The execution of Miguel Hidalgo in 1811 by royalist forces did not end New Spain's rebellion against the mother country. Another priest, José María Morelos, assumed command and committed the movement to a repudiation of the Spanish past. In Spain, meantime, the liberal Cortes (parliament) that had fought off Napoleon turned its attention to reform. Heeding the ideals of the Enlightenment, Spaniards penned the Constitution of 1812; the document forced King Ferdinand to acknowledge the will of the Cortes and provided the means by which people could gain better representation at all levels of government. An absolutist, Ferdinand suspended the constitution upon returning from exile in 1814, and Morelos's capture and execution in 1815 spawned a royalist resurgence. Guerrilla bands carrying the Hidalgo/Morelos banner went underground for the next five years. Then, surprisingly, in 1820 liberalism returned to Spain when a military revolt coerced the king into reinstating the Constitution of 1812.

Alarmed, conservatives in New Spain—who had envisioned a nation retaining the basic foundations of the colonial era, but with themselves presiding over the society—considered independence preferable to living under a liberal rule that might well encourage the lower classes to challenge the social order. Agustin de Iturbide surfaced as the leader of this conservative faction, but he successfully recruited among the liberal resistance fighters, who shared with him and the other conservatives the belief that liberation would be for the common good. In 1821, New Spain's viceroy, realizing that the power of this expedient conservative/liberal coalition prevented the further subordination of the colony, recognized Mexico's independence.

Finally free from the yoke of the Old World, Mexico confronted the task of forming its own kind of government. Liberals wished to mold a republic based on the liberal precepts of the Enlightenment and the Constitution of 1812. The conservatives, however, disliked the egalitarian ideas that Enlightenment thinking put into the minds of the lower classes. In a conservative countermove, Iturbide, who had been responsible for uniting all classes and political elements in Mexico behind the rallying cry of independence, centralized rule by establishing himself as emperor of Mexico. No sooner had he taken the throne, however, then he was denounced in the Plan de Casa Mata (issued in February of 1823), a liberal
edict issued by a young military commander named Antonio López de Santa Anna. After successfully removing Iturbide from power in March 1823, the liberal supporters of the Plan de Casa Mata sought to solidify their victory by establishing a federalist republic.

Besides ideological differences over class distinctions, several other issues plagued the newly independent Mexico. These included economic chaos, the desire of military and Church officials to preserve their traditional standing alongside government, and the political inexperience of the nation's new leaders.

Equally pressing was the need to defend the Far North from the United States and the Comanche empire. Texas, especially, had been the scene of an increased amount of activity by American adventurers since the close of the eighteenth century. In 1801, Spanish soldiers caught the mysterious Philip Nolan, an American who claimed to be looking for mustangs for subsequent sale in Louisiana. Nolan had no official permission to be in the area (present-day Hill County, historians believe), and the Spanish soldiers, suspecting Nolan of conspiring to acquire Texas and perhaps other parts of the Crown's northern empire, killed him. In 1806, the Spaniards repelled two U.S. encroachments into East Texas. One was a scientific expedition dispatched by President Thomas Jefferson to clarify the boundaries of the Louisiana Territory acquired by the United States in 1803; royal troops turned back the small party at Spanish Bluff in today's Bowie County. The second was an intrusion made by General James Wilkinson over the same disputed eastern boundary of Texas. Wilkinson and a Spanish commander avoided a major dispute when they mutually agreed to recognize a neutral ground between the Arroyo Hondo (a branch of the Red River close to where the presidio of Los Adaes once stood) and the Sabine River.

Then, in 1819, the Spaniards faced an attempt by Dr. James Long and a force of fellow filibusters to wrest Texas from Mexico. This endeavor apparently had the backing of a group of Natchez entrepreneurs who were upset over the passage of the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819. Under the terms of the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, many Americans believed the United States had bought lands that extended west from Louisiana into Texas. But the Transcontinental Treaty established the Sabine River as the dividing line between the United States and Spanish Texas. The agreement led many land-hungry southerners to make the argument that the United States had “surrendered” Texas in order to acquire Florida from Spain. Taking it upon themselves to “reclaim” Texas from Spain, Long's small army of filibusters was not quelled until October 1821, when Spanish troops apprehended Long and took him to a prison in Mexico City. The whole Long incident created enormous distrust of Americans by Spanish (and later Mexican) officials.

**Immigration**

Past trespasses into Mexico's Far North amounted to relatively little compared to a combination of threats both old and new in the 1820s. An old peril, the Comanches persisted in their time-tested practice of attacking the poblares and stealing their livestock for barter in the United States. The new threat came from expansionists in the United States. Defense of the Texas frontier appeared urgent for Mexico, and a government-directed colonization of the area seemed to be the best way to deter the land-hungry Americans. After careful consideration, the short-lived Iturbide government turned to plans that would entice European and Anglo-American settlers into Texas.

Mexico decided to allow the formal immigration of Americans to Texas for at least four reasons. First, the nascent nation wished to form a buffer between the domains of the
raiding Comanches and the established Texas settlements. A line of Anglo villages and farmsteads, the Mexicans hoped, would serve to cordon off important posts such as San Antonio. Second, the Spanish government had already set precedent. In 1788, for instance, Spain had experimented with a defensive immigration policy to attract Anglo frontierspeople from the American West into Louisiana, but it suspended the plan in the 1790s when the newly arrived Americans resisted accepting Spanish customs and traditions. Then, following the Transcontinental Treaty, in which the United States abandoned all claims to Texas, Spain turned once more to its previous policy of defensive immigration. In January 1821, the Spanish government agreed to a proposal by an American named Moses Austin to let him oversee the settlement of American citizens in Texas. According to the contract, Austin was to relocate 300 Catholic families from the United States to Texas in exchange for a huge personal grant of Texas lands. Since the start of the nineteenth century, Austin had prospered in lead mining in Missouri (once part of Spanish Upper Louisiana). Then the War of 1812 and the subsequent Panic of 1819 had wiped him out, and now he hoped that the Texas venture would help him recover financially. Third, by this time, Mexican liberals had come to regard the missions as liabilities that added to the power of the Church and encouraged its intervention in governmental affairs. Since the liberals no longer wished to support the missions as colonizing institutions, they looked for alternative ways to the North. Fourth, security in Texas and the Far North appeared to rest on foreign immigration. With about 6 million inhabitants settled over an expanse reaching from California to Central America, Mexico lacked the manpower to occupy its vast territory. The war for independence, moreover, had deprived of the new nation of many of its younger people.

Upon Moses Austin's sudden death (in Missouri) on June 10, 1821, his twenty-seven-year-old son, Stephen F. Austin (Figure 3.1), assumed the Austin contract, the legality of which was recognized by the Spanish-born governor of Texas, Antonio Martínez. Prospective colonists (some of them slave owners) began to arrive in the settlement by the end of 1821, as authorized. In March 1822, however, Martínez received word that national officials of the newly independent Mexico no longer recognized Austin's colonization contract. Compelled to press his claim in the nation's capital, the young Austin journeyed to Mexico City.

He arrived there in time to witness Iturbide's coronation as emperor in July, and for the next five months Austin waited for the new government to act. An Imperial Colonization Law was enacted on January 3, 1823, and Austin's contract was formally approved in March. However, with Iturbide's overthrow, a new congress was called, all acts of the previous government were annulled, and Austin had to start all over again. Finally, on April 14, the new congress confirmed his grant, authorizing him to proceed with his plans to import families under the original agreement made between his father and the Spanish government.

His right to locate the full complement of 300 families in Texas finally established, Austin left Mexico City in April 1823 and returned to his colony to find the settlers he had left there in a state of uncertainty. Attacks by the Karankawas, food shortages, and other misfortunes had convinced many of the first wave of settlers to depart. Those who had "toughed it out" awaited word on the recognition of the Austin contract. Others who had moved into the colony since early 1822, when Mexico had ceased to recognize Austin's right to settle families, similarly hoped that Austin would get his concessions officially sanctioned by the government in Mexico City, so that their presence in Texas might be legalized. Austin regrouped and renewed his call for colonists to fill his contract's allot-
Mexican Texas, 1821–1836

Figure 3.1 Stephen F. Austin. CN 01436, The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

ment. By the end of the summer of 1824, the land commissioner, Baron de Bastrop, who originally had helped Moses Austin get his contract, had approved most of Stephen F. Austin's remaining land titles. Some historians refer to the settlers who helped Austin complete his first contract as the Old Three Hundred. San Felipe de Austin, on the Brazos River, became Austin Colony's principal settlement; it lay some eighty miles from the Gulf, or about sixty miles from today's Houston (and should not be confused with Austin, the present-day capital of Texas).

The colonization laws of Mexico

Although several prospective American empresarios (immigration agents) had been in Mexico City at the same time as Austin was trying to secure his colonization contracts, only Austin managed to win approval from the provisional congress that succeeded the Iturbide regime. The peopling of Texas, therefore, occurred mainly under the National Colonization Law of August 18, 1824, which the Mexican congress passed while still debating the details of a new national constitution. Though establishing certain restrictions for colonization, the Colonization Law left the individual states of Mexico with complete control over immigration and the disposal of public lands. The legislation instructed the states, however, to remain within the limits of the national constitution. Even though
general sentiment in Mexico scorned human bondage, the law did not directly prohibit the importation of slaves or outlaw slavery.

The National Colonization Law of 1824 emanated from a developing federalist-liberal philosophy advanced by men who planned the creation of a republic based on the principles of the American Revolution and the Spanish Constitution of 1812. Their leaders included Valentín Gómez Farías of Zacatecas and Lorenzo de Zavala of Yucatán. Conservatives, supported by the clergy, major landholders, and the military—all of whom espoused a strong central government—opposed the rising Federalists. Using the unfulfilled dream of establishing a republic and the abdication of Iturbide to their advantage, the liberals created the Federal Constitution of the United States of Mexico on October 4, 1824. (Measures such as the National Colonization Law that the congress passed in the months preceding the Constitution's adoption were not superseded by the new document.) The republican Constitution sought to satisfy regional interests by giving states control over their internal affairs and by diluting the power of the national government. As its framers had hoped, the new document resembled the U.S. Constitution in many ways as well as borrowing items from the Spanish Constitution of 1812. Among those who signed the new constitution was a forty-two-year-old Tejano ranchero, Erasmo Segúin.

In the north, the national government united the old Spanish provinces of Coahuila and Texas into one state, Coahuila y Texas. Via a decree issued in early 1825 by the state constitutional congress at Saltillo, which functioned as a legislature while it drew up a constitution for the new state, Texas from the Nueces to the Sabine River became a departamento (called the “Department of Texas”). It was to be presided over by a jefe político (political chief) appointed by the governor of the state. The jefe político was responsible for overseeing the defense of Texas (including the command of local militias), education, taxes, censuses, and elections, as well as for enforcing the laws and supervising the ayuntamientos. When, on March 11, 1827, the congress finally promulgated the new constitution, this agreement was incorporated into the Coahuilteco government. Furthermore, the legislature allowed two deputies for Texas, with provisions to add more as the population of the province grew.

Also decreed by the provisional state constitutional congress was the State Colonization Law of March 24, 1825. Through this measure, the legislature sought to achieve several goals, namely the peopling of Coahuila and Texas, the encouragement of farming and ranching in the state, and the stimulation there of commercial activity. The plan permitted the immigration of Anglo Americans into Coahuila and Texas, but it also sought to prod Mexicanos into moving north by giving them priority in land acquisition. For modest fees, heads of families qualified to obtain a league or sitio (4,428.4 acres) of grazing land and a labor (177.1 acres) of farming land. Immigrants were temporarily exempted from paying tariffs or custom duties. Provisions required all new residents of Coahuila and Texas who were not already Mexican citizens to take an oath declaring that they would abide by the federal and state constitutions and promise to observe the Christian religion. The legislature made no explicit mention of Catholicism: it was simply understood that the people of Mexico practiced no other religion. After agreeing to said conditions and establishing residence by obtaining lands, the land grantees were regarded by the government as naturalized Mexicans. The wording of the Colonization Law of 1825 was so vague that it did not immediately prohibit the importation of slaves.

Negotiations for land titles could be handled individually or through empresarios, who acted on behalf of the state government to select colonists, allocate land, and see to the enforcement of the laws in the colonies they helped to found. As compensation for their
work, empresarios qualified personally to receive five leagues and five labores (a total of 23,027.5 acres) for every 100 families they settled in Texas.

Empresario contracts

Between 1821 and 1835, a total of forty-one empresario contracts were signed, permitting some 13,500 families to come to Texas. Anglo Americans from the United States entered into most of these contracts.

By 1825, Stephen F. Austin had nearly completed the terms of his first contract, and that year the government made a second agreement with him to settle 500 families. Two years later, he negotiated to locate another 100 families in what are today Bastrop and Travis counties. In 1828, Austin obtained another land deal, and in 1831 he received his last contract. Actually, Austin only complied fully with his first contract and never came close to meeting his obligations on the other four. He used part of his grants for speculating purposes, but for that matter, so did the other land agents and even some settlers who sought to turn a profit from the Mexican government's generosity.

To the west of Austin's original lands, between the Guadalupe and Lavaca rivers, Green DeWitt planted a colony with its center at Gonzales. This contract expired in 1831, however, by which time DeWitt had settled only about one-third of the 400 families he had pledged to bring. Bordering the DeWitt colony to the southeast lay the tract belonging to the rancher Martín de León. Issued at San Antonio in 1824 (even before the enactment of the Colonization Law of 1825), this grant had ill-defined boundaries, which caused some disputes between de León's and DeWitt's settlers, at least until DeWitt's land became part of the public domain in 1832. De León's colony, with its principal settlement at Victoria, remained small, though titles had been issued to 162 families by 1835. Figure 3.2 shows the extent of the empresario contracts in the region.

Most other empresarial colonies achieved only moderate success in the 1820s. In 1825, Robert Leftwich received (on behalf of a cooperative venture called the Texas Association of Nashville, Tennessee) a contract to settle lands situated northwest of Austin's lands, but no one colonized them until the early 1830s, when a Tennessean named Sterling C. Robertson took over as empresario for the Texas Association. Farther east, Haden Edwards's colonization contract called for 800 families to settle around the Nacogdoches region, but following his armed uprising in 1826 against government officials (the so-called Fredonian Rebellion, discussed below) his vacated land reverted to the state. Part of Edwards's tract went to David G. Burnet, and another portion of it went to a German merchant named Joseph Vehlein in 1826. Lorenzo de Zavala, one of the framers of the Mexican Constitution of 1824, received land along the Sabine River in 1829, but he never colonized it.

The Native Mexicans of Texas

As Anglo settlers arrived in East Texas, the native Mexicans were, according to historian Andrés A. Tijerina, experiencing a resurrection in fortunes following the devastation of the war for independence. Ranches between Béxar and La Bahía (the latter called Goliad after 1829—from an anagram of the name Hidalgo) were reestablished in the mid-1820s along the entire stretch and on both sides of the San Antonio River and its tributaries. These ranches belonged to Texas Mexicans of wealth and status, men like Martín de León of
Victoria, Erasmo and Juan N. Seguín of Béxar, and Carlos de la Garza of Goliad. In Nacogdoches, a few brave souls had held the town together throughout the upheaval of the 1810s, and by 1823 a steady flow of the Mexican population into Nacogdoches and the surrounding district was apparent. In the 1830s, Nacogdoches consisted of a small town surrounded by approximately fifty founding ranchos. In South Texas, the Trans-Nueces ranching frontier spread northward from the Rio Grande in the 1820s to cover the present counties of Willacy, Kenedy, Brooks, Jim Hogg, Duval, Jim Wells, and Kleberg, with its northern point at Nueces County. Ten years later, approximately 350 rancherias (small family-operated concerns) existed in this region, many of which provided the foundations for future Texas towns.

**Anglos and the Mexican Government**

Anglos, whether they had entered Texas legally or illegally (most of those fleeing debts or the law in the United States arrived in Texas independently rather than under the guidance of an empresario), began to worry the Mexican government. For one thing, many of the Anglos were not taking their Mexican nationality seriously. While some of the Anglo new-
The newcomers had built homes in the predominately Tejano settlements and ranchos of San Antonio and Goliad, most preferred living a good distance away from Comanche hunting grounds, in the hope of avoiding Indian attacks. Concentrated east of the Colorado River, these Anglos lived an almost semi-autonomous life, conducting their affairs in ways that made the Mexican government uneasy: squatting on unoccupied lands; engaging in forbidden transactions with commercial establishments in New Orleans; applying American practices to local situations; speculating with their properties; working slaves; and otherwise disregarding the conditions (and oath) under which they had been allowed to settle. Their decidedly independent attitude manifested itself at Nacogdoches as early as 1826, when the empresario Haden Edwards proclaimed the independence of the region, his so-called Fredonian Republic. For months, disputes had developed between the old settlers in Nacogdoches and Edwards’s colonists over land titles; a break from Mexico, thought Benjamin Edwards (Haden’s brother and the actual leader of the insurrection), would resolve the conflict in favor of the newcomers. But the armed revolt collapsed when more successful, foreign-born colonists denounced the affair and Austin led his colony’s militia, along with Mexican officials, to Nacogdoches to suppress it. Nonetheless, the episode heightened concerns in Mexico that further American immigration might dissolve Mexico’s hold on Texas. Meanwhile, in Texas, immigrants became distrustful of a government that had just voided an empresario contract without due process of law.

In order to evaluate how the national government might best deal with the troubles in Texas, Mexican officials dispatched Manuel de Mier y Terán, a high-ranking military officer and trained engineer, to the north. Crossing into Texas in 1828, Mier y Terán reported that the province was flooded with Anglo Americans, that Nacogdoches had essentially become an American town, that prospects for assimilation of the Anglos into Mexican culture appeared dim, and that the Anglo settlements generally resisted obeying the colonization laws. Once back in Mexico, his concerns over American immigrant loyalty mounted, and his fear that Mexico might indeed lose Texas to the newcomers intensified. Mier y Terán’s recommendations spurred the drafting and implementation of the new law of April 6, 1830.

The Law of April 6, 1830, intended to stop further immigration into Texas from the United States by declaring uncompleted empresario agreements as void, although Mier y Terán let stand as valid those contracts belonging to men who had already brought in 100 families. Thus, Americans could still immigrate to Texas legally, but only into the colonies of Austin or DeWitt: the only two empresario grants that met the general’s requirement, neither of which was filled to capacity. Furthermore, future American immigrants must not settle in any territory bordering the United States. New presidios, garrisoned by convicts serving out their prison sentences through military service, were established to check any such illegal immigration. Finally, the new law banned the further importation of slaves into Texas.

Actually, on September 15, 1829, President Vicente Guerrero had issued a directive abolishing slavery throughout the nation. (Guerrero’s gesture notwithstanding, slavery in Mexico would continue until the 1850s, though never as a legal institution.) Concerned about an immigration policy that seemed to be going astray, Guerrero had sought to dissuade Anglos from further colonization altogether by depriving them of their enslaved workforce. Political resistance from various quarters in Coahuila and Texas, however, ended up persuading Guerrero to exempt Texas from his national emancipation decree. Now, only seven months later, the Law of April 6, 1830, reinstated the ban on bringing human chattel into Texas—a point not lost on the American immigrants.
Mexican and American Capitalists

It was a rising class of capitalists from Coahuila and Texas who, along with Stephen F. Austin, had convinced Guerrero to excuse their state from the anti-slavery law. Leaders of this coalition were the statesmen from Parras and Monclova in Coahuila, José María Viesca and his brother Agustín. In the 1820s, the Viesca faction belonged to the liberal Federalist party struggling to maintain control in Mexican politics. Their leaders at the national level were revolutionary veterans such as Guadalupe Victoria, Lorenzo de Zavala, and Vicente Guerrero, as well as intellectuals like Valentín Gómez Farías. Their antagonists were members of the Centralist faction, who were usually conservatives bent on securing the traditional power of the military and the Catholic Church.

According to Tijerina, the Viesca faction was committed to achieving economic prosperity through the state colonization program of 1825 and other means. Through legislation, they obtained exemptions from taxes on cotton, foreign imports, and domestic items for use by colonists and residents of Coahuila and Texas. They granted citizenship and special concessions to many Anglo Americans, among them the entrepreneur James Bowie, who acquired a textile-mill permit. These liberals posited that slave labor was necessary for the economic advancement of the state.

Meanwhile, Stephen F. Austin’s plan for developing the cotton industry in Texas paralleled the ambitions of the liberal Coahuiltecanos, who, seeing their own prosperity in the cultivation of cotton, worked strenuously to have slavery legitimized. An early victory came in a decree passed on May 5, 1828, that validated contracts of servitude made in foreign countries by immigrants to Coahuila and Tejas. Sponsored by the Texas delegate José Antonio Navarro (Figure 3.3), the new law provided for Anglo-American colonists to bring slaves into Texas as permanently indentured servants. Support for passing this legislation was generated by the same coalition of Coahuiltecanos and Anglos that had mobilized in 1829 to have Texas exempted from the Guerrero decree.

The Law of April 6, 1830, Resisted

The Law of April 6, 1830, passed by Centralists following a conservative coup in late 1829, posed a dilemma for the liberal Coahuiltecanos, for they now fell out of step with both national and state politics. Committed to stopping Anglo-American immigration and slavery, the Centralists preferred counter-colonization from the Mexican interior or from Europe. Stepping up their initiative, the conservatives reinforced presidios at San Antonio, Goliad, and Nacogdoches and commissioned the building of more garrisons, among the most important of which were Velasco, at the mouth of the Brazos River, and Anahuac, founded just above Galveston Bay. Situated near the Gulf Coast, these two forts were to discourage the infiltration of illegal immigrants by sea.

The liberals resisted these conservative policies. When the state congress expelled one of the Texas delegates in September 1830, the ayuntamientos of Béxar, Goliad, and San Felipe de Austin proclaimed that only the appropriate constituents could determine whether their deputy would serve. In this way, the Tejanos were committing themselves to the liberal, Federalist standard and the Viesca faction.

Among Anglos, a radical faction of the Federalists, which has come to be known in Texas history as the “war party,” emerged from the outrage over the Law of April 6. In the summer of 1832, friction between settlers and authorities trying to enforce recently instituted poli-
cies regulating commerce in the Gulf ports and the collection of new tariffs reached a high pitch at the military post in Anahuac. Colonel Juan Davis Bradburn, an Anglo-American adventurer who had joined the Centralist cause in Mexico, arrested the lawyer William Barret Travis when the latter attempted a ruse to secure the release of two runaway slaves that Bradburn had in protective custody. In response to Travis's arrest, vigilantes gathered to call for his release. When Bradburn refused to surrender his prisoner, the colonists, accustomed to the Anglo-American tradition of the separation of military and civilian law, and to trial by jury, labeled Bradburn a despot.

Consequently, in June of 1832, a party of Anglo Texans from around Anahuac and the port town of Brazoria marched on Bradburn's garrison. A full-scale battle seemed imminent, but, while waiting for reinforcements, the Anglos issued a document known as the Turtle Bayou Resolutions on June 13, 1832, which cleverly argued that their actions at Anahuac were not an uprising but a demand for their constitutional rights as Mexican citizens, adding that their cause was in sympathy to that of the Federalists and their leader, Antonio López de Santa Anna, then attempting to overthrow the Centralists, the party to which Bradburn belonged. Higher military officials avoided further bloodshed at Anahuac by replacing Bradburn and releasing Travis and others whom Bradburn had arrested.

At this time, however, the radical war party failed to garner popular endorsement; indeed, many Texans condemned the group as adventurers. Most Texans belonged to a "peace party," led by Austin, which preferred to work for solutions to settlers' grievances.
via established political channels. Hence, on October 1, 1832, delegates from several Anglo settlements met at San Felipe de Austin and drafted petitions requesting certain concessions from the national government, among them the removal of the article in the Law of April 6, 1830, that severely limited immigration.

This meeting, or consultation, was not legal under Mexican law, such protests had to originate with the ayuntamientos. Although he sympathized with the protesters, Ramón Múñoz, the political chief in Béxar, followed the law and refused to forward the peace party's petitions to the governor. The convention of 1832 bore no fruit.

In late 1832, leading citizens of Béxar, among them Juan N. Seguin and José María Bal-maceda, met in San Antonio to express their own grievances to the state government in Saltillo. They complained about the constant intervention of the national government in the state colonization program and contended that the Law of April 6, 1830, threatened to dissuade useful capitalists from moving into Texas. They further demanded bilingual administrators, more judges, better militia protection from hostile Indians, and certain tax exemptions for businesses. These complaints, along with the October petition from Austin's group, were part of the groundswell of federalism pervasive throughout Mexico in 1832.

The ayuntamientos of Goliad, Nacogdoches, and San Felipe endorsed the Tejanos' petition, and Political Chief Múñoz submitted it to the governor, explaining that the Tejanos' boisterous tone was designed to remedy a situation that might otherwise lead the Anglos to try to separate Tejas from Coahuila. What the Tejanos wanted, he assured the governor, were reforms, not the creation of their own state. The Tejanos understood that should Texas become a separate state with its own legislature, Anglo Americans, who already outnumbered the native Mexicans, would dominate politics.

Since little had come out of the Anglos' 1832 consultation, another was held at San Felipe de Austin in April of the following year. But those attending the second meeting included new leaders who opposed Austin's position of caution and conciliation with Mexico. Among the new group were the brothers William and John Wharton, David G. Burnet, and the former governor of Tennessee, Sam Houston, who had arrived recently in Texas. Scholars attribute different motives to Houston's immigration, from attempts to buy up all the stock remaining in the Leftwich contract (he had been among the investors in the Texas Association in 1822), to an honest desire to start anew in Texas, perhaps as a landholder, lawyer, or politician. Overall, this second consultation desired the division of Coahuila y Tejas, maintaining that a separated Texas would enjoy political autonomy to make decisions affecting its own well-being. As things stood, Coahuila had nine times the population of Texas, and its representatives in the legislature could easily checkmate the Texans on crucial issues. Upon adjourning, the second consultation entrusted Erasmo Seguin, Stephen F. Austin, and Dr. James B. Miller of San Felipe with taking the grievances to Mexico City. Of the three, only Austin made the long journey to the capital.

**Liberals in Power**

In January 1833, Santa Anna ushered in a brief liberal era in Mexican politics when he was elected president as a Federalist. Back in favor, the liberals in Coahuila y Tejas and the Viesca brothers immediately arranged for the state legislature to petition the national government for the repeal of the Law of April 6, 1830. Now they had more helpful allies in Mexico City, among them Gómez Farías, whom Santa Anna appointed as his acting president before
retreating to his hacienda in Vera Cruz, and Lorenzo de Zavala (Figure 3.4), the legislator from Yucatán who still held interests in Texas lands for which he sought settlers from the United States. Working alongside the Federalists in Mexico City was Stephen F. Austin, who had arrived there following the consultation of April 1833. Ultimately, effective May 1834, Mexico's senate revoked the section in the Law of April 6, 1830, that had curtailed the immigration of Anglos into the Mexican nation.

Austin failed, however, to gain the separation of Coahuila and Texas. And when officials discovered letters between him and the San Antonio ayuntamiento encouraging Texas's separation from Coahuila, they threw Austin in prison (early in 1834). Nonetheless, the state and national governments abided by their previous stand on colonization, and liberal legislation continued to emanate from Coahuila. New acts recognized the acceptance of English as a legal language of the state, permitted the extension of empresario contracts, expanded the number of local courts, and provided for trial by jury. The Coahuilense legislature also raised Texas's representation in the state congress and increased the number of departments in Texas to three. Actually, the district of Nacogdoches, which extended from the watershed between the Brazos and the Trinity rivers to the Sabine, had been created in 1831 to accommodate the rise in the Anglo population. In order to allow more self-autonomy in the province, the legislature in 1834 established the Department of Brazos, with its capital at San Felipe de Austin, which extended from the Nacogdoches district to
a north-south line from the coast to the Red River, just east of the Béxar and Goliad settlements. The third zone, the Department of Béxar, included San Antonio and extended to the Nueces River.

The Ineffectiveness of the Law of April 6, 1830

These changes point starkly to the ineffectiveness of the Law of April 6, 1830. Since Mexican officials had not been strict in interpreting the provisions of the decree, Anglos had continued to come into those colonies whose empresarios had imported the minimum 100 families by the time the Centralists enacted the law. In addition, two empresario groups from Ireland persisted in their efforts to complete contracts they had acquired in the late 1820s; Centralists, after all, looked favorably upon European immigration as a way to people Texas. James McGloin and John McMullen brought several Irish families to the Nueces River area and founded San Patricio in 1831. Three years later, James Power and James Hewetson located colonists in the place that became modern-day Refugio, Texas.

At the same time, the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company, a land-speculating corporation from the eastern United States that the empresarios Vehlein, Burnet, and de Zavala had commissioned to complete their contracts, continued to advertise the availability of its properties in Texas, even though the Law of April 6, 1830, had prohibited the further disposal of such lands. Thus, the company sold invalid land certificates to buyers. Despite the company’s fraudulent activities, it brought several European families into Texas in the early 1830s. Since the new arrivals were not Americans, Mexican officials ultimately accepted and resettled them elsewhere in Texas.

For his part, Sterling C. Robertson continued to claim ownership of the original Leftwich/Texas Association contract. Though Stephen F. Austin contested the contract, convincing the legislature at one point that the Robertson contract was invalid and that it should therefore be allotted to himself, Robertson persuaded the authorities in 1834 that he had brought to Texas the required 100 families before the Law of April 6, 1830, had been effected. Despite the dispute, Robertson successfully settled numerous families while the Centralists remained in power.

Finally, many immigrants had arrived in Texas illegally during the early 1830s, hoping to start afresh as merchants, lawyers, land speculators, politicians, squatters, trappers, miners, artisans, smugglers, or jacks-of-all trades. But with the dilution of the Law of April 6, 1830, the stream of Anglo-American immigration into Texas became a torrent. By 1834, it is estimated that the number of Anglo Americans and their slaves exceeded 20,700. This figure might well have represented the doubling of the number of Americans in Texas just since 1830.

A Multicultural Society

Anglos

As one would expect, the number of towns in Texas increased—from three in 1821 to twenty-one by 1835—most of them inhabited by the Anglo newcomers. The principal towns included San Felipe de Austin, in Stephen F. Austin’s first colony, Gonzales, in
Green DeWitt’s grant, Velasco, on the Brazos (near present-day Freeport), and Matagorda, on the mouth of the Colorado River. Figure 3.5 shows the settlements in 1836 by ethnicity.

For all Texans, life consisted of a battle for survival, largely against the same odds the pobladores had faced before 1821. Basic goods such as clothing, blankets, and footwear were not readily available in Texas, but many immigrants had known enough to bring such items with them. Material for homemade apparel came either from animal skins or from cloth made on spinning wheels, devices some people had managed to import. Necessarily, the colonists used local resources such as stones, mud, or timber to construct log cabins or other types of shelter that ordinarily consisted of no more than two rooms (with dirt floors). Pioneers similarly lived off the land, hunted wild game, fished, planted small gardens, and gathered natural produce such as nuts and berries.

Anglos managed to convert parts of their grants into farmsteads, though agriculture as a gainful enterprise in Texas developed sluggishly. Early on, farming earned one barely the minimum standard of living, but by the late 1820s, cash-crop farming in Austin’s colony and sections of East Texas began to reap better rewards. With slaves and imported technology at their disposal, some Anglos planted and processed cotton for new markets outside the province. One prominent scholar estimates that Anglos’ farms by 1834 shipped about 7,000 bales of cotton (to New Orleans) valued at some $315,000.

Figure 3.5  Source: Terry G. Jordan, “A Century and a Half of Ethnic Change in Texas,” Southwestern Historical Quarterly 89 (April 1985). Courtesy Texas State Historical Association, Austin, Texas.
Because hard currency did not circulate in the province, people bartered to obtain needed commodities and services, using livestock, otter and beaver pelts, and even land to complete their transactions. Improvising, Anglos found numerous ways to earn an income, among them smuggling. The tariff laws that exempted Anglo products during the 1820s had not applied to all imports (generally, codes excluded household goods and implements), so Anglos brought merchandise illegally into Texas. From there, some even brazenly shipped the products south to Mexican states or west to New Mexico.

Goods moving out of the province included corn, the skins of deer and bears, salted meats, and even timber from East Texas. The latter enterprise amounted to little more than a local activity undertaken to meet the needs of the people around Nacogdoches, but some of the lumber found its way to buyers far away as Matamoros.

To further their education, the foreigners established numerous schools in the 1820s and 1830s. They patterned the schools after institutions similar to ones they had known in the southern United States. Private enterprise provided the funds for children’s education (public schooling did not exist during that era), both at the elementary and secondary levels. Older students attended academies or boarding schools, which were private institutions established by religious groups, local residents, immigrant teachers (often women) of certain communities who wanted a place in which to practice their profession, or by individuals seeking a profit. In Texas, education suffered the limitations of the frontier. Instructors were never plentiful, private homes usually had to serve as makeshift educational facilities, and schoolhouses, where they existed, were often little more than simple structures constructed from pine logs. Colonists who could afford to do so sent their children to schools in the United States.

Printing in Texas had started in the 1810s with the first and probably the only issue of La Gaceta de Tejas, printed to spread republican ideas that might help Mexico liberate itself from Spain. But the first successful press in Texas was established in 1829 in Austin’s colony by Godwin Brown Cotten. His newspaper, named the Texas Gazette, served Austin in his determination to assure the host country of Anglo-American loyalty and to remind the colonists of the gratitude they owed to Mexico. The Gazette ceased publication in 1832, but other papers continued to spread the news to Anglo Texans.

Although Anglos had agreed to observe the Catholic religion in order to qualify as Mexican citizens, the Church neglected them because of, among other things, a shortage of priests. Hence, many Anglo settlers held illicit church services and (religious) camp meetings. Lacking priests, the people in Austin’s colony conducted their own civil ceremonies when necessary, though in 1831 and 1832 the Irish-born Father Michael Muldoon did tend to the community as the resident clergyman. He reports the colonists as faithful to Catholicism, but he wed couples who had already been living together outside of Church-sanctioned marriages. For a brief time after 1834, the settlers did not have to be so cautious about their religious practices, for the state government conceded them freedom of conscience.

Anglos defended themselves by organizing local militias, ready volunteer companies authorized by the Mexican government as alternatives to standing armies. These were necessary given the government’s inability to provide the settlers adequate protection. In 1825, the garrisons at San Antonio and Goliad had only 59 men; by 1832 the government had managed to raise that number to about 140, but only half of these Texas soldiers were formally prepared for military action. Unlike Austin’s, most of the colonies failed to establish their own militia as was prescribed by law. Instead, they relied on volunteer companies
of a temporary nature; such units evolved into the organization of the Texas Rangers by July 1835.

Blacks

For black people, life on the Mexican frontier differed radically from that of their counterparts during the Spanish colonial era. As already noted, Anglos had, in the guise of contract labor, been able to perpetuate slavery despite Mexican disapproval. Neither the Law of April 6, 1830, nor a state decree issued in 1832 to weaken negotiated servant contracts deterred some of the immigrants from bringing black slaves into Texas surreptitiously. Anglos argued that the economic development of the province depended on slave labor, and both Tejano oligarchs and liberal politicians in Coahuila seconded this position. While many Mexican officials genuinely believed in the cruelty and immorality of the institution, they somehow consistently accepted the argument that the province could not grow and prosper without it.

By 1836, the number of slaves in Texas numbered about 5,000. Most slaves lived on the Anglo plantations located in the productive lands adjacent to the Brazos, Colorado, and Trinity rivers, although slavery did exist around Nacogdoches and in other fledgling Anglo communities along the Red River.

The peculiar institution arrived in Texas with all its southern trappings, for whites sought to recreate it just as it existed in the United States. As in the South, where society delineated strict roles for the disparate races, in Texas many Anglos considered blacks a racially inferior people suited to a life of strenuous labor and servitude. As far as these people were concerned, black persons could be bought and sold, hired out, counted as part of one's assets, and bequeathed to relatives. To control the slave population, whites followed tried and tested policies, including the liberal use of the lash. Slaves attempted to alleviate their condition by running away when possible, often seeking refuge among the Indian tribes of East Texas or in the Mexican settlements of the nation's interior.

Tejanos

Hispanic Texans, many of them descendants of the first colonizers and presidial soldiers assigned to garrisons throughout the Spanish period, lived in the ranching areas of Central and South Texas. In the latter area, they occupied lands granted to them since the 1770s but also ones acquired from the state of Tamaulipas as late as the early 1830s. Most Tejanos, however, continued to live in the older cities established in the eighteenth century.

The Tejano urban settlements included: San Antonio, which had a Hispanic population of 2,500 in 1835; Goliad, with 700 in 1834; and Nacogdoches, reporting a figure of 537 Mexicans in 1835. Additionally, Tejanos resided near Goliad, in the nascent town of Victoria founded in 1824 by the empresario Martín de León. By 1830 the population of Victoria had grown to 248, and to 300 four years later. On the Rio Grande, Laredo consisted of about 2,000 predominately Hispanic residents in 1835.

In the towns, people tried to make a living in a variety of ways. Merchants, especially in San Antonio, sojourned to the Mexican states below the Rio Grande to acquire finished goods such as clothing and household items for resale in the province. Tradespeople met both civilian and military needs as tailors, blacksmiths, and barbers. Poor people, most of
them peones (commoners), did whatever task people would pay them to perform, including work on nearby ranches.

In the countryside, rancheros still took to the open range to round up mesteños, though by this time government regulation impeded efforts to make a profitable living in this way. Nonetheless, the rancheros around San Antonio clandestinely captured wild horses and cattle and invented clever ways to sell the stock to soldiers, fellow Béxareños, and even Anglo Americans. Alternatively, as rancheros had done in the Spanish era, they drove their stock into other Mexican states or Louisiana.

Generally, farming continued to provide only a subsistence-level existence. The people in San Antonio generally limited themselves to working family plots, though larger landowners tried harvesting vegetables and fruits on a grander scale. Some of the farmers in Béxar and Goliad who possessed irrigable lands experimented with growing cotton. Farming did at times yield slight surpluses, most of which were consumed locally.

As was the case before Mexico gained independence, Mexican society in Texas remained a divided one, the emerging opportunities in commerce, ranching, and politics during the 1820s and 1830s fueling the fragmentation. Government bureaucrats, successful merchants or rancheros, and others who came from prominent families made up a small elite. Among its members were Erasmo and Juan N. Seguín, José Antonio Navarro, Ramón Múñquiz, and retired soldiers such as José Francisco Ruiz and José María Balmaceda.

The status of Hispanic women reflected both liberties and restrictions. Women sued for military survivors’ benefits and engaged in the sale of lands, from which some achieved financial standing equal to or surpassing that of some men. But women also suffered from serious disadvantages. Law and tradition barred them from voting or the holding of political office. Religion discouraged divorce, dooming many women to endure unhappy marriages. Furthermore, societal conventions at the time demanded the ostracism of adulteresses, while turning a blind eye to the philandering of men. As was common practice in other western societies at the time, women often ate their home-cooked meals apart from (and sometimes only after) their spouses.

As in the Anglo sector, education was an area of concern for the Hispanic community, and in the traditional Mexican way, Tejanos supported it locally through fundraising drives. In Laredo, citizens opened a school in 1825. In Nacogdoches, Mexicans began a determined drive in 1828 to establish a similar facility, and by 1831 they had a school building and a teacher. San Antonio had two teachers in the late 1820s and early 1830s, though education there seems to have had its ups and downs according to prevailing economic conditions. Béxar and Nacogdoches boasted the highest proportion of students per capita in Texas. Generally, education declined with the turmoil of the mid-1830s.

Militia units remained the primary form of defense, as had been common during the period before 1821. Different from the Anglo volunteer companies, which were basically retaliatory, the Tejano militia, led by locally elected officers, followed an offensive strategy that conducted forays into Indian camping grounds. By the early 1830s, militia squadrons had developed into highly efficient, ranging cavalry units with the capacity to strike and pursue the enemy. Leaders of these companies included Martín de León, Juan N. Seguín, and Carlos de la Garza.

Catholicism remained the primary religion among the Mexican Texans. As during the Spanish era, Tejanos carried on the practices of their colonial forefathers. The Church had all but given up its work in the Far North during the period, and the two priests responsible
for Texas Catholicism during the period had earned disgraceful reputations. Displaying their own independence from religious dictates, Tejanos pleaded poverty and refused to pay the fees that the clergymen requested for performing the sacraments and other priestly functions.

Indians

The Indian peoples of Texas, still seeking to maintain their independence, now contended with Tejano militias and Anglo rifle companies instead of Spanish priests and royal armies. Those tribes that the Spanish had targeted for conversion had by the 1820s either perished due to wars and (European) diseases, been displaced from their native lands and driven into the western regions, or integrated successfully into Spanish/Mexican communities. Only vestiges of the tribal Coahuiltecans remained by the 1830s, some of them having managed to meld into Goliad’s population following the last phase of mission secularization in the 1820s.

With the Nuestra Señora del Rosario Mission no longer operative, the Karankawas lost one of their last sources of refuge near their old hunting grounds; at the same time, they became the targets of Anglos who coveted Karankawan lands. In 1824, settlers from Austin’s colony launched hostilities to drive nearby Karankawas from the vicinity. By 1827 the antagonistic whites had succeeded in forcing the tribe to relocate farther south along the coast. The move, however, only produced new problems for the Indians, as it placed them closer to the Tejano settlements at La Bahía, where local rancheros tolerated no threats to their livestock. During the 1830s, the Karankawas numbered less than 800 persons but desperately clung to survival by preying on Tejano-owned cattle or, in the case of those who gradually drifted back to their previous homeland, “hiring out” to Anglo settlers as casual laborers or domestic servants.

Meanwhile, the Indian tribes of the plains—such as the Comanches, Apaches, and Nortenos—remained faithful to their traditional lifeways. Nortenos and Apaches continued to rely on a combination of the hunt and small-scale farming, with women cultivating and harvesting corn, pumpkins, and beans. Meanwhile, Comanche warriors sabotaged settlements in an effort to halt the encroachment on their land and to take livestock, especially horses. Developing new entrepreneurial skills, some Plains bands traded with unscrupulous Anglo Americans in the United States, exchanging horses, mules, and other property they had stolen from the Texas settlements for desired American-made weapons. The Comanches, for their part, continued to rely on the old dependable custom of extorting gifts from the Mexican government in exchange for peace. But with national leaders unable to raise money for tribute, the Comanches—making use of Texas as a virtual stockroom—by the mid-1830s had arrested farm and ranch development in a line extending from San Antonio to Goliad.

The Caddos of East Texas, who had long lived in farming communities, now contended with problems that threatened to unravel their civilization. Alcohol, provided them by American traders, enfeebled many tribespeople almost at the same time that outsiders began penetrating long-held Caddo territory. Interlopers included other Native American peoples from the U.S. South as well as Anglo empresarios bearing contracts to establish colonies in Caddo land. By the late 1820s, the Caddos numbered no more than 300 families; they attempted to survive by farming, but also by trading beaver, deer, and otter pelts for weapons and household and other personal items in Louisiana.
The cultural diversity of Indian society was enhanced in 1819–20 when a band of Cherokees, bowing to legal and extralegal pressure by Anglos to abandon their homelands in Georgia and Alabama, arrived in northeastern Texas near Caddo land. Other southern tribes, including Kickapoos, Shawnees, Delawares, and Alabama-Coushattas, also emigrated to East Texas. The Cherokee leader Duwali (known also as Chief Bowles) originally located the Cherokees on the Trinity River, in the proximity of present-day Dallas. Friction with the Plains Indians soon forced the Cherokees to relocate in today’s Van Zandt, Cherokee, and neighboring counties. During the late 1820s, the Cherokee settlement in Texas included about eighty families that made their living from a combination of farming, livestock raising, and trade with nearby Nacogdoches. From the time of their arrival until the mid-1830s, Duwali and his people actively sought to acquire legal title to their new homeland from the Mexican government, but they never received anything more than vague promises.

The Centralists Back in Power, 1834–1836

Santa Anna returned from retirement in May 1834 to remove Gómez Farías, his acting president, whose liberalism had thoroughly alienated the Church and the established military. Resurfacing as a reactionary, Santa Anna abolished the Federalist Constitution of 1824 and held elections for a new congress composed of conservatives: that is, Centralists and others supportive of the powers of the military and the Catholic Church. In October 1835, the new congress took steps to create a Centralist state in Mexico. It dissolved all state legislatures and turned the former states into military departments, over which presidential appointees would now govern.

The dissolution of federalism produced revolts in several states. Zacatecas opposed the new order most resolutely, but Santa Anna crushed an uprising there unmercifully. The people in Yucatán broke with the government at this time, managing to retain their separatism until 1846. Meanwhile, in Monclova (which had become the capital of Coahuila y Tejas in 1833), liberal politicians denounced Santa Anna’s new government in the summer of 1834. The legislature refused to obey Centralist orders and in March and April of 1835 it passed two laws designed to raise money for resisting the Centralists. The decree authorized the governor to sell up to 400 leagues of public land in order to meet the “public exigencies” that the state then faced with Santa Anna, and they designated another 400 leagues with which to compensate militiamen willing to take up arms against hostile Indians.

Many in Texas disapproved of investors acquiring real estate for the sake of profit, but Anglo Texans present in Monclova acquired grants during the crisis by promising to raise and equip 1,000-man companies on these lands, though most of these agents beat a swift retreat back to Texas to try to sell their newly acquired property. Fearing that some of these speculators might in fact raise a militia to be used against the central government, Domingo de Ugartechea, the principal commandant in Béxar, called upon General Martín Perfecto de Córs to muster reinforcements. Córs, the commanding general of the northeastern Mexican states, relayed the request to President Santa Anna.

Responding to reports that Mexico was preparing to send troops into Texas, a band of men (historians provide different numbers, anywhere from twenty-five to fifty) led by William Barret Travis and armed with cannon descended on Anahauac on June 30, 1835, forcing the surrender of the forty-four Mexican troops stationed there. The immediate cause behind the assault on the Mexican installation dealt with the old grievance regarding
import tariffs, which people could ill afford to pay on needed goods. But the war party, which traced its origins to 1832, banked on the assumption that the episode would rally people in support of their cause of seeing Texas achieve its independence from Mexico. However, committees of (political) correspondence, which had organized by the early summer of 1835, still held divided views on what stand Texas should take in its relationship with Mexico. Some even assured Mexican officials that Texans, overall, had nothing to do with the acts that had induced troop movements into Texas.

But to Mexican political and military figures long wary of the Texans, the Anahuac incident represented the beginning of a revolt, and the refusal of Texas authorities to arrest the Anahuac agitators (primarily Travis) as the government wished, pointed to a widespread opposition. Moreover, the speculators stayed at large, mainly because by August they had either left Texas or gone into hiding. Among those lying low was Lorenzo de Zavala, once one of Mexico's most prominent Federalists, who had fled to Texas not only to escape the CENTRALIST regime but to be closer to his East Texas land possessions, which he had been using from afar for speculative purposes.

Meanwhile, other, more radical committees of correspondence called for another consultation but resolved not to surrender the fugitives to the authorities. By August, stories circulated that Mexico's troops were on the move into Texas; communities reacted by calling general meetings to decide their best course of action: reason with the government, or openly resist it. Then, in early September 1835, Austin, newly freed from jail in Mexico City, arrived back in Texas and threw his prestige behind the ideals of the war party. On the twentieth of that month, Cós landed with men and materiel at Capeño Bay, whence they marched into the interior, reinforcing Goliad before heading toward Béxar. Reports that the CENTRALIST forces intended to free the slaves, oppress Texans, and lay waste to the region influenced communities to take necessary measures for an expected confrontation.

Even before the CENTRALIST armies from Mexico skirmished with the Texans, the first episode between Anglos and the Mexican military occurred at Gonzales, where Lieutenant Francisco de Castañeda arrived on September 30, 1835, to request the transfer of a cannon that the Mexican government had given to the colonists four years earlier to help them protect themselves from Indians. Because he feared provoking a fight should he cross the Guadalupe River into Gonzales, Castañeda found himself negotiating for the surrender of the artillery piece in a rather awkward manner—he on one side of the river and local officials, determined to retain possession of the cannon, on the other. Without much hope of success and still reluctant to start a conflict, Castañeda retreated. Then, on the morning of October 2, the rebels fired upon the government forces in their camp, some four miles upriver from Gonzales, using the very cannon in question: on the artillery piece the Anglos had draped a white banner bearing the combative phrase "COME AND TAKE IT." A brief and minor encounter ensued. Shortly, the Anglos called for Castañeda's surrender, resuming their fire with the cannon when the lieutenant refused. With orders from his superior to withdraw "without compromising the honor of Mexican arms," Castañeda left Gonzales without further ado, and the Anglos proclaimed victory.

The insurgents claimed another triumph a week later when Goliad fell to them. With the capture of the presidio and the soldiers Cós had left there, the Texans obtained a new cache of military goods recently brought in by Cós; more important, they could now prevent the general from using the Gulf to import additional troops or to escape in case of an impending defeat.

By the end of the month, Texas volunteers under the command of Stephen F. Austin began moving into San Antonio. In late October, they quarantined the city, which was by
then under the control of some 800 to 1,200 troops under Cós. In mid-November Austin was sent on a diplomatic mission to the United States, and the men elected Edward Burleson to command the army. Burleson decided to abandon the siege for the winter, but Ben Milam convinced him to allow volunteers to attempt to take the town. On December 3, some 300 men led by Milam and Frank Johnson attacked. Isolated from reinforcements and re-supply for his army, Cós, having tried to defend Béxar in door-to-door combat, succumbed to the assault on December 11. Now the attackers, less Ben Milam, who had been killed by a Mexican sharpshooter, forced Cós to promise to respect the Constitution of 1824 and begin a retreat into the interior of Mexico.

Meanwhile, fifty-eight delegates from a dozen Texas communities had assembled in what is called the Consultation of 1835 at San Felipe de Austin. Meeting between November 3 and November 14, they elected Branch T. Archer president of the Consultation and, after lengthy discussion, declared their commitment to federalism as embodied in the Constitution of 1824. By this strategy, the delegates hoped to win support from liberals in Mexico and gain time in which to acquire assistance from the United States; in fact, Texans already wanted independence from Mexico. Delegates further created a provisional government and elected Henry Smith as governor, James W. Robinson as lieutenant governor, and established a general council (a legislative body like a parliament) to be composed of representatives from the various settlements. Among other things, the Consultation empowered the new government to seek funds to finance the expected war (to that end, it dispatched Austin, Archer, and William H. Wharton to the United States) and selected Sam Houston as commander of the regular army.

By early 1836, President Santa Anna himself was on the move toward Texas to crush the rebellion. In February the Mexican army, consisting of some 6,000 soldiers, ambushed them trained infantrymen and cavalrymen but many others conscripted for the Texas campaign, crossed the Rio Grande. Draftees included farm and ranch hands, poverty-stricken city dwellers, heads of families more concerned with the safety of their loved ones than a distant war, and political opponents of the Centralists.

Texas troops in the field, meantime, proved difficult to manage. Officers faced problems imposing order and discipline. Enlisted men tended to show more allegiance to their immediate leaders, as opposed to those higher up the chain of command. For the most part, the Texan army consisted of volunteers willing to fight when needed but ready to leave the ranks in order to care for their families and property once an immediate crisis had passed. It soon became apparent that the Consultation had blundered badly in not giving Sam Houston (who commanded the mostly nonexistent regular army) command over the volunteers as well.

The disorder in the military was symptomatic of problems besetting Texans in general, for into the winter of 1835 and 1836 they still faced much political division. Their own individualism inhibited agreement on the best path to pursue toward independence. Some held conflicting feelings about their relationship to Mexico and agonized over whether to join the peace or the war party. Others took issue with their fellow Texans over land claims or denounced them for shirking military duty.

As to the government, it faced such confusion and dissension that in December 1835, the general council called for the election of men to meet in early March 1836 for the purpose of adopting an ad interim government and framing a new constitution. Before the convention could meet, however, the government virtually collapsed. In January Governor Smith suspended the general council, which retaliated by removing Smith from office. Neither recognized the legality of the other's action, and for all practical purposes
Texas ceased to have a government. When delegates to the convention convened at Washington-on-the-Brazos on March 1, sentiment had crystallized in favor of independence from Mexico. On March 2, the delegates endorsed a committee document, a declaration of independence, stating that Santa Anna had overthrown the Constitution of 1824 and substituted it with tyranny, that the Mexican government had subjugated Texas to Coahuila and thereby had diminished the voice of the people of Texas, that it had denied them the right to trial by jury, the right to religious freedom, and the right to bear arms, and that Mexico had failed to establish a system of education. It further denounced Santa Anna’s regime for employing the military to enforce the law instead of utilizing civilian justice, for inciting the Indians against the colonies, and for mustering an army of mercenaries which was even then on its way to exterminate the colonists. All fifty-nine delegates to the convention signed the document, among them three Mexicans: Lorenzo de Zavala and the Tejanos José Antonio Navarro and José Francisco Ruiz, the latter two belonging to that group of Coahuiltecano capitalists who had profited from Anglo-American colonization.

The War for Texas Independence

Causes

How can this move for independence be explained when, just fifteen years earlier, Anglo-American immigrants to Texas had pledged their loyalty to Mexico and agreed to conform to Mexican custom? Traditionally, historians viewed the Texas rebellion as a courageous act of liberty-loving Anglo Texans against the intolerant and undemocratic government of Mexico: in this light, Anglos were simply following in the footsteps of their ancestors who had rebelled against the autocratic British. Over time, other interpretations gained acceptance. One depicted the Texas rebellion as part of a conspiracy of southern slaveholders to take control of Texas. Another cited collusion between President Andrew Jackson and Sam Houston. Nevertheless, the original democracy versus tyranny thesis remained the most tenacious.

Recent interpretations, however, depart from the earlier explanations. One line of analysis takes a narrow political view, arguing that the uprising was primarily a constitutional conflict against the Centralist party, which consistently followed a discriminatory course against the Texans, and that the abolishment of the Constitution of 1824 explains the move for independence.

Another alternative view asserts that economic incentives, such as land speculation, underlay the revolt. The land-trafficking thesis sees several of the influential men in Anglo Texas having migrated from the United States to the Mexican north with the intention of turning a profit in land transactions. This argument links these individuals to speculators in Texas, Coahuila, and Mexico City, as well as to financial centers in New York and Philadelphia. When Mexico moved against Texas in 1835, the leading men in the colony threw their influence behind rebellion in an effort to maintain opportunities in land speculation.

Other historians attribute more subtle economic reasons for the uprising, seeing the rebellion as one launched by Texans to preserve recently achieved economic gains. For years, Anglos had lived under the auspicious climate created by the Constitution of 1824—federalism had fostered further immigration, slavery, and economic progress. In eastern
Texas, Anglo Texans had benefited favorably from cotton production, finding markets for the staple in U.S. markets. Santa Anna’s effort in 1835–36 to impose stricter rule over the province threatened the Texans’ notions of an individual’s right to make a living through inventive entrepreneurship. The rebellion, then, intended to protect the agricultural and commercial advances Anglos had made in Texas, as well as slavery.

Still other historians focus on Anglo-American contempt for Mexico’s rule. According to this view, Anglo Americans throughout the 1820s and up to the outbreak of the war faulted the Mexican character for a number of defects, among them the Mexicans’ unenlightened politics: they tolerated military intervention in government, centralist rule, and the violation of individual and states’ rights, and seemed unenlightened on such fundamental republican tenets as the right to due process. In short, the Anglos scornfully viewed Mexicans as a politically and culturally inferior people, one incapable of governing Texas and thus undeserving of the province.

Similarly contemptible, they contended, was Mexico’s cowardly policy toward the indios bárbaros; Anglos grieved that politicians preferred retrenchment against the Comanches instead of a manly resistance to them in the American manner. This allegation, however, conveniently ignored several realities. First, Spaniards and Mexicans had not timidly retreated from openly engaging the Indians. Spain and subsequently Mexico saw Texas as a region designed to buffer and protect the wealthier northern states from foreign interlopers (including those from the United States by the 1820s); fighting Indians in Texas simply had held low priority. Nor had Anglo communities been any more successful in restraining the powerful Comanche nation from attacks on the province. It was myth, of course, to maintain that the United States produced a more courageous breed of men than did Spain or Mexico; in point of fact, Anglo men launched no major offensives against the Comanches, as Anglo settlements up until the mid-1830s were situated in eastern Texas, remote from the bison-hunting grounds of Plains Indians.

It follows, therefore, that ethnocentrism or racism as a cause of the conflict has also received attention from scholars, with some arguing strongly that racial prejudice acted as a guiding force (though not the sole one) in the break with Mexico; others adamantly contest this analysis. The first school would note that Anglo Americans arrived in Texas already conditioned to think negatively of Mexican people: the Mexicans’ darker skin and adherence to Catholicism helped Protestant, racially biased Anglos view Mexicans as biologically inferior and morally flawed. Believing, as past generations of Anglos did (and future ones would) that the United States had a special purpose in the world (a “Manifest Destiny” to bring order and discipline to “untamed” and “uncivilized” hinterlands), they arrived in Texas bent on “rescuing” the underdeveloped region from a backward people and an unstable government.

Critics of such an interpretation argue that racism truly was not manifest in Texas before 1836, and thus should be discounted as a primary cause in the independence movement. In fact, Anglos and Tejanos coexisted fairly well, sharing similar economic and political interests. Frontier settlements were so remote that large-scale contact between the two peoples hardly aroused ill-feelings. But once it started, the war itself, one group of scholars observes, spurred anti-Mexican prejudice. During the conflict Anglos came to see Mexicans as decadent, brutal, and subhuman, the reality of the events that transpired during it hardening such perceptions. Still other scholars note that not until after 1836, when new factors emerged, among them a desire to turn Mexicans into a controllable labor force and stepped-up competition for land, did feelings that may be classified as racist develop. Prejudice evolved from a need to justify the violent domination of the Tejanos, in short, from anxiety, distrust, fear, conflict, and competition.
Scholars also find the United States economy a contributing factor leading to the breakup of Texas with Mexico. Anglo-American immigrants had facilitated closer economic ties between Texas (and other parts of the Far North for that matter) and the United States, so that by the 1830s, even Tejanos (both oligarchs and some plain folks) and entrepreneurs in Coahuila were forging connections to U.S. commerce. When events pushed Texas toward separation from Mexico, many Texans (both Anglos and Mexicans)—driven by the human instinct for survival—sided with rebellion, seeing greater opportunity in an independent Texas tied to the robust economy of the United States.

Finally, after decades of relative neglect, the Revolution has come under the examination of historians from Mexico. Writing from a nationalistic perspective, they have tended to view the conflict as an expression of U.S. imperialism—a shameless American land-grab perpetrated against a weaker neighbor. In this view, the Texas War for Independence was simply the first step in the United States’ acquisition of Mexico’s northern territories, a process that started in Texas and then culminated in the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–48. The Texas rebels, in other words, were simply surrogates for the U.S. government, fully intending to detach Texas from Mexico and add it to the United States.

Whatever the immediate causes of the Texas War for Independence, the conflict must be considered in the larger social, political, and economic context of Mexican and American history. Texas by the 1830s was an isolated, peripheral region of the weak, incompletely formed Mexican nation. The events of the 1820s and 1830s had drawn Texas increasingly into the dynamic, rapidly expanding capitalist economic system of the United States, and those ties proved stronger than all of Mexico’s inadequate attempts to foster a Mexican identity and bind the northern frontier province more tightly to the national core. Shortly before the outbreak of the Revolution, Stephen F. Austin had described Texas as “a ripe peach” simply waiting for a “gentle breeze” to cause it to drop from its Mexican tree. The events of 1833–35, culminating in Santa Anna’s turn to Centralism, whipped up more than a breeze—it was more like a storm that had been brewing quietly for many years but finally broke.

Independence won

Santa Anna arrived in Béxar on February 23, 1836, to find the Alamo (the popular name of the old mission of San Antonio de Valero) fortified by a contingent led by William Barret Travis and James Bowie. Laying siege to it, Santa Anna prepared for a final assault, as those inside mobilized for defense.

On March 6, sometime around the break of dawn, some 1,100 of Santa Anna’s 2,600 troops began a trot toward the walled compound as the derogatorio, a bugle call signaling to take no prisoners, sounded. The old mission would not fall easily; its location on a slight rise afforded those inside a clear view of their attackers. Moreover, the defenders (historians now place their number in the range of 240 to 260) had already armed the compound with twenty-one heavy artillery pieces, and many of those inside were expert riflemen, including foremost the Tennessee marksmen led by the recently arrived volunteer Davy Crockett, a nationally famous former U.S. congressman. Using cannon fire and long rifles, the Alamo’s defenders felled the lead soldiers responsible for positioning the ladders that would allow the attackers to scale the mission’s defenses; thus officers and more-seasoned fighters rushing behind the first wave could only try to claw their way up and over the compound’s eight- to nine-foot walls. Now fighting for their lives, the Mexicans contended with bayonets and Bowie knives. Within minutes of its start, the assault appeared to have
miscarried, and Santa Anna committed 400 reserves to the engagement. As this new wave of soldiers dashed toward the fortress, their bullets hit many of the hapless conscripts who still lay bunched up at the base of the walls. Frantic effort finally took the attackers over the walls of the Alamo, where the volunteers fell back to find cover within the compound (Figure 3.6). The battle itself ended within thirty minutes, but the carnage followed for some time after, as the Mexicans ferreted out soldiers still resisting from makeshift secondary lines of defense. The assault had cost Santa Anna more than 200 deaths and total casualties of about 400.

Even though Santa Anna gave orders to spare no one’s life, several who had stood in the Alamo survived. Among them were Susannah Dickinson, her small child, and a black slave belonging to Travis. Many of the survivors were Mexicans, most of them family members of (what recent research reveals were) nine Tejanos who had chosen to stand and fight with those inside the Alamo. About six or seven volunteers—Davy Crockett probably among them—were captured and executed within minutes after the battle by orders of Santa Anna.

While Santa Anna was waging his costly victory at Béxar, Texans under the command of Colonel James W. Fannin were preparing to defend the old presidio at Goliad from Mexican forces advancing up the coast from Matamoros under the command of Gen. José de Urrea, who had already disposed of Anglo resistance his forces had met at San Patricio, Agua Dulce, and Refugio. Fannin decided on the morning of March 19 to abandon the garrison and make a run for Victoria, reasoning that the lack of adequate provisions at Goliad undermined a capable defense. As Fannin and his men retreated, Urrea intercepted them, deterring the Texans from taking refuge at Coleto Creek, the ravined terrain of which might have allowed Fannin to dig in to mount a spirited resistance. Therefore, at the “battle of the prairie,” some two miles from the timber of Coleto Creek, Urrea forced Fannin to surrender on the morning of March 20, and then marched the enemy force back to Goliad. A week later, despite Urrea’s personal pleas for clemency for the prisoners, Col. Nicolás de
Ja Portilla (whom Urrea had left in command at Goliad) slaughtered the Anglos at Santa Anna's insistence. Some 312 persons met their death, but close to 30 men who had not been fatally wounded by the executioners' first volley managed to escape into the woods.

The March convention had finally given Houston command of all Texan troops—volunteers as well as regulars—creating unity of command, an element essential to fighting a war. Moreover, the defeats at the Alamo and Goliad had eliminated the soldiers' narrow allegiances to their immediate leaders. Houston arrived at Gonzales on March 13 to take command of 374 troops gathered there, only to hear of the fall of the Alamo. Two days later, following the arrival of more men, which increased his force to around 500, Houston headed away from Santa Anna's advancing army, toward more familiar territory in East Texas. While he might have undertaken this maneuver in order to engage the Mexican army on the Texans' own ground, many believed that Houston intended to retreat all the way to the Louisiana border, where the U.S. Army might then intervene on the Texan side. Indeed, throughout the retreat Texan officials stayed in contact with U.S. Gen. Edmund Gaines, who was stationed with an American force just across the Sabine River. Whatever Houston's intentions (and he never fully revealed what they were), many Texas settlers perceived it as a mindless retreat and panic spread quickly among the plain folk of the area—a panic made worse by unfounded rumors of an alliance between Mexicans and Indians. Consequently, an exodus Texans called the "Runaway Scrape" ensued as people fled their farms and communities, seeking refuge along the Texas-Louisiana border. A sense of mortal terror propelled them forward, despite cold weather and a driving rain that turned dirt roads into quagmires and common streams into mighty rivers.

By this point, Santa Anna felt confident that his conquest of the Texan army was near at hand, and he committed a major military blunder by detaching himself and some 1,300 troops from the main body of his army to pursue the rebel government near Galveston Bay. Now the pursuer became the pursued, as Houston caught up with Santa Anna at the San Jacinto River on April 20. The Mexican general audaciously made camp in a location that defied the rules of engagement; although he had the Texans boxed in, he, too, was shut off on three sides, with the enemy less than a mile in front and already poised for an attack. The San Jacinto River on Santa Anna's right and swampy terrain behind him would make a disciplined retreat impossible (Figure 3.7).

When no attack had come by midday on April 21, Santa Anna became convinced that Houston did not intend to fight. Therefore it came as a complete surprise when, sometime around 4 p.m., Sam Houston's forces of approximately 1,000 troops (made up of volunteers from the Anglo settlements, recent arrivals from the United States, as well as a detachment of Texas Mexicans led by Júan N. Seguin) advanced on Santa Anna's camp. Caught off guard, Santa Anna's forces attempted to beat back the Texans, even killing a horse out from under Sam Houston and wounding the general, but their resistance amounted to little. Within eighteen minutes after the first shot had been fired, Houston's men had full control of the enemy camp. The Mexican army, by this time already deserted by Santa Anna, had become disorganized and gave ground, with the Texans chasing Mexican troops as they fled into the river and the marsh, killing them as they came upon them. The slaying of Santa Anna's men continued past dusk. Casualty figures showed 650 Mexicans dead and 208 wounded. Additionally, the victors took numerous prisoners. The Texans had suffered only eight or nine killed and somewhere between seventeen and thirty injured.

Captured the day following the Battle of San Jacinto, Santa Anna succeeded in negotiating an agreement whereby Houston spared his life in return for a concession that the
The Battle of San Jacinto – April 21, 1836

Figure 3.7  Adapted from Stephen L. Hardin, Texian Illad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution, University of Texas Press, 1994.
Mexican Texas, 1821–1836

Mexican leader order the retreat of his three armies into Mexico. The small Texan navy had succeeded in preventing Mexican forces from being resupplied, and the remaining Mexican forces under the command of Gen. Vicente Filisola—short of provisions and further weakened from foundering in a “sea of mud” for two weeks due to heavy rains—obeyed Santa Anna’s orders, which Filisola, second in command, relayed to a bitterly reluctant Urrea and his forces as well.

On May 14, in the Treaties of Velasco, Santa Anna acknowledged Texas independence, vowed again to remove all of his forces into Mexico, accepted Texas’s southern boundary as the Rio Grande, and promised to see an independent Texas receive full diplomatic recognition by the Mexican government. Although the Mexican congress refused to accept the general’s accords, by this time Mexico lacked the means to attempt a reconquest of the lost land. Texas’s independence had been won.

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Articles


