same factors also help to explain why interracial mixing between white men and women of color occurred more commonly in the antebellum period than it did after the Civil War. Although an 1837 law voided marriages between blacks and whites, sex between partners of the two races was not made a felony until 1858. Pairings, legal and otherwise, between white men and Tejano or Indian women remained common and generally tolerated.

Still, women of all races faced a hard lot that included starting a family at a young age and then caring for it through sickness and all manner of misery. Simultaneously, women tended to household chores and helped perform those tasks essential for frontier survival, including the construction of the family dwelling (which at midcentury generally consisted of little more than four make-shift walls, a roof,
dirt floors, and improvised accommodations), hunting and fishing, working stock, clearing fields, cultivating crops, and fighting off raids by Indians and desperadoes. Despite the liberating tendencies of the frontier, the Texas heritage remained basically masculine and discriminatory. The male-dominated culture held firmly to the belief that women should remain subordinate to men, and thus it restricted women's political, legal, social, and economic activities. Although the women of Texas enjoyed certain legal rights based on the U.S. legal system as well as the (more equitable) Hispanic tradition that persisted following 1836, the norms of the period limited their privileges. Women still could not vote or sit on juries, nor were they permitted to take the pulpit or speak in public forums. Nonetheless, a handful of women during the 1850s participated in such reform causes as the abolitionist and women's rights movements, among them Melinda Rankin, a New England Presbyterian missionary working in South Texas, whence she denounced slavery, and Elise Wacrenskjold, an immigrant from Norway who became an activist for abolition and the rights of women. Married women could not be assured of the guardianship of their children in cases of divorce, and they lacked full control of their own earnings, though the Constitution of 1845 did declare that properties acquired by women before and after marriage were theirs—and not their husbands’—to claim. Texas law during this period also provided that property and income accrued by a couple during marriage became community property. Consequently, a few Texas women went on to amass sizable fortunes during the antebellum period.
**Education**

Public education in Texas at midcentury remained in its nascency, with no overwhelming improvements having been made since the period of the republic. The Constitution of 1845 entrusted the legislature with reserving one-tenth of tax revenues for a “perpetual” school fund, but efforts toward carrying out the constitutional mandate of establishing a statewide system of free public schools moved slowly. Finally, in 1854, Governor Elisha M. Pease (1853–57) signed into law an educational measure with several provisions. One created a permanent education endowment of $2 million to be derived from the $10 million that the United States had given Texas as a part of a settlement in 1850 whereby the state surrendered its claim to territory in New Mexico. Another section of the law provided that schools be made available to all Texas children in common (from which concept the label “common schools” derives) and mandated the creation of schools for the hearing and visually impaired in 1856. Another act of the legislature in 1858 provided for the creation of a university (which ultimately became the University of Texas) by appropriating for the institution, among other things, 3 million acres of public land.

Little of substance came from these efforts. The permanent fund grew slowly and never amounted to enough to pay teachers’ salaries and construct school buildings. Although the facilities for the handicapped opened in 1857, these institutions progressed but slowly. The government maintained the university endowment, but it took little action to establish a university campus until much later.

**Newspapers and Literature**

Although the condition of public education remained weak, newspapers, at least, helped perpetuate literacy, keeping the public abreast of political controversies and current events. Indeed, the number of presses increased measurably during the 1850s. While only nine papers actively reported before 1845, the U.S. census of 1860 counted eighty-nine Texas-based newspapers and periodicals. The *Telegraph and Texas Register* remained the state’s best-known newspaper, but few frontier communities lacked access to a local newspaper. In the ethnic communities, German and Spanish presses published papers in the native language of their readership. Among these were the *New Braunfels Zeitung* and the *San Antonio El Bejarano*.

Literature produced in the 1840s and 1850s mirrored the rural and frontier nature of the state. Instead of the Romanticism that characterized the literature of the northern United States, mundane themes marked Texas writing: travel logs, histories, and journals of personal adventure are thus overrepresented. Out of this era, however, came the state’s first major resident historian, Henderson K. Yoakum. In his *History of Texas* (1855), Yoakum portrayed Texas as a people nourished by American democratic institutions and possessed of an industry and energy then breaking a path for civilization and republican institutions. To Yoakum, Texans were ably helping to fulfill the United States’ manifest destiny.

Ethnic and women writers also contributed to the early development of Texas literature. Melinda Rankin’s *Texas in 1850*, Juan N. Seguin’s *Personal Memoirs of John N. Seguin*, *From the Year 1834 to the Retreat of General Wool from the City of San*


**Statehood and Secession**

*Antonio, 1842,* and Ferdinand Roemer's *Texas,* first published in German in 1849, all possess historical significance. Several Europeans also wrote books about their impressions of midcentury Texas.

**Religion**

Religious activity at midcentury, while lacking the force of the religious movements that overtook the northern United States during the 1830s and 1840s, sustained an evangelical impulse. Since the 1820s, Protestant preachers had seen in Texas a society of sinners in dire need of spiritual rescue, a place ripe for the establishment of institutions to carry on the struggle against Satan. By the time of annexation, the largest denominations in terms of size of congregations were (in descending order) Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics, and Episcopalians.

The Protestants taught a southern and conservative brand of religion that stressed humankind's imperfections and the need for individuals to improve themselves and develop a personal relationship with God. More concerned with people heeding the precepts of the Christian faith, Protestants in Texas did not generally call on their flocks to address social issues or engage in reform crusades. Consequently, Protestantism in Texas differed from the evangelical Protestantism in the North, which emphasized the amelioration of society.

As part of their work in Texas, churches established Sunday schools and other educational institutions. Most of the latter had short lives, but some survived the era of early statehood. Among those founded during the period that have proved durable are: “Old Baylor,” opened by the Baptists in 1845 in the small town of Independence and then moved in 1887 to its permanent site in Waco; Austin College, established in 1849 by the Presbyterian Church in Huntsville but relocated to Sherman in 1878; and St. Mary’s University, a Catholic facility that began operation in 1852 in San Antonio.

Although it might be presumed that clergymen of the time would have tended to shy away from public discussions of the morality of slavery, to the contrary, most chimed in with the majority opinion that regarded slavery as a necessary institution and one beneficial to an “inferior” race. Actually, very few Texans dared denounce the peculiar institution, although some Tejanos (as mentioned) took matters into their own hands and escorted fugitive bondpeople to Mexico. Most Texans joined the proslavery camp that upheld the institution's necessity, its righteousness, and its benefit to those enslaved.

**Texas Politics at Midcentury**

**Sectional Troubles**

For Texans in the 1840s, there was reason for confidence and optimism. Their state had been newly accepted into the Union, the former diplomat James Pinckney Henderson had been elected governor, and no less than Sam Houston served as one of their two United States senators. Furthermore, Texas had reason to share in an expanding national pride. The United States now stretched to the Pacific Ocean, and gold from California swelled the national money supply.
But annexation also held pitfalls, for the issues that threatened to tear the Union asunder in the late 1840s also roiled the new state. Many in the northern United States wanted the federal government to abolish slavery and the slave trade in Washington, D.C., while most southerners demanded the passage of a stronger fugitive slave law that would permit slave owners to retrieve runaways who had fled to the North. Issues created by the war with Mexico burned more portentously. Was slavery going to exist in the territories acquired from Mexico? Southerners said yes, northerners said no. The expansion of California following the gold rush of 1849 forced another related question: Should California join the Union as a free or a slave state? Connected also to the aftereffects of the war with Mexico was the question of the western boundary of Texas: Was it to be the Rio Grande, as Texans and southerners argued, or was much of New Mexico to be excluded?

In January 1850, Henry Clay, a senator from Kentucky, proposed a compromise bill in the United States Congress. According to Clay’s settlement offer: the slave trade would end in the nation’s capital; the legislature would pass a strong fugitive slave law; the territories acquired from Mexico would be organized without prohibiting the importation of slaves into those regions; and California would be admitted into the Union as a free state. On the issue of Texas and New Mexico, Clay recommended that Texas be denied claims to lands extending westward to the Rio Grande in New Mexico, but that it be compensated for relinquishing those claims. At first, Texans denounced the idea of giving up any part of New Mexico, but reason replaced misgiving when negotiators proposed that Texas’s western boundary would extend due east from the Rio Grande along the 32nd parallel to the 103rd line of longitude and up along this meridian to the 36° 30’ line. (This plan established the state’s modern boundaries in that area.) To indemnify the state for relinquishing its New Mexican claims, the federal government would give Texas $10 million. In this offer, the state saw the opportunity to receive money that finally would erase the public debt incurred during the period of the republic. Texans endorsed the plan in a referendum in November 1850, thus supporting the measures that President Millard Fillmore had signed into law in September as part of Clay’s Compromise of 1850.
Throughout the first half of the 1850s, at least, Texans had reason to expect a sanguine future. Removed from the rest of the nation by a long distance traversable only by a rudimentary infrastructure, and preoccupied with their own internal problem of defense against the Indians, Texans did not feel as keenly the turmoil of the era as did the other slave states. Location, demographic diversity, and other factors distinctive to Texas acted to blunt the severity of the sectional issues sizzling throughout the rest of the United States.

Whigs, Democrats, Know-Nothings, and Republicans

Although the controversies of the 1850s influenced the Deep South more than they did Texas, the state was by no means free of political conflict. Traditionally, Texans had adhered to the principles of the Democratic party, though before 1848 candidates ran more on their personality and reputation than on party platform. Texans had always associated the Democrats with Andrew Jackson and Sam Houston, both war heroes who embodied the ideology of the triumph of the common man.

Although the Democratic party would remain well-entrenched as the party of the majority in Texas, in the mid-1850s it began to depart from its Jacksonian foundation. This restructuring owed its impetus to numerous factors, the foremost of which was reaction to the establishment of the Whig party in Texas. Though active only temporarily in the late 1840s and early 1850s, the Whig party’s strength lay mainly in urban counties, where southern Whiggery found support among the planter, mercantile, and professional classes. Economic expansion, internal improvements, banking to enhance a business climate, loyalty to the Union, an emphasis on nationhood, and a call to heed core American and Protestant values served as the rallying points for Texas Whigs.

While successful in local elections, doing well in 1848 and 1852, the state Whig party was handicapped by the stand the national party had taken against annexation and the war with Mexico, by President Zachary Taylor’s and then President Millard Fillmore’s (both Whigs) hostility to the claims Texas made to territory in New Mexico, and by the northern wing’s support for abolition. Indeed, the slavery issue of the 1850s ultimately undid the Whig party. Though it declined, the party had for the moment mobilized those Texas Unionists fearful of the Union’s breakup.

A second factor prodding the restructuring of the Democratic party was the appearance of an upstart organization called the Know-Nothings. Like the national American party to which it belonged, the Texas wing of the Know-Nothings (a sobriquet that had lingered from earlier times when many Know-Nothings had belonged to a secret fraternal order that admonished them to reply “I know nothing” when asked to divulge the order’s secrets) drew its backing from nativists, anti-Catholics, Democrat-haters, Unionists, and other nationalistic elements. Obviously, natural opponents of the Know-Nothings included Mexicans and Germans, whom the nativist party perceived as culturally un-American because of their Catholic religion and foreign origins (the Know-Nothings also saw these groups as radicals due to their stand against slavery). The Know-Nothings also distrusted
Democrats, whom they believed had threatened the structure of the Union by inflaming sectional passions in the territories following passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854). Viewing itself as the defender of the Union, the Know-Nothing party painted the Democrats as perpetrators of the internecine conflict. Other, disparate groups alarmed by the events of the 1850s found elements of the Know-Nothing platform attractive. Many persons in the commercial centers of East Texas switched over, for businesspeople feared that the current partisan rivalry would imperil the region’s economic stability. Furthermore, Know-Nothing support for state banks and federally subsidized programs of internal improvements appealed to planters, lawyers, and merchants. The presence of the federal military in such western areas as San Antonio financially benefited local businesspeople and added strength to Know Nothingism, for if Texas left the Union, the federal troops would be withdrawn. Finally, others sympathized with Know-Nothing sentiments without formally joining the party. In the election of 1854, the party won mavoral offices in San Antonio, Austin, and Galveston. Even Sam Houston, concerned over increased talk of the breakup of the Union, came to endorse and support some of the party’s beliefs in 1855. But Know-Nothingism proved to be a temporary phenomenon, for the slavery question divided the national Know-Nothing party just as it had the Whigs. The party’s presidential defeat in 1856 dealt it a blow from which it never recovered.

A third factor dividing the Democratic party related to the increased influence of the Lower South culture in Texas. Know-Nothings had siphoned off Unionist Democrats such as Sam Houston, thereby leaving southerners in control of the state party. This in part had allowed Hardin R. Runnels, who favored reopening the slave trade, to overcome Houston’s challenge for the governorship in 1857. Deep South Democrats, a few of them “fire-eaters” advocating immediate, unconditional secession from the Union, defended slavery as essential to the preservation of the southern way of life, championed white supremacy as a standard of race relations, guarded the doctrine of southern states’ rights, endorsed the ambitions of the Knights of the Golden Circle (a group based in Texas but committed to founding a slaveholding empire in the United States, the Caribbean, and parts of Latin America), and condemned the upstart (northern) Republican party.

The growing vigor of the national Republican party further weakened the Texas Democrats’ cohesiveness—not because white Texans disagreed over the danger that an antislavery party posed to the South, but rather because they disagreed over the best way to counter the republican threat. Born from the controversy surrounding the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act—which in 1854 opened the question of expanding the southern lifestyle into Kansas and Nebraska by allowing settlers there to decide whether their respective territories would permit slavery—the republican party assailed the legislation for having produced “Bleeding Kansas,” a regional civil war wherein pro- and antislavery forces inflicted violent acts on one another. The Democrats, the republicans contended, were responsible for the bloodshed. Stern Republican opposition to slavery in the new territories and heated rhetoric about the immorality of the peculiar institution aroused fears that the republicans had only northern (i.e., abolitionist) interests
at heart and therefore might stop at nothing to overturn slavery and disrupt southern society. In response, many Texans turned to the ultrasouthern wing of the Democratic party, seeing it as a vehicle for defending cherished traditions.

Therefore, growing numbers of Texas Democrats drifted from Jacksonian nationalism, believing that the best interests of the state lay in protecting slavery at all costs. Their voices increasingly drowned out those of leaders like Sam Houston, who feared that the radical proslavery wing of the party would precipitate secession and bring on a potentially catastrophic war that might destroy slavery even as it sought to preserve it. As a consequence, by 1858 the Democratic party in Texas had edged closer to the Secessionist Democrats of the plantation South.

1859: A Tumultuous Year

Despite this realignment, Texans worried about disunion—and many of them were put off by the rhetoric of the Secessionist Democrats. The extent of disaffection allowed Unionist Democrats (that wing of the Democratic party committed to the preservation of the Union) to defeat the Secessionists in the election of August of 1859, installing Sam Houston as governor. In the campaign, Houston put Runnels on the defensive by criticizing his inadequate protection of the frontier, highlighting Runnels's wishes to see the slave trade renewed, and reminding voters of the governor's preference for secession. Houston now distanced himself from the Know-Nothings and claimed to be the same supporter of national democracy that he always had been. By so doing, Houston attracted non-slaveholding voters in the Rio Grande country, in western Texas, and North Texas. Yet he still appealed to former Know-Nothings and Whigs and successfully enticed into his camp several thousand voters who had not participated in the election of 1857. Furthermore, he won the support of two other elements: those eligible to cast ballots for the first time and voters recently arrived in Texas. Houston's 1859 victory was hailed as a tribute to Unionism, but it turned out to be only a partial success, for the Secessionist Democrats, determined to redeem the party from the Unionists, selected Louis T. Wigfall, a fire-eater, for the U.S. Senate.

Political differences in the fall of 1859, however, gave way to tumultuous historical events. John Brown's attempted slave rebellion at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in October of that year reaffirmed southern fears that northerners would employ violence to curtail or even end slavery. Juan Cortina's attack on Brownsville in South Texas at about the same time made many Texans question the federal government's willingness and ability to defend the state's southern frontier; Comanche attacks on the northern and western settlements raised similar questions. Then, when members of the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C., wasted two months debating the selection of a Republican Speaker between 1859 and 1860, thereby delaying defense measures for the Texas frontier communities, it convinced many Texans that the republicans held their immediate party concerns above all others.

Disintegration

On April 23, 1860, the Democrats met in Charleston, South Carolina, to nominate their candidate for the upcoming presidential election. Failing to agree on
a platform, the party reconvened in Baltimore in June but failed again to reach a consensus. In frustration, southern Democrats split from the national party and held their own nominating convention, in which they chose John C. Breckinridge as their presidential candidate. In their own convention, the northern Democrats picked Stephen A. Douglas. Afraid that the splintering of the Democratic party signaled disunion, a border states' coalition of Unionist Democrats, former Whigs, and ex-Know-Nothings fused to form the Constitutional Union party, running John Bell as their standard-bearer on a patriotic platform emphasizing the preservation of the Constitution and the Union. Meanwhile, the republican party, meeting in Chicago, turned to Abraham Lincoln of Illinois; Lincoln felt that slavery was morally wrong and should be kept out of the territories, although he did not advocate its abolition where it already existed.

Texas Democrats faced an excruciating decision over which Democratic nominee to support. By summer, however, most Texans began to swing over to Breckinridge, who most closely mirrored the sentiments of pro-slavery Texans and seemed most likely to win. But the election returns brought grim news to all Texas Democrats: a Republican, Abraham Lincoln, would be the next chief executive of the United States. They feared that as president, Lincoln would ignore the state's frontier problems, push for tariffs and internal improvement programs that southern states resisted, campaign to bar slavery from the territories (and future states), and, notwithstanding his assurance that he would respect slavery where it already existed, agitate for its dissolution. News of South Carolina's secession from the Union on December 20 helped to advance the cause of Texan secessionists. Democratic party leaders now requested that governor Houston convoke a special session of the legislature, in order that the body could then legally convene a secession convention.

Texas Democrats by no means unanimously chose secession, and Unionists within the party, such as Sam Houston, fought to avert the disintegration of the nation. But time favored the pro-slavery elements. One after another, states from the Lower South continued to issue ordinances of secession, and moderate politicians in Texas supported the trend. The very preservation of the state's way of life seemed to make secession essential, and the deep-seated understanding many held of republicanism only committed them to the belief that their way of life should be run as they, and not the federal government, defined it. Secession, therefore, received broadening popular support. Recent historical thought discounts the belief that the Knights of the Golden Circle were responsible for the increase in secessionist sentiment in Texas.

Although Governor Houston resisted scheduling a special legislative session, Democratic party leaders responded to the growing public pressure by summoning Texans to a People's Convention. On December 17, Houston finally did call the legislature into session, thereby legalizing the secession convention; still, he asked that the decision of the secessionists be submitted to a public referendum. Meeting on January 28, 1861, convention delegates voted overwhelmingly to sever ties with the North: 166 for, 8 against.
Who Wanted War?

Scholars disagree on the reasons for secession, but they have offered a lengthy list of explanations. Among the causes they identify are: alleged conspiracies by a southern Slave Power and perceptions of a plot by northern Republicans to overturn southern culture; the denunciation of slavery as immoral or its defense as a positive good; constitutional issues of states’ rights versus the inviolability of the Union; and the incompatibility of the economic systems of the South and the North (the former agrarian and primitive, the latter industrial and modern); and conflicting value systems that revolved around religion, immigration, cultural conformity, or sectional prejudices. In Texas, certainly, the increased economic viability of slavery from 1850 to 1860, the racial prejudices and fears upon which slavery rested, and the increased connection of the state to the Lower South linked all of these causes together, explaining the fervor for secession in the state and why Texans chose to fight with the Confederacy. Texans’ justification for leaving the Union, enunciated by the secession convention in a “declaration of causes,” was in part a response to the republican party’s opposition to slavery in the territories and its alleged advocacy of the doctrine of racial equality. Texas intended to go to war, the declaration stated, to protect “their beneficent and patriarchal system of African slavery” 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.”

One last step to secession remained following the vote cast by the delegates to the secession convention: the people had to be called upon to speak on the issue. To reach ethnic voters, the delegates had the secession resolution printed in Spanish and German as well as in English. On February 23, by a statewide referendum, Texas ratified secession, with 46,188 votes for and 15,149 against it. Texans did so because they feared northern Republicans viewed the South as the principal obstacle to the growing abolitionist movement, and because secession seemed their last chance to uphold their preferred social and economic institutions. As the vote totals revealed, cultural pluralism and economic reality shaped Texans’ views. Expectedly, eastern and southeastern Texas voted heavily for secession. Half of the voters living in counties that drew their settlers from the Upper South, on the other hand, expressed less enthusiasm for the breakup, mainly since North and north-central Texas had few slave owners. On the West Texas frontier, four German-populated counties were overwhelmingly opposed to secession. To a large extent, the vote reflected western fears, similar to those prevalent in the northern counties, of the cessation of federal protection from Indians should Texas leave the Union for the Confederacy. At the same time, this vote may have pointed to an inherent cultural bias that Germans had against slavery, though by the 1850s many Germans had become indifferent to the peculiar institution or even defended the right to own slaves. The fact remains that where the demographic composition did not resemble that of the Lower South, Texans noticeably opposed secession.
Shortly after the referendum, the secession convention reconvened, announced the withdrawal of Texas from the Union, and pursued the necessary protocol to enter the Confederate States of America, including writing a new constitution (the Constitution of 1861). But Governor Houston refused to concede, proposing that the state instead restore the republic of Texas and in that way avoid entering the Confederacy. When he declined to swear allegiance to the South, the convention proclaimed the office of governor vacant and replaced Houston with Edward Clark, the lieutenant governor. Refusing to stay in office through the use of force, Houston rejected President Lincoln's offer to dispatch federal troops to Texas to try to keep it in the Union. Rather, the sixty-eight-year-old Sam Houston relocated with his family to Galveston. He died in Huntsville in 1863.

**Texas and the Civil War**

**The Texas Front**

Texans took up the southern cause without hesitation. Acting under the instructions of the secession convention, Ben McCulloch on February 16 went to San Antonio, compelled Brigadier General David E. Twiggs, commander of the Department of Texas, to surrender all U.S. forces there and to evacuate federal property in Texas, then raised the Lone Star flag over the Alamo. A few days later, Colonel John S. “Rip” Ford, with some 500 volunteers, captured Brazos Island, at the mouth of the Rio Grande, from its twelve U.S. Army defenders. By the time that news of the shelling of Fort Sumter arrived in South Texas, Ford had taken Fort Brown and secured the lower Rio Grande country, gaining a foothold on the Mexican port city of Matamoros across the Rio Grande.

With the withdrawal of federal troops from posts on the northern and western frontiers, the responsibility of protecting citizens from Comanche hostility fell upon state and special volunteer companies. By the summer of 1861, these units appeared in Indian country along the Red River, chasing away Comanche war parties. By 1862, Texas forces occupied eighteen military stations roughly from the 97th meridian at the Red River, thence southwesterly toward Eagle Pass in South Texas. But the Comanches were too masterful and resourceful to be deterred from conducting their raids, and throughout the Civil War they continued to wreak havoc upon settlers.

As the westward wing of the Confederacy, Texas served as a launching point for campaigns against Union forces along the upper Rio Grande. An expedition under Lieutenant Colonel John R. Baylor subdued Fort Bliss in El Paso in July 1861, and the next month Baylor's men assumed control of southern New Mexico. Another campaign under Henry Hopkins Sibley left San Antonio in November 1861, marched through the El Paso Valley, and moved into New Mexico, where it met up with Baylor and his men. Then, on February 21, 1862, the Sibley Brigade, temporarily under the command of Colonel Tom Green, encountered Union soldiers at Valverde, and in an all-day battle defeated the Unionists. Sibley then continued toward Upper New Mexico and brought it, too, under Confederate rule. In late March, the Union launched a counterof-
fensive and repelled the southerners, forcing them back to Fort Bliss. Sibley and what remained of his force retreated to San Antonio by the summer of 1862.

The Texas coast had ever remained vulnerable to Union attacks, but in late 1862 John Bankhead Magruder took steps to secure this vital area. Of extreme value was the port city of Galveston, which had fallen to Union guns in October of that year. In a daring night assault on New Year's Day 1863, Magruder's unit (which
included troops under Colonel Tom Green of New Mexico fame) attacked the city by both land and sea. Fierce fighting ensued, resulting in a spectacular Confederate win that reestablished their control of Galveston. A few days later Union gunboats returned to regain the port and to shell other fortifications along the coast, but the Confederates repelled the strike. Nevertheless, Magruder and the Texans knew that the federals would return, and they duly prepared for an all-out Union invasion of the state, though they did not know when or where the Union troops would land.

In the middle of 1863, the war's current turned against the South following Union victories at Gettysburg (Pennsylvania), Vicksburg (Mississippi), and Chattanooga (Tennessee). For Texans, the task of defending the state's three frontiers remained. In the north and west, a state of near-anarchy persisted throughout the war years. Organized rings of bandits and cattle rustlers proliferated, with much of the resulting lawlessness and loss of property conveniently blamed on Indians. Indian raids—consistently exaggerated in official reports—continued sporadically, including one major attack by Comanches on settlers near Elm Creek in Young County in October 1864 in which seven whites were killed and several women and children were taken captive.

The Texan authorities rarely responded effectively to such incidents. In January 1865 a combined force of Rangers and Confederate soldiers attacked a camp of 1,400 peaceful Kickapoos at Dove Creek west of San Angelo. Armed with new Enfield rifles, the Indians killed some thirty-five soldiers and wounded another sixty, routing the attackers. Overall, however, Texas Indians emerged from the Civil War in a weakened condition. Severe droughts (in 1860, 1862, and 1864), disease, and Anglo retaliation for crimes real and imagined caused the Comanche population of the southern plains to decline by as much as 40 percent between 1860 and 1865. In August 1865, federal authorities in Kansas signed a peace treaty with the Plains tribes, relinquishing much of West Texas west of the 100th meridian to the Comanches. The U.S. government soon reneged on the treaty (Texans never recognized it) and conflict on the frontier would continue into the 1870s.

On the southeastern coastline, the long-anticipated Union offensive against the state occurred in September of 1863, when a Union fleet of four gunboats and twenty-two troop transport vessels carrying approximately 4,000 men attacked Sabine Pass. Though outnumbered, the Confederates led by Lieutenant Richard W. Dowling repulsed the attack. Recoiling, the Union troops turned their invasion plans to the region of the lower Rio Grande Valley. On November 2, 1863, Nathaniel P. Banks and some 7,000 Union troops took Brownsville, interrupting the important Confederate supply line through Matamoros. Now the Union sought to secure the Nueces region, but ultimately it decided to hold Brownsville and concentrate on plans for another northeastern invasion of the state.

Not until the next summer (of 1864) did Rip Ford regain the lower Valley and restore the supply lines from Matamoros to Texas (and from there to the rest of the Confederacy). The expected counterattack upon South Texas came in May 1865; this time Ford rebuffed the enemy. But the Unionists proved to be members of the regular garrison at Brazos Island, which Ford had failed to take in
1864. From a prisoner of war, Ford learned that the South had surrendered over a month earlier. As fate would have it, this was the last land battle of the Civil War.

The Confederate Front

No one can accurately state the total number of Texans who contributed to the war effort, either on the Texas or the Confederate front; historians generally accept the estimated figure of 68,500, though some argue that the total was closer to 90,000. Similarly, determining the number of casualties remains elusive; a commonly accepted fact is that some 24,000 Texans perished during the four years of fighting. Many Texans distinguished themselves in the fighting as part of Texas units. Among those companies winning praise for valor were Terry’s Texas Rangers, named for the unit’s organizer, Benjamin Franklin Terry. The Rangers saw constant action in the Kentucky-Tennessee-Mississippi region and then, carrying out their reputation for swift and daring attacks, they assisted in efforts to delay Sherman’s march through Georgia in 1864. Also earning kudos for bravery was Ross’s Texas Brigade, named for its commander, Lawrence Sullivan “Sul” Ross. This cavalry brigade conducted hit-and-run strikes in the Alabama-Mississippi-Tennessee theater and participated in several major battles and numerous small engagements—in a three-month period in 1864, Ross’s unit engaged the enemy almost daily. Another outfit that won renown for its audacity and bravery was Hood’s Texas Brigade, named for John Bell Hood, who succeeded the brigade’s original organizer, Louis T. Wigfall. This unit fought in the Army of Northern Virginia and participated in such significant engagements as the Second Battle of Manassas (Second Bull Run) and Antietam in the late summer of 1862, as well as in the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863. Numerous other Texas units, which fought on both sides of the Mississippi River, were singled out for praise by Confederate commanders.

Thirty-seven Texans went on to lead important Confederate brigades as high-ranking officers. Albert Sidney Johnston, who fell at the Battle of Shiloh, had been commissioned a general by the Confederate government; John Bell Hood, in 1862, earned a promotion to lieutenant general; and Samuel Bell Maxey, John A. Wharton, and Tom Green led forces as major generals. Additionally, Texas furnished the Confederacy with thirty-two brigadier generals and about one hundred colonels.

Aside from the military aid Texas rendered to the Confederacy, the state also assisted the southern cause economically. Until the very end of the war, Matamoros remained a center for Confederate trade, primarily through the port town of Bagdad. From the commence-
ment of hostilities, the Confederacy had utilized Brazos Santiago, a small island near the mouth of the Rio Grande, as a way station for the export and import of goods, but following the arrival of the Union navy in early 1862, the suppliers removed across the Rio Grande into Mexico in order to conduct commerce under the guise of neutral trade. Bagdad, located about thirty-five miles from Matamoros, emerged as a boom port, as cargoes destined for Matamoros were first unloaded there. To Bagdad flowed cotton hauled from the plantations of Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and even states east of the Mississippi River, for export to British and French markets. From Bagdad left manufactured goods and war munitions, which were then distributed throughout the Confederacy.

Despite the close association that existed between the Confederate government of Texas and that in Richmond, relations between the two were not always amiable. From the beginning of the war, Texans, along with citizens of other western Confederate states, had felt neglected by the Confederate authorities. This had led the governors of Texas and Arkansas in 1862 to complain emphatically about the lack of protection they felt their states, as well as Missouri and Louisiana, were receiving. In July 1862, therefore, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, sanctioned a meeting in Marshall, Texas. The results of this conference appeased the two governors attending, Texas Governor Francis R. Lubbock and the governor of Missouri, for Richmond Confederate leaders created the Trans-Mississippi Military Department and assigned Edmund Kirby Smith as its commander. A subsequent conference in August 1863, again held at Marshall and chaired by Lubbock, produced little relief for the western states; by this time the Confederacy had become increasingly concerned with the state of affairs east of the Mississippi.

**Behind the Lines**

Besides defending the state, Texas officials also were responsible for outfitting their own troops. State-run arsenals produced small arms, ammunition, and cannons, but shortages of all sorts of matériel continued throughout the conflict. A scarcity of labor forced women and children to toil in the munitions factories. Unable to collect taxes and place confidence in the paper money it issued, the state found it difficult to purchase weapons elsewhere. Troopers had to supply their own gear, and in the latter stages of the war, fighting men had so much trouble acquiring mounts, firearms, food, and other provisions that they frequently confiscated goods from civilians.

Recruitment also plagued the military mobilization. The wartime governors, Francis R. Lubbock (1861–63) and Pendleton Murrah (1863–65), found filling army ranks a difficult and thankless responsibility. Disdain for military discipline and tradition, the necessity of having to care for family members, contempt for the rule that permitted planters and other members of the elite to exempt themselves from military service by finding (hiring) a substitute, and despair over the Confederacy's lack of progress in the war all hindered recruitment efforts. After the calamitous defeats suffered by the Confederacy in 1863, the rate of desertion increased. Decent men weary of battle and losing hope of victory departed for home upon learning that their families were hungry and unable to fend for themselves. Less honorable deserters made common cause with gangs of slackers and even Unionists on the run.
Additionally, Confederate Texans contended with dissent against the Southern Cause, especially in the Red River counties of North Texas, where several factors had fueled strong antisecessionist sentiment in 1861: such factors included the relative absence there of slavery; regional dependence on the federal government, which purchased wheat (from Oklahoma) and corn from North Texas farmers; fears that the residents would suffer attacks by Indians and Union forces; and the influence of anti-secessionists such as Collin McKinney, who propagandized against the fragmentation of the nation. In Cooke County, citizens who had voted against secession in February 1861 formed the Peace Party in the summer of 1862 to protest secession, resist taxation, defy the conscript law, and, according to rumors, prepare the way for a Union invasion into North Texas from Kansas. By the winter of 1863–64, other parts of north-central Texas seemed openly to contest the war effort; men in the regions between Dallas and the Red River engaged in such lawlessness that the Confederates feared losing the section.

Less blatant but no less serious was opposition posed from Unionist Democrats. One faction of the party, which had found the Texas Whigs attractive in the 1850s or had been Know-Nothings, had disapproved of secession but, valuing Texas more than the nation, had reluctantly submitted to the people’s referendum of February 1861 and fought for the Confederacy. A smaller element within the ranks of the Unionist Democrats, those of the Jackson-Houston persuasion or former Know-Nothings, revered the Union and the federal constitution and, placing nationhood above sectional concerns, had gone on to join Union military forces or become government officials in the North.

In addition, minority groups of diverse ethnicity expressed disapproval with the majority cause of their state. Many blacks took the opportunity to run away from plantations or, if possible, flee to Union lines. Indeed, some fifty black Texans fought in the Union Army. German Americans (especially those concentrated in West Texas beyond San Antonio and Austin), while not vociferous in their opposition to slavery and secession, tended to harbor antislavery attitudes and sympathize with the Union. Actions in the German-populated Hill Country during the war, such as shielding Union sympathizers and draft dodgers, revealed German Texan displeasure with the South’s cause. In South Texas, anti-Confederate resistance was evidenced by the 950 Texas Mexicans who fought for the Stars and Stripes. Unionist sympathizers led by Cecilio Valerio and guerrilleros such as Juan N. Cortina harassed Confederate troops throughout the war, seizing cotton and livestock for Union forces.

But it should be emphasized that most Texans steadfastly supported the South, and few of them committed themselves to the defeat of the Confederacy. Their devotion to the war effort periodically took aastardly turns, manifesting itself in intolerance, harassment, and violence in the form of vigilante justice against suspected traitors.

Ethnic Unionists confronted repression by angry Confederates. Slaves suspected of sedition or treason received swift physical punishment. German Texans became especially targeted for any outward sign of disloyalty or subversion, even as hundreds of German Texans from West Texas enlisted in the Confederate ranks. Authorities kept an especially keen eye on West Texas Counties such as Gillespie, Kerr, Kendall, Medina, and Comal, some of which acted as a sanctuary for the
Union Loyal League. Through this organization, German Unionists endeavored to destabilize the Texas Confederacy and reinstate Union authority, by military means if necessary. Expectedly, Austin officials considered the Union Loyal League a danger to Southern security; in July of 1862 they ordered a company of Confederate cavalry and Texas state troopers into the Hill Country to suppress League activities. Many Germans found the Confederate effort to establish law and order through arrest, detention, and violence so odious, however, that some sixty-one of them opted for flight into Mexico on August 1. Convinced that those fleeing the country were part of the seditious sentiment overrunning the German counties, Confederate troops gave pursuit, overtaking the Unionists on August 10 near modern-day Bracketville, on the West Nueces River. In what came to be known as the “Battle of Nueces”—a brief skirmish resulting in fatalities on both sides—the Confederates forced the Germans to surrender. Subsequently, and on their own initiative, a handful of Confederates foully murdered some of the German survivors.

As to Mexican Americans, only the relative isolation of the border country protected them from attacks such as those Anglos had leveled against Germans, even though 2,500 Tejanos served in the Confederate ranks, including officers like Santos Benavides. But Texans held those Tejanos disputing the Southern cause in contempt, referring to them at one point during the war as an assortment of abolitionists, outlaws, Mexicans, and fugitive slaves.

Ethnic background was not, however, a criterion for victimization by vengeful Rebels. In Gainesville (Cooke County), for instance, North Texas Confederates—responding to reports of a plot by members of the Peace Party to take over local ordnance depots and to revolt at the same time that Unionists forces invaded Texas from Kansas and Galveston—executed some forty-two alleged conspirators (most of them innocent) in October 1862 and proclaimed martial law in the county. The imposition of Lynch law followed, and more men in Cooke and neighboring counties fell victim to beatings, imprisonment, or hanging without a trial. Luckier ones made for the brush, successfully warding off Confederate detachments sent to bring them to “justice.”

At War’s End

Following the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, Texans looked to the future with a mixed sense of remorse, satisfaction, and uncertainty. Pride could be taken in the significant role Texans had played in the major battles of the Civil War and in the number of highly regarded officers the state had furnished the Confederacy. Gratifying as well was the fact that the war either furthered or launched the political careers of many Texas veterans. Texas had avoided the widespread destruction and demoralizing effects of military invasion and occupation, and in the coming decades Texans would often attempt to distance themselves from the painful memories of slavery, secession, and defeat, choosing instead to emphasize the state’s frontier and western heritage. Nevertheless, the experiences of the antebellum and Civil War years would continue to give Texas a distinctively Southern identity for decades to come. The hard
truths remained that Texas and the South had lost the war, that legal slavery was a thing of the past, and that before the state could once again enjoy its membership in the United States, it would have to tread the rugged road of Reconstruction.

Readings

Books and Dissertations


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**Articles**


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