The Texas Revolutionary Experience
A POLITICAL AND SOCIAL HISTORY
1835–1836
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1. Background to the Revolution

Like other upheavals of its kind, the Texas Revolution had a very discordant development characterized by false starts and internal dissent. Therefore, in terms of background to the events of 1835–36, two important questions must be addressed: (1) what forces caused the conflict between Texas and Mexico—why did such a movement occur at all? and (2) what factors restrained the rebellion and divided the Texans, leading to the hesitant, lurching qualities that characterized their efforts?

The people of Texas had received much from the government of Mexico and had not been badly treated. The sparsely settled region on its northeastern frontier presented the new Republic (independent in 1821 after a decade of debilitating struggle against Spain) with a serious dilemma. At its outset as a nation Mexico suffered from a weakened economy, population decline, and political uncertainty. With its resources thereby limited, how could Mexico rule the land of Texas, which shared a border with the expansive people and government of the United States? Influenced by the fact that emigrants from the United States had already begun to settle in Texas, Mexico invited colonization and sought to regulate it. Colonists received land for small fees, often paid to Anglo-American “empresarios” like Stephen F. Austin and Green DeWitt, who recruited them and sometimes provided assistance in the settlement process.

Historians have emphasized the issue of cultural conflict, but in practice Mexico did not demand that Anglo settlers be substantially Hispanicized. The Mexican Constitution of 1824, in some ways even more loosely federalistic than that of the United States, allowed considerable local autonomy. Business in areas where most Anglos lived could be
carried on in English without hindrance. The requirement that emigrants adopt the official state religion was ignored, and the people became “catholic” in quite a different sense than the law provided. Farmers and merchants pursued their callings, normally with little interference from Mexican authorities. Seldom has the ruling hand been felt so lightly as in Texas in the period 1821–35. Yet, certain chronic disputes between Mexico and its northeastern province created an undercurrent of tension, mutual suspicion, and frustration that developed alongside the growth of Anglo American influence in Texas. Barker described these issues as “dull, organic aches” in the relations between Mexico and Texas.

Disagreements on the matter of racial bondage proved to be a perpetual source of irritation. Antislavery ideology had triumphed in Mexico as part of the revolutionary ethos that accompanied the movement for independence. By contrast, the Anglo Texans had emigrated largely from the southern United States where intellectual reactionaries defended the peculiar institution. In Texas the colonists circumspectly argued in favor of slavery on the practical grounds that progress depended on forced labor. To a large extent debate on slavery occurred within a nation-state framework, as a matter of principle versus interest. Throughout the 1820s local authorities in Texas blunted repeated but indecisive antislavery measures.

Anglo leaders either muted the impact of these laws or simply ignored them, in particular by persuading the legislature to sanction a bogus “contract” system allowing imports of bound labor. This subterfuge received a jolt on September 15, 1829, with the promulgation of a general emancipation decree by President Vicente Guerrero, but local officials once again gained an exemption for Texas. Henceforth the barrage of antislavery measures lessened, yet the status of the institution remained in doubt. When the legislature in 1832 established a ten-year limitation on the length of labor contracts, Anglo Texas colonists launched a movement for separate statehood. These repeated clashes resulted in something of a stalemate—slavery survived amidst a sense of uncertainty. Masters bought, hired, and sold workers with little regard for the law, but Mexican policy had the effect of slowing the pace of immigration, perpetuating labor shortages, and retarding growth.

Many antislavery actions occurred as part of a larger effort to regulate immigration into Texas; on this issue Mexican and Anglo interests also clashed fundamentally. Congress in 1824 had enacted a measure which, except for restrictions on the size of individual grants and on their location near foreign or coastal territory, allowed nearly open immigration under the direction of state governments. Coahuila, the state authority over Texas, created the empresario system the next year, making land available to individuals in enticingly large plots at virtually no cost. These measures, together with a depression and a more restrictive land policy in the United States, resulted in an unexpectedly large movement into the areas claimed by Austin and the other Texas colonizers. Many more emigrants continued simply to cross the Sabine into Mexico and occupy land without benefit of government sanction. The pace of population growth caused a quick reconsideration of the liberal land policy. Leaders also became apprehensive in response to U.S. diplomatic designs on Texas and to stirrings of rebellion against Mexican authority.

By the end of the 1820s Mexico sought to reverse its policy and to bring Texas more nearly into the orbit of the nation. The far-reaching plan of Gen. Manuel Mier y Terán envisioned expanding Mexican military presence, attracting colonists from the interior of Mexico and Europe rather than the United States, and establishing a better trade pattern. His program achieved only partial implementation. The law of April 6, 1830, by which Congress banned all immigration from the United States to the bordering provinces of Mexico, proved to be unenforceable and did much to worsen relations between Texas and the central government. Anglo-American immigrants continued to seep in illegally, and two of the empresarios gained temporary exemptions, so the North American presence hardly declined. Anglo settlers greatly resented the law and sought by petition and other forms of political activism to have it repealed. These efforts increased Mexican suspicion that Texas had become disloyal. Nevertheless, in November, 1831, Congress reopened the nation’s borders to residents of the United States, effective in May of the next year. On the matter of immigration, as on slavery, Anglo Texas had challenged the power and the will of Mexico and found it weak.

Inadequate government machinery frustrated the correction of other problems. The fact that Mexico had no means of enforcing tariffs or other measures pleased Texas free traders, but the effort to establish customs houses in the 1830s resulted in explosive controversies without appreciably adding to Mexican authority. By the mid-1830s little coastal trade had developed between Texas and other Mexican ports, with the result that, in the words of historian David J. Weber, “the government failed to integrate Texas into the national economy.” The impetus for judiciary reform came from Anglo settlers who found the Mexican sys-
They received relief with an April, 1834, law that made justice more
Anglicized and localized for the Texans. On these as on the other con-
troversies, the colonists had blocked efforts to augment the power of
the central government and agitated successfully for policies congenial
with their own civilization. The Anglo colonists venerated the 1824
constitution because localized and limited government protected their
way of life.

Despite triumphs resulting from pressure tactics, the Texans' meth-
ods had unfavorable results as well; increasingly, Mexico viewed the
province as dangerously ungovernable. Recurrent demands for further
reform increased Mexican suspicion of this dynamic, distant region.
Persons of varying shades of political opinion resented the Texans' tur-
bulent behavior, disrespectful attitude toward colonial policy, continued
identification with the United States, and aggressive tactics.6

Whether malcontents and "adventurers" really dominated the Texas
scene, as many observers believed, some fiery spirits did take control
at certain times. What Barker called the "popular disturbances" of 1832
in fact amounted to armed rebellion. The incidents at Anáhuac (a fort
above Galveston Bay) in part resulted from an awkward constitutional
arrangement: this military town came directly under the authority of
the national government, which had always denied colonization in the
coastal area. The land claims of the nearby community of Liberty
emanated from the state government of Coahuila and Texas. Tensions
grew in 1831. National officials sent more soldiers to Anáhuac, began
to issue titles that conflicted with those of agents of the state, and en-
forced import duties as well. Unaccustomed to paying taxes in any form,
many Texans hated the new collection policy and regarded its enforcers,
Col. Juan Davis Bradburn and George Fisher (stationed at Brazoria),
as arbitrary military despots.

Mier y Terán had appointed these officials in an effort to implement
the law of April 6, 1830. From his fort at Anáhuac the tactless Brad-
burn quarreled with settlers and state officials over the major issues
that divided Texas and Mexico. He disputed the power of state officials
to establish civil government in this area, and he harbored runaway
slaves in a manner that seemed likely to spread discontent. Fisher's en-
forcement of tariffs appeared equally arbitrary to Brazoria merchants
and consumers. In late 1831 they clashed with his troops in defying
payment of import taxes.

Throughout the year 1832 rumors of a planned attack by civilian
volunteers confronted Bradburn, but local compromisers averted vio-

lence for a time. Citizen soldiers and leaders from Liberty, Brazoria,
and San Felipe finally converged on Anáhuac and clashed with some
of Bradburn's forces, themselves divided on political issues. The Mexi-
can commander fled to Louisiana and then back to Mexico. Compromisers
managed to avoid Mexican retaliation by sending out the Turtle
Bayou Resolutions, presenting the revolt as part of the nation's restora-
tion of federalism. Although this coincidental political upheaval in
Mexico had helped prevent complete rupture in 1832, in Texas, the
events at Anáhuac had great significance. The centralist effort to estab-
lish firmer machinery of national control had been defied, and those
who led the resistance no doubt gained in confidence as a result.

Since Texas had narrowly averted a full-scale armed conflict with Mex-
ico over these incidents, moderate Stephen F. Austin reacted without
enthusiasm to the proposal for a convention in the fall of 1832. Fearing
that such a gathering would involve only Anglo participation he
preferred to accomplish reform goals by a more cautious policy of peti-
tioning or by gaining the support of existing political officialdom in
Texas. Mexico, he knew, regarded unauthorized meetings as revolu-
tionary. Unable to dissuade the popular leaders, Austin met with the
people's representatives when they congregated in San Felipe in October
and again in April, 1833. Their proposals included changes in immi-
gration, judicial, and other political policies that eventually were passed
by national or state governments. But the conventions also favored sepa-
rate statehood for Texas and Coahuila, an idea that even previously
sympathetic Mexican officials regarded as a dangerous step toward se-
cession and eventual independence. The delegates went so far as to
draw up a Texas state constitution. This cause provoked suspicion among
some Hispanic residents in Béar and Goliad and left those communities
divided; but Austin believed that failure to grant the colonists' de-
mand would lead to war. The fact that separate statehood had become
largely an Anglo movement hurt Austin's chances during his mission
to the political authorities in Mexico. They eventually imprisoned him
when he, in exasperation, advised Texas to forge ahead without the
approval of the central authorities.8

By 1832-33 the Texans had become both impatient with what they
regarded as the nation's constant political turmoil and contemptuous
of Mexican power. Nevertheless, they remained quieter in 1834, in de-
ference to Austin's lobbying efforts on their behalf at the national capi-
tal. The state government once again responded to their agitation with
further concessions; Texas in 1834 gained more representatives in the legislature, an additional political department headquartered in San Felipe, more municipalities, and several judicial reforms. Writing retrospectively after Texas has won its independence, Austin concluded that during the previous decade "the country was placed . . . upon a volcano, subject to be ruined by popular excitement on the one hand or by the jealousy of the Mexicans on the other." But during his 1834 sojourn in Mexico the people overwhelmingly followed his conservative advice. Further, many other pacifying factors had emerged: immigration had been legally renewed, the state government seemed benign, localism prevailed in politics, and a cholera epidemic discouraged controversy. The region hummed with economic activity rather than political agitation.

For two years after the April, 1833, convention controversies ebbed, relations seemed to improve between Mexico and Texas, and a mood of optimism prevailed among the colonists. Citing the repeal of the law of April 6, 1830, and other favorable measures, one observer in February, 1834, explained: "The people generally appear to be satisfied with what has been done for the present [and] are willing to defer the state question. They consider their prospects truly cheering." Slightly over a year later this attitude had been bolstered by continued hopes for statehood and rapid immigration from the U. S. Many no doubt concurred with Thomas H. Borden, who suggested that this turn of affairs could be credited to the Texans' resistance to unfavorable Mexican policies: "Our political affairs are more settled than they have been for some time past." Though "it is uncertain yet whether our fights here in 1833 have been a benefit or not," Borden admitted that "one thing is certain that it increased there jealousies, but it also done this good it showed them our spunk and what we could do if we were a mind." In retrospect, it is clear that by 1835 an explosive and perhaps inevitable clash had been brewed. Mexico wearied of Texans' perpetual recalcitrance and ongoing insistence on more concessions, while the Texans believed that their resistance had been successful and had developed an agenda of additional demands.

At the same time several aspects of the Texas scene restrained the potential for conflict with Mexico. An overriding factor was the character of the people, whose rampant individualism and political lethargy distressed those who emphasized the need for cooperation and activism. In 1834, John A. Wharton wrote despairingly about the apathy that caused his newspaper to fail, leaving Texas without a free press and subject to misinformation, demagoguery, and tyranny. Others used this languid quality to reassure Mexican officials of the continued loyalty of the province. In an 1834 address designed to facilitate the release of Austin, R. M. Williamson (president of the San Felipe Ayuntamiento) insisted that the people "are not of a revolutionary disposition."

The empresario himself wrote back to encourage a "dead calm" in Texas, only to fear that he had succeeded too well when words of con-
ern and support dwindled to virtually nothing. Though Austin confined himself to pleading for unity and condemning divisions among the people, others occasionally attempted to explain the causes of the self-oriented and non-cooperative attitude that prevailed. Rival empresario Sterling C. Robertson noted in October, 1835, that “Texas is divided into small municipalities unconnected by any bond of union except their common danger.”

A different sort of geographic determinism occurred to an anonymous writer who visited the new Republic in 1837. He, too, observed the “backwardness” of the Texas settlers in engaging in “revolutionary measures” in 1835 and attributed it to their character: a favorable climate and natural abundance resulted in an ease of living and indolence. For this reason the people were complacent; they responded slowly to the political crisis, convinced themselves that “the justice of Mexico” would prevail, and resorted to arms belatedly under an actual invasion. Following the defeat of Mexico, according to his observations, the people “relapsed into their former unconsidered mode of life and seem to take but little interest in the affairs of government.”

The question of a national or regional “character” always proves to be a formidable and elusive subject, but a few scholars have attempted to understand the Texans of the 1830s. Invariably the high degree of individualism receives prominent attention, and some historians have also adopted modified geographical explanations for this quality, emphasizing the early Texas environment and the frontier experience. Mark Nackman has suggested that the emigrants of this period brought with them an enhanced dislike of social restraints. He noted that Texas attracted a large number of persons who were propelled out of the United States by business failures, brushes with the law, family disputes, and other misfortunes. They sought sanctuary from the law, new adventure, and a chance to begin again. To many, these ephemeral ambitions all translated into one tangible goal: land, the symbol and means of freedom. Benefiting from the generous Mexican policy, Texans had acquired as a result even more personal independence. They did not intend to surrender either the land or the independence. Many others, especially in east Texas, settled without acquiring titles and lived virtually free of any government, content not to stir the waters of discord.

Whether Texas attracted immigrants who by character were predisposed to intense individualism, their experience on the frontier of Mexico nurtured this quality. Texas society imposed remarkably few constraints on personal freedom. Throughout the period of heavy Anglo migration, the Mexican Constitution of 1824 provided the northern provinces with a liberal framework of government, including representative institutions based on electoral principles and a high degree of free speech. Some Texans chafed at their union in statehood with Coahuila and expressed frustration about the political upheavals that beset Mexico, but in practice government fell mostly under their local sway. Settler J. P. Cole expressed the common disgust at Mexican politics to a prospective immigrant but quickly added, “upon the score of Local Government we get along very well[,] there is such an identity of Interest here that the will of the people form a government.” Even though he was writing on the eve of war, Cole considered Texas “to be perfectly safe and while this is the case (and belie it will not be otherwise) we have nothing to fear.”

The federalist system in fact brought little more than a shadow of government over Texas. Political chiefs residing in Bexar, backed by only a token military force, naturally had difficulty enforcing their will in scattered settlements to the east. Mostly, they tended to defend regional needs and perspectives to outside authorities; the creation of additional departments of Nacogdoches in 1831 and Brazos in 1834 furthered government responsiveness to local interests. Municipal politics (with twenty-two municipalities in 1835, ruled by elected ayuntamientos) also remained close to the people; confronted by huge geographic dimensions, they were as a result very limited in authority. In the words of scholar Carlos E. Castañeda: “Left much to themselves, the colonists ran their own affairs” according to their traditions and needs.

Localized and weak government did concern some Texans because it crippled the judicial system. Texas communities employed no salaried law enforcers, and in many instances elected officials had difficulty obtaining what Henry Smith called “enough public spirit” to conduct a formal trial of those who by chance got arrested. This ex-alcalde lectured his former constituents on the “duties incumbent upon us as members of the society,” but still found the citizens unwilling to pay any of the taxes levied by the ayuntamiento for judicial purposes. That the government might compel collection seems to have occurred to no one. Though they sometimes complained about the cumbersome legal system, most settlers actually seemed content with the vigilante justice that by the mid-1830s had already become a Texas tradition.

Austin and other reformers advocated the extension of a measure of government control over the economy, believing that commercial regulations might improve ports and lessen the unfavorable balance
of trade. In practice the efforts of Mexico to collect import duties in Texas faltered, and its largely self-sufficient majority continued to have nearly complete economic freedom.\textsuperscript{19} Progressive-minded citizens recognized also a need for developing certain beneficial social institutions. Several tuition-supported private academies sprang up in various communities late in the history of Mexican Texas; these included some female-operated boarding schools that survived more than one or two terms. Nevertheless, education remained largely the private function of the family.

Religion existed in a state of flux and variety. Despite maintaining an officially favored status, the Roman Catholic Church had undergone considerable decline as a result of Mexico's independence. The triumph of liberal ideology, secularization, an end to government aid, and the inability to recruit Spanish Franciscans sapped the vitality from the mission system by the 1820s. Even the traditional religious centers, Goliad and Béxar, underwent religious decline; the area where most Anglos lived, including Nacogdoches, which also had a sizable Mexican community, remained without services for all but a few years. Thus, Texas had the practice if not an official theory of toleration. This situation emboldened Protestant activity in the early 1830s, despite Austin's continued concern that "fanatical" preachers might provoke the attention of Mexican authorities. The few Anglo missionaries active in Texas did not establish institutionalized churches, despite the appearance of Sunday schools and camp meetings. Many settlers expressed dismay about the absence of piety and morality due to the weakness of formal religion. Conventional minds considered Texas to have a distinctively religious climate of opinion. "They are a most ungodly people," wrote diarist William F. Gray.\textsuperscript{20} Remarkably few institutions existed to develop group consciousness and cohesion. Though certainly not a static society, Texas on the eve of its revolution remained a land of unfettered personal freedom and intense individualism.

The unpolticized character of many Texans and their habit of placing individual concerns over the needs of society were qualities that first impeded the growth of revolutionary zeal and later undermined political and military efforts. Various internal divisions in Texas also existed, further segmenting the people and threatening the development of revolutionary unity. Racial and ethnic diversity increased the potential for internal discord. By the mid-1830s slaves, concentrated on river bottom plantations near the coast, comprised over ten percent...
creasingly, the Tejanos of the Nacogdoches area voted as a bloc and otherwise retreated into a separate community, and seething animosities lay close to the surface in this region.23

To the south and west of Austin's grant lay another area with complex and competing land claims and a variety of ethnic divisions. Victoria had been founded as a colonial center by Tamailipas rancher Martín de León, whose grant of 1824 unfortunately provided very indistinct boundaries. This fact became critical when territory to the north, west, and south came into the hands of other empresarios; the situation brought what Castañeda has described as "suspicion, distrust, and hatred" among the various residents. Nevertheless, the De León colony attracted over one hundred Mexican families by 1835. These regional tensions accentuated the Anglo Texans' predisposition toward viewing the fate of Texas in racial terms. Even the previously restrained Austin burst out in 1836 that the war represented a contest between the barbarism of a "mongrel Spanish-Indian and negro race, against civilization and the Anglo-American race."23

Cultural dissimilarities also divided other colonists in southwestern Texas. Two sets of Irish empresarios attempted to settle the region. James Power and James Hewetson received grants near the coast between the San Antonio and Nueces rivers in 1826. Some of their settlers persevered through a discouraging start and congregated on lands formerly held by Refugio missions; a number of Tejano residents continued to ranch and farm in this neighborhood. Other Irish colonists also competed for this territory, establishing their claims on the contracts of empresarios John McMullen and James McGloin. Even those who moved southward to the town of San Patricio, founded in 1826, inhabited territory claimed by Power and Hewetson. Several of these settlers possessed an enhanced loyalty to Mexico because of their religion. Other Tejanos in the region based their real property rights on prior occupancy, on the De León grant, or on privileges recognized by the ayuntamiento of Goliad. As a whole, the entire southwestern coastal area had explosive potential.24

Even without the ethnic element, disputes over land rights created powerful animosities. To the east of Austin's colony confusion also prevailed. Lorenzo de Zavala, David G. Burnet, and Joseph Vehlein, having all failed to settle the number of families required by the terms of their contracts, disposed of their grants to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company as if they actually owned the substantial territory. The speculative company in turn sold scrip to immigrants who believed they had acquired acceptable title to the land. Other colonists failed to gain Mexican deeds because their claims were for land in the foreign boundary zone adjacent to the United States and by law forbidden to settlement. The upper Brazos also came under dispute between rival empresarios. Sterling C. Robertson struggled against the potent partnership of Stephen F. Austin and Samuel M. Williams, who attempted to invalidate Robertson's grant on grounds of insufficient settlement and to avoid other Mexican restrictions in a new claim of their own.25 These controversies all involved more than a few speculationists; the colonists themselves stood to gain or lose their land depending on the outcome of these imperial-sized schemes.

Political partisanship also contributed to the spirit of disharmony. These divisions had only a small ideological content; both "war" and "peace" parties favored greater autonomy for Texas and divisionary control on the behest means to achieve that goal. The more conservative of these groups tended to oppose violent methods and to emphasize loyalty to Mexico, thus becoming the "peace" party and also being branded as "Tories." Those favoring more forceful action (hence the term "war" party) often found themselves characterized as tax-eading merchants, land- or job-schemers, and hard-drinking, boastful adventurers. Length of residence played a role in determining factional identification, with more recent arrivals tending toward the "war" party. Leadership loyalties also seem to have been at the core of these disputes; William and John Wharton headed the faction that generally opposed Stephen F. Austin and his "peace party." Subleaders and positions shifted back and forth so frequently that faction is a better term for them than party. Nevertheless, these conflicts generated genuine ill will, and partisan feelings had the effect of elevating the level of internal bitterness. After attending a meeting that dissolved into "confusion" because of war and peace party conflicts, one veteran of Georgia politics concluded in disgust, "the people knew nothing .... they are damned stupid and easily ruled by Demagogues and factions."26

Rampant individualism, political disunity, and serious social divisions—these characteristics limited Texas' revolutionary potential. In 1834 few apparently allowed their contentment to be stirred by the warnings of the newspaper Advocate of the People's Rights, which editorialized on the dangers of unpreparedness. According to this account, too many placed faith in past victories over small Mexican garrisons or counted on assistance from the United States. The journalist feared that "the young and enthusiastic" might rashly plunge into war.
and then, having no property to protect, would flee to the United States. How, he asked, could Texas win such a contest "with an unorganized population of a few thousand, without even provisions enough at this moment to raise the present crop, without arms, without money, without able commanders, and without a disciplined soldiery?" The fighting would undoubtedly occur on Texas soil and might well become a struggle like that of Mexico against Spain, lasting for years with devastating effects. Even those who took these warnings seriously probably saw little point to them. The editor urged his fellow "North Americans" not "to submit to oppression," but who had the means to prepare the people for the worst? In this fashion the Anglo Texans eased through the year 1834 and into 1835 hoping for more signs of progress or, at the least, preservation of the status quo.

In this fashion the Anglo Texans eased through the year 1834 and into 1835 hoping for more signs of progress or, at the least, preservation of the status quo.

From the early months of the year through September, 1835, Texas charted a spasmodic course toward revolution. The province reacted slowly to the triumph of centralism in Mexico and the resulting overthrow of the Coahuila and Texas state government in Monclova. Although a few warned of the dangers these political changes posed for Texas, leaders either failed to emerge or to stir the masses out of their accustomed routines. Efforts in May and June to aid the unpopular state government proved unsuccessful, and it collapsed in the face of punitive measures by centralist authorities. In late June some of the hot-blooded from San Felipe and Harrisburg took up arms against a Mexican outpost at the perennial troublespot of Anáhuac, but spokesmen for peace in other communities repudiated the use of force and sought to initiate conciliatory moves. Committees of safety emerged slowly and without a consensus as to the direction Texas should take—some fostered revolutionary attitudes while others sought to establish an accord with Mexico. This absence of unanimity led to a call for a popular convention to resolve the differences; however, the cautious-minded objected to this measure as a potentially provocative step. Not until mid-August did the different factions, bolstered by reliable reports of the impending military escalation in Texas by Mexico, coalesce behind a "Consultation" called for mid-October.

In short, the Texas reaction to the advent of a centralist government in Mexico was anything but forceful, wise, uniform, or confident. To a considerable degree this sputtering response resulted from ignorance.
slave discipline and discouraged slaveholder migration. Reflecting this concept, the initial drafts of the March constitution in a straightforward manner forbid admission of all free blacks. Ultimately, the delegates, without recorded explanation, modified the language and thereby confused the issue. The relevant clause, by providing that “no free person of African descent . . . shall be permitted to reside permanently in the republic, without the consent of Congress,” gave the government a free hand to control this group. However, three features of this wording worked to the advantage of free blacks—first, the constitution did not specifically forbid their emigration as had earlier drafts; second, it added the word “permanently,” which by implication invited temporary residence; and third, it opened the possibility of congressional exemption. These potential benefits to free blacks apparently did not arise from a conscious intention of the delegates. By changing the focus from emigration to residence the constitution threatened the very existence of all free blacks, and unequivocally the document denied them citizenship. Texas thus entered nationhood with a constitution that defined human rights in racial terms and also provided a long list of positive guarantees of slavery.42

The Texas movement for independence had a dual character with respect to slavery and the black experience. The events of 1835 and 1836 had shaken slavery considerably, but in the end the Texas victory confirmed the institution. Black participation provided some increased opportunities for grasping freedom, but for the masses these were short-term or otherwise elusive. Ideologically, the Texans displayed generally reactionary impulses, despite frequent and fervent identifications with the Spirit of ’76. The practical-minded Anglo Americans applied their version of liberty, equality, and democracy cautiously and only to themselves. This aspect of the Texas Revolution clearly owed a debt to the Great Reaction that swept the southern United States in the early 1830s. By then, radical worldwide abolitionism had also emerged, a development that fostered more reaction and thus reinforced the conservative emphasis on property, order, and white supremacy. However uncongenial in spirit toward black freedom, the Texas Revolution generated other forces—including armed conflict and internal dislocation—that temporarily challenged the slave-labor system and Anglo racial hegemony. Yet the brevity of the war and the sudden collapse of the Mexican invasion effort prevented the disintegration of slavery and allowed Texans three more decades to apply the doctrines of their southern heritage.

Conclusion

The political and social history of Texas in the years 1835-36 reveals an experience full of revolutionary dimensions. The movement’s leaders established local committees of vigilance and safety to advance their cause and developed a popular ideology that emphasized the march of democracy in the Anglo-American tradition. But more challenging revolutionary developments also occurred—a variety of internal conflict flourished from the first. Texans entered their quarrel with Mexico as a fragmented people, individualistic, divided from one community to another by rivalries for land and other jealousies, bothered by ethnic and racial tensions, and lacking a consensus about the meaning of political changes in Mexico.

Beginning as a kind of regional separatist movement, the Texas rebellion had moved but a short distance before the requirements for wartime authority outpaced the capacities of its infant governments. Varied community interests grew into a myriad of disagreements which no political body had a sufficient combination of wisdom, will, leadership, and popular backing to resolve. The heads of the ever-changing interim governments found themselves suspected of inadequate zeal and failed to assert genuine control over their cause. A virtual state of anarchy existed for much of the struggle, and the requisite extra-constitutional measures were enforced haphazardly by the army. The military element in turn suffered from such democratic fragmentation that no coherent revolutionary purpose emerged to guide the Texas cause.

The army made essential contributions in pushing the regional movement to independence and enforcing material sacrifices. As the milit-
In social as well as political terms the Texans suffered from a kind of failed revolution. The social experience had many elements and by-products. For the masses of Texans the Revolution was a time of dislocation and grief, with morale descending to a threatening level. Blame for this response often fell on the public; however, the real source of the problem resided in the shortcomings of government. By failing to establish the central political authority necessary to direct the Revolution, the leaders of Texas had placed an impossible burden on the popular commitment. A cycle of suspicion and self-defense then gained an unbreakable grip on the people. What appeared as capricious seizures of property by the army made them defensive of their self-interests, and the inability of any central authority to compel equitable degrees of sacrifice and participation allowed jealousies to prevail.

This twisted cycle reached its zenith in the western region of Texas, the area of Tejano preponderance. The existence of considerable Tory behavior there gave the army a justification for enforcing militant policies. Texas Mexicans suffered grueling political, property, and status losses.

Inequitable distribution of the burdens of sacrifice and inadequate organization of resources—these were potentially fatal to the Revolution. Nevertheless, forces of geography, miscalculation by the enemy, aid from the United States, just enough volunteering, and incredible good fortune managed to carry Texas arms to a sudden triumph at San Jacinto. At least temporarily, this victory removed the burdens of war and occupation, but it did little to provide forceful government. In fact, political authority remained weaker than ever during the months that followed the Texas military triumph, and the army continued its de facto dominance.

From this context of flawed victory, in the late summer of 1836 the upheavals of revolution and war calmed sufficiently that thoughts began to turn to the future of Texas. Visions of distant grandeur did not oc-
ized on the subject of government, as if to reply to the foreign representative and other Americans in Texas. It advised patience to the U.S. volunteers until the new nation could develop better public credit, speculation might ease, and land values could rise. The journal offered as well a comparative perspective on the difficulties of governing in a revolutionary setting. The United States in its infancy had experienced problems similar to and as severe as those currently faced by Texas. "Although we labor under great and apparently to some, insuperable difficulties, and disadvantages in systematizing and establishing an efficient government," wrote the editor, the American republic sixty years earlier had also faced "tumultuous movements" and other "victissitudes" which "at times threatened [it] with even dissolution." These obstacles had been conquered only by "the good sense and perseverance of that people."2

The obvious questions in response were, did Texans have similar good sense would they persevere, and, further, could they find the statesman to lead them through the tumultuous times? In its earlier stages, as one historian of the Texas Revolution has written, the struggle had been the product of the varied visions of competing personalities rather than "the design of a master planner." No single leader had emerged "displaying the qualities" necessary "to rise above the issues and win the sustained confidence and support of the whole public." The interim government had taken the necessary step toward political stability by providing for elections on the first Monday in September to ratify the March Constitution and to elect the specified officials. Those elevated to power by these contests would constitute the sixth set of leaders to attempt to rule Texas in twelve months. Voters and candidates alike approached the electoral process with great interest and seriousness, as if the outcome might be the last chance to make their Revolution work.

Burnet’s election proclamation of July 23 attempted to provide for all the technicalities that might cast doubt on the outcome. In addition to ensuring the usual voting procedures, the rules allowed citizens absent from their homes in military service or as refugees to cast ballots. Nevertheless, the troubles of the recent past quickly engulfted the election. Critics charged that Burnet had timed the contest (set for the first Monday in September) in such a way as to promote the candidacy of his personal favorite. Old factional dynamics and emotion-laden issues reappeared. On August 11 from army headquarters Gen. Thomas J. Rusk described the source of his despair to Sam Houston:

If we do not soon adopt some system and some rules of Law to govern the angry passions of men we shall forfeit all our claims to the benefits of that kind providence to whom we owe our success so far corruption walks abroad in this Land the still voice of reason and truth is suppressed and without a speedy change we shall feel the bitter effects of the informed system of slander distraction and abuse. . . Lord have mercy on us save us from the enemy and from the mighty operations of our own Great Men.

Contentions threatened to make the election a source of disunity rather than one of accord.2

Congressional candidates attempted to outmaneuver each other by aligning themselves with the most popular issues and by emphasizing moderation on the most controversial ones. For example, William H. Jack in Brazoria and Mosely Baker in San Felipe both favored annexation to the United States, opposed leniency toward captured Mexican President Santa Anna, endorsed compensation to veterans, and urged defeat of measures that would in effect expropriate the holdings of large landowners from the Mexican colonizing period. Ex-captain Baker, in particular, also sought to identify himself with the Revolution and with populist positions. The individuals who composed the glorious "Lexian band" that fought the war, he maintained, "were not the wealth of the land. They were in the main her poorest citizens, and entitled to receive at the hands of government a liberal and just compensation in land."3 He promised quick measures to put the veterans in possession of their entitlements and to compensate the settlers of his region who had been impoverished by the late military campaign. Baker also joined the growing number who denounced the "old party violence and old party prejudice" that threatened again to "agitate the country—should the citizens of Texas again allow themselves to be divided . . . then will the day of destruction to Texas have arrived, and instead of a government of law, producing order and confidence and giving prosperity and greatness, we shall have anarchy and violence and misrule."4

Baker and similar-minded candidates in effect proposed a postwar consensus that few dared to oppose directly. It involved boasting of the future of Texas while also endorsing annexation to the United States, evoking memories of past glories while denouncing revolutionary turmoil, and promising fair compensation to all who had suffered in the cause of the Revolution without committing injustices against the old settlers who had helped to people the land. However popular this ideology, Texas faced one issue that threatened to block its elevation—the
presidential election. Neither of the two initial candidates was able to rise above the bitter divisions of the immediate past.

Try as he might, Stephen F. Austin could not shake the prejudice that had grown in his absence. Though endorsed by prominent citizens, including former political enemy William H. Wharton, and emphasizing his credentials for accomplishing annexation, the great empresario found himself on the defensive. He had to deny affiliation with corrupt land speculators, involvement in the policy of saving the Mexican commander from his just fate, and identification as the favorite of the unpopular interim president. Zealots like Gen. Thomas J. Green reflected army distrust of Austin as a lukewarm politician who would “forever lay about and boot lick Santa Anna’s royal feet” in order to prepare the way for a return to Mexican sovereignty that would guarantee large empresario holdings. Gossip circulated that Austin had already promised all the cabinet positions to cronies and vote brokers. Houston also proved that he retained the political talent that he had demonstrated of past bitterness. The ex-commander received overwhelming support from veterans and current members of the army. They believed, as one politicized woman wrote, that Houston “is in favor of making a more equal division” of the landed domain and “stands altogether the volunteer’s friend.” He also prompted enthusiasm among those who held that the army needed a firmer command. Further, “many of the old settlers who are too blind to see or understand their interest” as Austin saw it, intended to vote for Houston, who would also carry East Texas. With an unbeatable coalition, the general won by a vote of 5,191 to 741 for Smith and 58 for Austin: the Revolution had produced a dramatic change in Texas leadership.

A major question confronted the new government: Could it achieve and maintain the kind of consensus that had previously eluded Texas? The short duration of the Revolution favored the growth of constitutional restraint. While the processes that gripped Texas during the previous year clearly reflected revolutionary dynamics, the brevity of the experience limited the degree to which revolution had wrenched apart the political order and social fabric.

The government in late 1836 had another major advantage over the previous failures—a broadly popular and charismatic head of state. Houston also proved that he retained the political talent that he had shown earlier in Tennessee, and he had the advantage of making a fresh beginning. The elections demonstrated a consensus not only for the presidency but also in favor of the Constitution and the idea of annexation. They were conducted smoothly and “with much moderation,” in the words of the encouraged U.S. diplomatic emissary. The first Congress, comprising men with a wide variety of personal and political backgrounds, began meeting in early October. It resolved a problem posed by the fact that the unpopular Burnet still held the presidency, burdened further by lame duck status. He left office on
October 12, agreeing to resign six weeks early under the threat of congressional removal. This act closed the Revolution on a fitting note of extra-constitutionality. 12

Houston as president openly strive for legitimacy and consensus. He brought all major personalities and factions into the government— in addition to Vice-President Lamar, Houston nominated Austin for secretary of state and Smith for the treasury, the popular Rusk for the war post, and men of repute to the other positions.

The government responded to the most fundamental issues by attempting to balance conflicting interests. Land policy especially required delicate handling, even though the vastness of the public domain gave Texas a decided advantage in determining its distribution. Congress had to decide which set of claimants would have priority. It soon enacted laws providing that settlers with uncompleted headrights would file first, thus giving them the prime lands in established neighborhoods where they may have already been living as squatters. The policy expanded the number who would be eligible for land bounties for military service but delayed the date of this distribution for another year. Empresario claims that had been completed before the Revolution were protected like other valid titles of settlers, but grants that had not been previously fulfilled remained invalidated by the Constitution. Congress turned over other disputed empresario matters to the courts. Likewise, potential vengeance against allegedly unpatriotic residents was directed to the mercies of local citizenry. Another issue—establishing new institutions of justice and local government—was easily resolved by structures constructed in accordance with Anglo-American traditions. 13

One major issue threatened this budding consensus: the militant and unruly army. All observers acknowledged that the military had genuine causes for complaint. Even its adversary Burnet spoke to the Congress of past "privations" of the army and of the need to reward recent recruits. Into the early fall soldiers continued to complain of the inadequate quantity and quality of food and clothing, but the more serious problem appeared to be rampant disorder. Rather than enforcing discipline, the officers set bad examples—drinking, quarreling, fighting, and even killing each other. The body of the army remained politicized and discontented, even while its composition shifted to a predominance of U.S. volunteers. Some efforts had been made by Austin and others to diminish the flow after the battle of San Jacinto, but the force grew to about two thousand men by late 1836, the largest since the outset of hostilities. Many of the junior grade officers gained extended furloughs, which they spent at the capitol in not-so-subtle lobbying activities. Some openly threatened legislators on issues relating to soldier interests, expressing particular disgruntlement when settler land interests received priority over veterans' claims. As a visitor to Texas explained, "This preference in favor of those who, it was said, shared none of the sufferings and privations of the war over others whose days and nights were spent in the tented field was pronounced unjust, ungrateful, and oppressive." 14

President Houston recognized the magnitude of the army problem and had the credentials to resolve it. As the wounded ex-commander, he could not readily be charged with an anti-military attitude. In one of his first acts the new head of state issued a general order nullifying the furloughs of those officers he saw milling around Columbia in great numbers, urging cessation of these leaves, and threatening to arrest those away from their posts as deserters. Other actions also gave clear evidence that the president would not submit to military pressure. He vetoed the measure extending land bounties to recruits who had entered Texas service since July and steadily asserted civilian control with procedures designed to establish the authority of the War Department. Congress gave the president the power to organize the military according to U.S. army regulations.

Houston had a major setback when Secretary of War Albert Sidney Johnston, sent to assume command in December, suffered a serious wound in a duel with Felix Huston, the general he had been ordered to replace. The victor remained in command, as if by battle-right. The president resolved this intolerable situation in the spring of 1837 by subterfuge. Bringing General Huston to the capital for a strategy session, Houston secretly sent the secretary of war on a simultaneous mission to army headquarters. He offered immediate furloughs (revocable at any time) to the camp-weary volunteers, half of whom left the army and many the country as well. His army reduced in size and power, Felix Huston soon followed the others back to the United States. Texas defense then rested on a tiny regular army and quixotic citizen volunteers, but President Houston had set aside the specter of military dictatorship that had appeared to be a lasting legacy of the Revolution. 15

What had been throughout 1836 a failed revolution, with a government lacking the will and power to tame the discordant elements of disorder, became within a few years a reasonably restrained constitutional system. Nevertheless, growth and progress amidst struggle and discontent characterized the entire political history of the Texas Re-
The feelings of harmony that swept Houston into office in 1836 and prevailed in his first few months as president soon dissipated; however, he brought a degree of popularity and restraint that had been entirely lacking in the Revolution. Extreme bitterness flared in electoral contests and over some specific issues—even the matter of locating the capital threatened to erupt into civil war—but ideological consensus also predominated. Executive power changed hands peaceably following each of the four elections. Threats to impeach Houston over his handling of Texas defense never materialized, and few dared even talk of coup d'état. Undoubtedly, the preservation of civil authority came in part from the character of leadership rather than from an underpinning of political stability. The best historian of government in the Republic concludes, "If Houston desired to be a military strong man and to pose as the savior of the Republic, the opportunity was...at hand" following the Mexican invasions of 1842. The ex-general not only excelled such an act but opposed governmental assumption of emergency powers out of respect for personal liberties and from fears of a cycle of revolution. At the same time, government did not provide the young nation with an adequate system of defense.

In short, Texas survived the internal and external threats to its existence without really resolving many of the underlying problems. However, popular the Texas national identity became in retrospect, the Anglo masses always rallied to the cause of annexation to the United States, even after their "infant" Republic had been independent for almost a decade. The major appeal of that measure was invariably the amplified prospect for peace, order, and security.16

The outlook of improved fortunes through annexation had no appeal to the minorities of Texas. Sudden military success had tipped the radical tides as applied to Anglo Texans by limiting the needs and thus the potential of the Revolution. Opposition to the Texas cause had quickly dwindled, and the decline of Tory attitudes limited extremism. No reign of terror emerged in communities where the Anglo ethnic minorities prevailed. Yet minority elements in Texas felt the effects of the Revolution in a harsh and lasting manner.

Tejanos experienced a kind of revolutionary purge in the years 1835–36, their lives being filled by bitter and destructive conflict, harsh material exploitation, and ruthless denial of liberty. Desolation and depopulation had been the major social consequence of the Revolution, results both of an extended presence by contending armies and of divided popular loyalties. The Texas army became larger than ever in the winter of 1836–37, and it preyed on local property from necessity or out of a misplaced sense of revenge. The military attempted to drive eastward what cattle it could not consume itself, transforming the area into a kind of buffer zone between centralist armies south of the Rio Grande and the heartland of Anglo habitation east of the Guadalupe. Those who survived a year of the ordeals of war and military occupation confronted a future with more of the same, hardened by sweeping anti-Mexican prejudice.

After 1836, the continued threat of invasion from Mexico retarded the peopling and economic growth of western Texas. Further, tensions between Mexico and Texas, while promoting "solidarity and patriotism at home" as one historian observes, also accelerated Anglo hostility toward Tejanos. Certainly anti-Mexican attitudes did not begin with the Revolution. As Arnoldo De León demonstrates, North Americans came to Texas with prejudices against people of darker color that soon developed into a fuller revulsion against Tejano culture.17 Revolution, war, and independence energized these notions with the spark of revenge. At Béxar Col. Juan Seguín with difficulty managed to save his hometown from destruction in early 1837, but the pattern of property expropriation by occupying forces continued, made worse by a pattern of Anglo land grabbing.18 As Andrés A. Tijerina has shown, except in the region south of the Nueces, the Tejano population of the Republic had difficulty patenting their land claims and thus remained in a state of decline from pre-Revolution levels.19

Tejanos responded to these continued antagonisms in several ways. Some continued the flight to the south; others persisted and hoped for improvement that did not come. Each passing year confirmed their minority status and waning political influence. A large portion of the Tejano community in Nacogdoches heeded the call for rebellion and for rallying to the standard of Mexico when raised by Vicente Córdova in 1838–39. Thereafter, suspicions abounded in western Texas concerning the complicity of Bexareños in support of projected or actual Mexican invasions that occurred in 1844. These affairs even ensnared Texas patriot Juan Seguín on charges of disloyalty. In fact, Tejanos remained divided between support of the two nations. Many lost their allegiance for the government of Texas, which continually preyed on their property and otherwise treated them as enemies. Tejano-Anglo thievery, violence, and mutual lawlessness remained the norm for the remaining years of the Republic.20

The black experience in the years 1835–36 had a dualism unlike that
of any other group in Texas society. Breakdowns in authority induced by war and rebellion gave slaves improved opportunity to seize freedom. Preservation of such gains required that blacks leave Texas with the Mexican army, a path chosen eagerly by many. The sudden collapse of the Mexican invasion effort prevented the disintegration of slavery, and the presence of the Anglo-American political order stimulated rapid growth of the institution in the decade after the Revolution.

Slaves rose from a ratio of less than one in ten to more than one out of every four of the Texas population by 1842. Little had remained for the nation's lawmakers to do in the way of positive guarantees for slavery, given the thoroughness of the constitution-makers on that subject. Few blacks managed to gain or maintain freedom by identifying with the Texas cause, for the practical-minded Anglo Americans applied their version of liberty, equality, and democracy cautiously and only to themselves. The Texas Constitution had been unintentionally ambiguous regarding the status of free blacks; vague wording opened a legal loophole by which a small free black class developed. Nearly all of this expansion resulted from migration; only two slaves received legal emancipation (with congressional approval) during the nation's entire history. Both gained their owner's endorsement and demonstrated records of significant service in the war for independence. An unstated policy of benign neglect regarding punitive measures before 1840 allowed some free black immigration to Texas, and remembrance of individual contributions to the cause during the Revolution helped sidetrack a threat to eradicate the entire population thereafter. Nevertheless, governmental policy had managed to retard the development of the free black community to one of the smallest in the Americas.

No Anglo came forth in public to challenge the powerful consensus of racial opinion or to argue in favor of equality and democracy applied across racial lines, but free black military veteran Greenbury Logan spoke out for himself. Disabled by his war wounds, fearful of losing his property to back taxes, and having no "say in any way," he recalled his loss of liberty bitterly in an 1841 petition to Congress: "I love the country and did stay because I felt myself mower a freeman then in the states . . . but now look at my situation. every privilege dear to a freeman is taken a way." However much the Texans might boast of their revolutionary heritage, national policy on race followed the dictates of the South, itself in the grips of a reaction against human liberty. In response to these racial policies, black Texans continued to iden-

ify with Mexico as a land and force of freedom. Mexican military ventures in Texas and around the Rio Grande attracted ex-slave participation. Runaways and other blacks fought in Tejano-led uprisings and Mexican invasions. Even without direct Mexican assistance, runaways, especially those who fled in groups, sought their liberty in Mexico during the period of the Republic as they had during the Revolution.

For Texans of Hispanic and African descent the outcome of the Texas Revolution was a sudden reversal of fortunes. Powerful racial and ethnic antagonisms—expressed not only institutionally in slavery but also by custom in the form of endemic Tejano-Anglo hatred, suspicion, and conflict—became fixed in the Texas identity during its brief experience of nationhood.

Other habits of mind also received confirmation, according to the leading social historian of the Republic. These included an aggressive "fighting spirit" which, William R. Hogan concludes, became both a "national compulsion" and an "individual necessity" given the weakness of the state and the pervasive forces of disorder. A rough-and-tumble style of politics emanated from the restless individualism of a people generally impatient with social restraints and unconcerned about imbroglios of the past. Texas society tended to accept newcomers in a democratic spirit and gave them the opportunity to plunge ahead in the competition for economic betterment. A decade of grim material realities followed independence. Yet optimism and stamina characterized the survivors, who continued to rally to calls for expansion and adventure even as failure dogged their steps. "The period of the Texas Revolution and the republic which emerged from it," Hogan concludes, "bred a temper peculiarly Texan."

These distinctive traits naturally found ample cultural expression. Early folklore generally centered on the tall tale, and its central figures displayed the qualities that Texans admired most: hospitality offset by quick tempers; perennial willingness to fight, especially against Indians or Mexicans; struggles of the individual against the environment; and the hazards of a settled life. The brief Texas past provided usable materials for a national culture. People already displayed the selective memory that would transform such figures as Travis, Bowie, and Crockett into legends. The penchant for social drinking gave ample opportunity for toasting on Texas' very own national holidays. Theater-goers attended patriotic drama, and poets trumpeted the glories of the land. National symbols abounded: the Lone Star flag, the battlefield at
San Jacinto, and even a sacred tomb (the Alamo). Orators also sounded the historic theme, or for variety, the futuristic one of “this young, rising, and interesting Republic.”

Even after Texas surrendered its independence so meekly, the sense of distinctiveness lived on in the popular mind, whether in or out of the state. Historical consciousness remained strong, and it centered on the Revolution. Holidays commemorated its events, the names of school buildings celebrated its heroes (even Fannin somehow acquired that status), proud descendants founded organizations to identify themselves with and to further its memory. In the process, the legend became the Revolution, but not a revolution, cleansed of its political turbulence, regional disharmonies, conflicts of interest, social turbulence, and racial or ethnic strife. Essentially, the Texas Revolution was transformed into little more than a staple for the swaggering boastfulness of the archetypal Texan.

Appendix:
Political Experience of the Convention Delegates

REPRESENTATIVES TO THE CONSULTATION

Barrett, T.
Bower, J. W. [did not attend]
Byrom, J. S. D.
Coleman, R. M. [did not attend]
Everitt, S. H.
Grimes, J.
Hardin, A. B.
Houston, S.

MENBERS OF THE CONVENTIONS OF 1832-33

Gazley, T. J.
Grimes, J.

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

Grimes, J.
Hardin, A. B.
Menefee, W.

Menefee, W.
Moore, J. W.
Parmer, M.
Power, J. [did not attend]
Rusk, T. J. [did not attend]
Waller, E.
West, C.
Woods, J. B.
Zavala, L.

Taylor, C. S.
West, C.