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## Sowing the Seeds of Texas Nationalism

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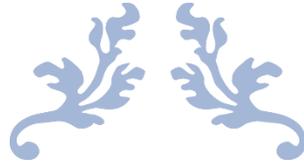
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## Sowing the Seeds of Texas Nationalism

### Abstract

The period of Texas independence (1836-1845) provided rich ground for a strong sense of Texan nationalism to grow, with the seeds sown much earlier. To this day, Texans still exhibit characteristics common with nationalism, due to a long history of coping with life on the frontier, the Scotch-Irish heritage of fighting in defense of individual rights, winning an armed struggle for independence from Mexico, and dominant Southern traditions of Protestant evangelical religion and military pride.



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# SOWING THE SEEDS OF TEXAS NATIONALISM

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People around the world continue to identify Texas as unique among states even if it is simply because “everything is bigger.” Yet, for those who have lived in the state for any length of time, a certain pride within the citizens of the Lone Star State can easily be detected. Every native Texan has been steeped in the pride or the “spirit” of Texas. Where does this pride come from? Where did the “spirit” of Texas first spring up inside its people? Perhaps, the “spirit” of Texas has been intertwined with the hearts of the people from the early days where the first brave people sought to settle and establish homesteads on Texas’ fierce frontier. In fact, the seeds of the “spirit” of Texas were first sowed with Stephen F. Austin’s “Old 300” and a few other original Texas colonies. Within these initial settlers, a distinctive blend of Tejano culture, American political ideas, Scots-Irish heritage, frontier grit, and Southern traditions were refined and then forged, through the Texas Revolution, into an ironclad pride that has endured the test of time.

Throughout this paper, the “spirit” of Texas will be referred to as Texas Nationalism. Why nationalism? While Texas might be a state now, the roughly nine years Texas was its own country (1836-1845) provided rich ground for Texas Nationalism to grow - even though the seeds were sown much earlier. To this day, Texans still exhibit characteristics common with nationalism. However, nationalism can be defined in many ways. For the purpose of this paper, nationalism will be considered “loyalty and devotion to a nation. Especially, a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on promotion of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations.”<sup>1</sup>To further narrow the definition,

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<sup>1</sup>*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “nationalism,”<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism>.

the term “nationalism” will be deemed a cultural and political principle and “nationalist sentiment” as “the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of... [this] principle.”<sup>2</sup>

Why did Texas Nationalism only take root when the Anglo-American settlers arrived? Why did it not spring up during Spanish or Mexican colonization? At its core, nationalism is “a doctrine of popular freedom and sovereignty” that requires a free, united people “gathered together in a... homeland... [and] they must have legal equality and share a single public culture.”<sup>3</sup> The clusters of Tejanos (Mexican-Texans) in Texas felt isolated and distant from their homeland and often under-represented in their governments. For instance, in 1835, Tejanos gathered in San Antonio to celebrate Mexican independence and then turned around and joined the Texians in storming Béxar later that year.<sup>4</sup> Only when Anglo-Americans settled in Texas did nationalism truly begin to sprout, although Tejanos would bring key qualities of Texas Nationalism to the table.

Living in Texas under Spanish and Mexican rule was challenging. Most Tejanos lived in either San Antonio or Goliad where the Texas climate provided hot, dry summers and bitterly cold winters. Only the Guadalupe River supplied sufficient water to support the towns and allow for growing crops and decent land for cattle ranching. Still, Tejanos were under constant threat of Indian attack, and, to make matters worse, the Mexican wars for independence had battered the Tejano population with many civilians killed for being “suspected of sympathizing with... rebels.”<sup>5</sup> Despite these difficulties, the Tejanos were survivors. They found ways to adapt and built a thriving aristocracy (which some Anglo-American Texans would marry into). While

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<sup>2</sup>Earnest Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>3</sup>John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, ed. *Nationalism*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>4</sup>Raúl A. Ramos. "La Pérdida De Tejas: Tejanos and the War of Texas Secession, 1834–1837." In *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861*.(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 136

<sup>5</sup>Gregg Cantrell. *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 107.

Anglos and Tejanos frequently butted heads, they were still able to work together for the common cause of Texas independence. The close cultural contact between Tejanos and Anglos before and during the Texas Revolution is where Texas Nationalism picked up distinctly Tejano characteristics.

Despite little help from Mexico in fighting the Indians, most Tejanos were loyal to the Mexican government until General Cós, under orders from Santa Anna, marched into Texas to “expel troublemakers and to disarm all colonists.”<sup>6</sup>This angered many Tejanos who opted to assist the Texians in retaliation. Before the battle of La Bahía, local Tejanos from Goliad provided crucial information to the Texians and they “not only kept the impending attack secret but served as guides.”<sup>7</sup>Well-known Tejano Juan Seguín led “a company of vaqueros” during the Texas Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

Vaqueros were the first “cowboys” and they came with a solid knowledge of the Texas frontier as well as advanced horsemanship skills. While some Anglo-American settlers had experience living on the “frontier” west of the Mississippi, the Texas frontier was a horse of a different color. As American settlers watched the Tejanos during the Texas Revolution, they picked up some of the most iconic elements of Texas including cattle ranching and frontier skills tailored to the Texas landscape.

Additionally, Tejanos had an unusual attitude toward social class. Much of this determination can be traced back to Spain’s attempt at colonization. Since many citizens refused to settle the dangerous and inhospitable Texas frontier, the Spanish government was willing to offer titles to those who would. Thus, in a society where rising through class ranks was virtually

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen L. Hardin. *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution*. (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1994), 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

impossible, the first Tejanos were elevated from being “sheep and goat herders” to elites with noble titles.<sup>9</sup> These newly-elevated Spanish citizens knew what it was like to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Also, the continued isolation from Mexico forged the Tejano classes into a tight-knit group with a shared social identity. Because of this background, they were unusually kind to other people such as the incoming Anglo-Americans that might have been seen as lower-class citizens in the eyes of the Spanish and Mexican governments. For example, the prestigious Seguín family hosted Stephen F. Austin and his brother Brown while Stephen negotiated with the Spanish and later the Mexican government to bring American colonists into Texas.<sup>10</sup> Often, Tejanos elites also negotiated and mediated between Anglo settlers and the Mexican government which temporarily benefitted both people groups.<sup>11</sup>

Initially, the relationship between Tejanos and incoming American settlers was positive. After all, any additional assistance fighting the Indians was helpful to the Tejanos and they also appreciated the chance to trade with the United States.<sup>12</sup> As already mentioned, the Tejanos’ assistance during the colonization efforts of Austin and others as well as the Texas Revolution were tremendously useful to the Anglo-Americans. These interactions between the two cultures offered the interchange of Tejano characteristics.

Two predominantly Tejano characteristics were Texas frontier toughness and savvy. Unlike the then-current United States’ frontier of the “Heartland,” Texas had a different and distinctive frontier that came with additional challenges. Besides the harsh climate, Texas also had multiple groups of hostile Indians coupled with extensive spans of open range which was

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<sup>9</sup>Richard Buitron. *The Quest for Tejano Identity in San Antonio, Texas, 1913-2000*. (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>10</sup>Gregg Cantrell. *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 110.

<sup>11</sup>Raúl A. Ramos. *Beyond the Alamo Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 83.

<sup>12</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 6.

easily navigated by Indians and hard to defend by settlers. No one knew this better than the Tejanos. This is one of the main reasons they had remained centrally located in the cities of Béxar and Goliad. Despite the attempt at solidarity, Tejanos still struggled with the Indians, but they managed to maintain their social class and traditions. The tough conditions of the Texas frontier provided Tejanos with insider information about the area that they passed onto Texians during colonization and the Revolution. Even Stephen F. Austin, on his first trip to Texas, noted that the:

Town [of La Bahia was] in a state of ruin, owing to the Shock it reed in the [previous] revolution and subsequent Indian depredations– the Inhabitants have a few cattle and horses & raise some corn. There is however a very considerable trade through this town from Nachitoches to the coast and money is tolerably plenty.

Despite the harsh conditions Texas offered and violence from Spain and the Indians, the Tejanos still found ways to prosper through hard work and trade.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps, the most obvious characteristic of Tejanos that became synonymous with Texas Nationalism was their horsemanship. Many Tejanos were vaqueros which translates to “worker of cows.” Vaqueros were the first cowboys, but they had life far rougher than later cattlemen. For example, vaqueros often had rudimentary saddles designed for lightness that was only a slight step up from riding bareback. However, the lightness of the saddles allowed vaqueros to travel quickly and kept their horses from tiring as rapidly. This provided Texians with a small “cavalry” of sorts during the Texas Revolution. Most of the Anglo-Americans had spent most of their time behind horses rather than on top of them back in America, so they had much to learn from the Tejanos’ expert horsemanship.

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<sup>13</sup>“Journal of Stephen F. Austin on His First Trip to Texas, 1821.” *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 7, no. 4 (1904), 286-307.

Just as Texas Nationalism bears many traits associated with Tejanos, it also picked up many characteristics of Anglo-Americans, including American political ideas. Regardless of the Spanish or Mexican requirements for settlers, the Anglo-Americans brought their political philosophies with them. For example, the settlers believed that “Property and personal liberty were virtually inseparable” and they were “overwhelmingly protestant” in religion.<sup>14</sup> Coming from America, the settlers were used to certain rights such as the right to bear arms and right to a trial by jury. Initially, the Anglo-American colonists either received these rights or were left alone by the Spanish and then Mexican government. However, following the Mexican Constitution of 1824, Texas was merged with the state of Coahuila which further removed Texas from its governor and lessened Texas’ representation in the Mexican government.<sup>15</sup> These actions angered Tejanos and Anglos alike, but no one wanted to incite violence.

In fact, contrary to their later reputation, most Texians loathed the thought of fighting Mexico, Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston included. Yet, as Mexico’s worry increased about Anglos seizing Texas, the new government sought to crack down on the liberties that had previously been provided to the colonists. Soon, under the easily swayed leadership of Anastasio Bustamente, the Mexican government began to focus more on “withdrawing individual rights and state autonomy, especially where Texas was concerned.”<sup>16</sup> On April 6, 1830, Mexico passed a law that closed Texas to immigration from the United States, canceled every empresario contract, banned any more slaves from entering the state, insisted that import and export taxes be

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<sup>14</sup>William C. Davis. *Lone Star Rising: The Revolutionary Birth of the Texas Republic*. (New York: Free Press, 2004), 60.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>16</sup> Davis, *Lone Star Rising*. 76.

collected on all goods, and posted more soldiers in Texas.<sup>17</sup> Rather than nullify the colonists, the law served to fuel greater protest.

Even with this new law, Texians did not desire a revolution. Instead, Anglos were able to run off Mexican authorities in eastern Texas with little bloodshed. Afterward, they opted to call a convention of representatives to discuss next steps. This convention elected to send Stephen F. Austin to Mexico to negotiate with the government. With Austin, they sent a short list of requests with the largest being Texas' separation from the Mexican state of Coahuila. After all, "the majority of colonists from the United States were willing to remain within the Mexican union, provided that they had control of Texas as a separate state."<sup>18</sup>

While Austin headed to the Mexican capital, a new man had taken charge of the government. Santa Anna was now president of Mexico which initially seemed favorably to most Texans who agreed with his federalist stance. Determined to have absolute power, Santa Anna ended up switching political sides and becoming a Centralist. Then, Austin arrived and presented the Texian's requests. Sadly, this attempt at negotiation ended with Stephen F. Austin in a Mexican prison. To make matters worse, Santa Anna then sent his brother-in-law to Texas. Although most Texians still insisted they wanted peace, General Cós "demanded that Texans prove their loyalty by turning over for trial a number of radicals and troublemakers"<sup>19</sup> This was soon followed by an attempt to disarm Gonzales of a small cannon. The first shots of the Texas Revolution had been fired.

Initially, the Anglo-American settlers had been peaceable enough. Stephen F. Austin seized every opportunity to show loyalty to Mexico – even using the name Estevan F. Austin. To

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Randolph B. Campbell. *Sam Houston and the American Southwest*. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 51.

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, *Sam Houston*, 59.

think that the settlers were going to allow Mexico to encroach on the freedoms the Anglo-American settlers had come to enjoy after turmoil within the new Mexican government had left them to their own devices for some time, was grossly incorrect. So, after the fighting began, the smoke of the first battles settled, and the majority of Texians finally decided to separate from Mexico, the first order of business was to write a Declaration of Independence.

Both the Texas Declaration of Independence and the Texas Constitution mirror their American counterparts closely because those writing the document were originally Americans.<sup>20</sup> Unlike the United States Constitution, however, the first article in the Texas Constitution contains a Bill of Rights with 29 sections. The Texas Bill of Rights includes freedom of worship, double jeopardy, the right to a trial by jury, and the right to keep and bear arms. Clearly, from the founding documents of Texas, the Anglo-American colonists came with certain political ideas in the back of their minds. So, while they had been content under the original empresario contracts to be loyal to Spain and then Mexico, the violation of what they believed to be their rights was too much and required action.

Much of this desire for independence and self-sufficiency stems from the strong Scots-Irish blood that flowed in many of the Old 300's veins. Frederick Jackson Turner was one of the first historians to point out the "significant role" that the Scots-Irish play in settling the west.<sup>21</sup> When the first Scots-Irish migrated to America before the American Revolution, they had hoped to be welcomed by the puritans since both were Calvinists, but sadly, the English Puritans wanted nothing to do with them.<sup>22</sup> This forced the Scots-Irish to settle more to the South and West. Most of these "Scots-Irish immigrants and their American-born descendants were living...

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<sup>20</sup>"Texas Declaration of Independence, 1836." New York: Fall River Press, 2014.

<sup>21</sup>James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 256.

<sup>22</sup>Jim Webb. *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America*. New York: Broadway Books, 2004.

in the mountainous areas of modern-day Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina” before some of them decided to move out west.<sup>23</sup> Poverty, restlessness, and “a sense of moral and biblical righteousness” encouraged further moves west.<sup>24</sup> They would bring with them several core qualities of Texas Nationalism.

Deeply engrained in Scots-Irish DNA were warrior-like qualities coupled with a “refusal to be intimidated.”<sup>25</sup> These traits made for the perfect frontier settlers. In their respective homelands the Scots-Irish lived in a society where:

men expected to fight, and every able-bodied man was automatically a member of the local militia. The women expected their men to fight, and sometimes their homes to be invaded. Strongly independent, these women understood also that they would be required to run households and farms when their men were away, and to be at risk from raiding parties in their home communities. The children grew up playing games of physical challenge... knowing that it was only a matter of time before they would be expected... to fight... [and] defend their family against attack.<sup>26</sup>

These were a people used to living everyday with the threat of war. Since the Texas frontier offered the constant possibility of Indian attacks, political unrest, and the necessity of hard, daily labor just to eke out a living, the Scots-Irish fit right in. Being able to effectively handle these circumstances separated Scots-Irish characteristics from those found in peoples of other European nationalities such as England, France, and Germany.

Yet, why did the Scots-Irish want to move to Texas in the first place? Mainly, the extreme economic disparity between the Scots-Irish and the government officials who usually

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>26</sup> Webb, *Born Fighting*, 140.

traced their families back to England. The South had stratified into a tiered class system with an “English-American aristocracy” sitting at the top and slaves at the bottom.<sup>27</sup> While the Scots-Irish did not fit into this original class system per se, they wound up providing a blanket of military protection between the eastern settlers and the western frontier by settling in the Allegheny and Appalachian mountains.<sup>28</sup> Still, the Scots-Irish subsisted with farming and hunting neither of which usually brings wealth. Thus, when back-to-back recessions or “panics” hit in 1819 and then in 1826, the Scots-Irish were hard hit. Many decided to take a chance on Texas because of the cheap land and fresh start the province offered.

Another trait of the Scots-Irish settlers was flexibility. Although most settlers were terrified to speak to, much less trade with, the Indians, the Scots-Irish did both. They also learned from the Indians and used their knowledge to fight against them when events demanded it.<sup>29</sup> Two well-known men of “Scots-Irish descent”<sup>30</sup> who learned from Indians, studied their opponents before attacking, and proved flexible when needed were Davy Crockett and Sam Houston.

Scots-Irish people were also renowned for their stubbornness. When it came to the frontier, a stubborn streak was a positive trait. The initial setup on a tract of frontier land required an extra dose of stubbornness. In these first days, the work was the same for everyone – a house had to be built, trees cut, crops planted, and a water source acquired. For the Scots-Irish moving from this makeshift set up to a “civilized” life necessitated the building of a community with a church, school, store, and hopefully, a tavern.<sup>31</sup> Also, Scots-Irish desired that their community be brought

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>30</sup> Webb, *Born Fighting*, 191.

<sup>31</sup> Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish*, 260.

“under the jurisdiction of a court.”<sup>32</sup> This stubborn Scots-Irish longing for an established neighborhood helped permanently settle the seemingly impossible to settle Texas frontier.

Despite the outwardly rough and tough nature of the Scots-Irish, they were also religious. Organized religion played a key role in the development of communities. “Strong ministers” formed “the backbone of the communities.”<sup>33</sup> Without strong religious leaders, people would “regress into the decadence and spiritual emptiness of the wilderness.”<sup>34</sup> Regardless of their warrior-like tendencies, Scots-Irish culture still cherished and relied heavily on religion. Even though modern stereotypes often picture Scots-Irish as drunkards, they were overall a moral people who thought that “Success itself was usually defined in personal reputation rather than worldly goods.” Honor was every bit as important in this culture as religion and morality.

Perhaps, the most eye-opening on the Texas frontier were the Scots-Irish traits of being “openly unafraid of higher authority, intent on personal honor, quick to defend itself [themselves] against attack of any sort, and [being] deeply patriotic.”<sup>35</sup> It is easy to see how a culture based on these principles would not allow the Mexican government to take away their rights. Adding to this sentiment, “they never felt themselves to be a “minority group.”” They considered themselves to be as American and Southern as much as they were Scots-Irish.

Obviously, the Scots-Irish had frontier grit, otherwise known as “what it takes to survive in the most inhospitable places.” This grit could be found in anyone brave enough to try to settle in Texas including Tejanos. In the popular image of frontier life, settlers “conquered the wilderness and laid the foundations of democratic faith and practice.”<sup>36</sup> Such a romanticized notion is far from the truth. Frontier life was incredibly difficult – plain and simple. Only a special kind of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Webb, *Born Fighting*, 156.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>36</sup> Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish*, 256.

person could head out west and make a life there. More than settlers in other parts of the west, the Texas colonists created lives for themselves. These people did more than survive in Texas; they built communities in a land that had not been successfully settled for over a hundred years.

One major trait of frontier grit was self-reliance. When settlers claimed their land in Texas, their land tracts included sometimes thousands of acres meaning that the nearest neighbor was a serious horse ride away. As such, a person could not traipse next door to ask for a few extra logs of firewood. Therefore, settlers had to provide for all of their own needs and even their own protection. If Indians attacked, a family had no time to run for help. Often, they faced the threat alone.

Outside threats of attack were far from the only frontier danger. To settle the Texas frontier, a person had to be physically hardy. Especially the early colonies which were settled in the humid Gulf Coast region faced a threat of disease, often spread by pesky mosquitoes. Stephen F. Austin witnessed the prevalence of disease on his first trip into the region. Several of his traveling companions became sick “with fever” only to recover in a couple of days and then fall ill again.<sup>37</sup> Later, on her first trip to Texas in 1835, Mary Austin Holley wrote that “The cholera, 2 years since, had taken off some families entirely, others in part and new connexions had been formed by the Survivors.”<sup>38</sup> The worst cases of cholera appear to have been in Brazoria County near the Gulf Coast.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Mary notes that the survivors banded together in the wake of their losses. This kind of support seems to be prevalent on the frontier, especially in Texas. Since keeping up with the daily chores of running an up-and-coming farm was infinitely more difficult after sickness struck the settlers, they were able to persevere, in part, by helping each other.

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<sup>37</sup>“Journal of Stephen F. Austin on His First Trip to Texas, 1821.” *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 7, no. 4 (1904), 290-294.

<sup>38</sup>Mary Austin Holley. *The Texas Diary, 1835-1838*. (Austin: The University of Texas, 1965), 17.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Yet another aspect of frontier grit is determination. As aforementioned, frontier life was not for the faint of heart, mind, or body. Truly building a life in Texas required tenacity. If drought struck one year, a person had to be willing to take a hit and try again the next year. If one house burned down in an Indian raid, the settler had to rebuild. Giving up meant having to take what could be loaded in a wagon or on a couple of horses and move somewhere else. For some of the Texas colonists, this was simply not a realistic option.

Perhaps, the most overlooked trait of frontier grit is that every settler had to be a jack-of-all-trades.<sup>40</sup> When first arriving on a new tract of land, there was no blacksmith, carpenter, shopkeeper, weaver, miller, doctor, tanner, seamstress, or a livery with someone to repair wagons and shoe horses to provide essential start-up supplies and meet the needs of a new farm. Instead, settlers had to take care of all those roles themselves until trades people moved into the up-and-coming community. In other parts of the American frontier such as Appalachia, neighbors would help each other meet those initial needs. However, with the large tracts of land in Texas, neighbors were farther away and less able to help in these areas. So, many Texas frontiersmen and women had to carve their own rudimentary furniture, shoe their own horses, mill their own grain, etc. which only increased the difficulty of the first days in Texas.

Where did such effective frontier grit come from? As already mentioned, the Scots-Irish certainly had these qualities. But, not all of the “Old 300” were Scots-Irish – many were simply Southern. Contrary to popular belief, most Southerners were not wealthy plantation owners. The majority of Southern families might have had slaves, but they were certainly not wealthy. This middle-class group was hit hardest in the South by the Panic of 1819 and 1826.<sup>41</sup>To avoid debts,

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<sup>40</sup>Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish*, 260.

<sup>41</sup>Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 6.

these Southerners headed to Texas. One famous man who went to Texas to escape debt was William Barrett Travis.

Some Southerners came to Texas not because they were broke, but because they were criminals. Mary Austin Holley, a cousin of Stephen F. Austin, mentions one such gentleman from Kentucky. This man, named Baily, “had been a convict in the penitentiary of Kentucky [but] he had [also] been in the Legislature of Kentucky.” While in office, “he had been tempted to the crime of forgery... he had paid the forfeit” and then run off to Texas where he died in 1832 from cholera. More famously, Thomas Jefferson Rusk pursued the people that embezzled him out of a large sum of money to Texas. Although he never caught the criminals, he did opt to remain in Texas and later fought at the Battle of San Jacinto.<sup>42</sup>

Regardless of their reasons for starting over in Texas, the immigrants brought with them Southern traditions. While today “Southern tradition” might imply home-cooking, sweet tea, and gracious hospitality, the Southerners brought economic, religious, and militaristic traditions with them. The most unfortunate of these was the “peculiar institution” of slavery. This was one tradition Southerners brought with them mainly because they planned on starting cotton farms which required additional free labor to be both profitable and successful. Again, most of the Texas colonists brought only a few slaves (Jared E. Groce’s ninety slaves were the exception). Sadly, at this point in America’s history, the economy of the South required slavery to operate effectively and because the new colonists were setting up a distinctly Southern economy, they believed slaves were necessary.

Since the first Anglo-American colonists were mostly Southern and in need of money to pay for their land in the future, they brought the farming techniques of the South with them along with the slaves needed to pick the cotton. After all, if a person could grow and harvest enough

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 203, 208.

cotton, they could make a pretty penny. Mary Austin Holley recorded in her diary that Walter C. White (one of the “Old 300”) had taken cotton to the market in New Orleans and had “brought back \$20,000 in goods & \$5,000 cash.”<sup>43</sup> Clearly, cotton was a profitable crop at the time.

Although many of the Texas colonists from the South were slaveholders, they also brought a tradition of Protestant evangelical religion. As already mentioned, the Anglo-American settlers had promised to convert to Catholicism, but only went through the motions to ensure claim to their new land. Many of the settlers associated themselves with smaller Protestant evangelical denominations such as the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, or Episcopalians. From a modern mindset, slavery and Christianity seem distant from each other. But, to Southerners in this era, slavery was sanctioned by God.<sup>44</sup> Southerners also honestly believed slavery was sinless, but that some (primarily larger plantation owners) mistreated slaves which was the true sin.<sup>45</sup> This Southern mindset towards slavery made Texas a distinctively “Southern” state.

Also, although Mexico stipulated that anyone who settled in Texas had to pledge to be citizens of Mexico and to convert to Roman Catholicism, Southern Anglo-Americans accepted the former but agreed to the latter with no true intent to practice Catholicism. Some Texas historians, like T. R. Fehrenbach, suggest that “Stephen F. Austin and the Spanish authorities had a clear understanding on two matters: one, that the American colonists would be substantial, law-abiding people; and two, that the requirement of the Roman Catholic religion would not be enforced.”<sup>46</sup>

In addition to slavery and Protestant religion, settlers brought a tradition of military service. The South already had a pride in being able to defend themselves from Indian attacks,

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<sup>43</sup> Holley. *The Texas Diary*, 15.

<sup>44</sup>Eugene D. Genovese. *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>46</sup>T. R. Fehrenbach. *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*. (Boulder: De Capo Press, 2000), 137.

outside forces (primarily the British during the American Revolution), and slave revolts. To ward against these unpleasant events, local and state militias were kept at the ready. Also, the high population of the previously discussed Scots-Irish with their warrior-like qualities contributed to the fighting spirit of the South. By the early 1800s, the South also had a high ratio of military academies. On top of all this, the War of 1812 and the Creek Indian Wars (which ended in 1814) provided additional military experience for Southerners including such notables as Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, and Edward Burleson. Houston especially showed courage and valor when he charged ahead of his men and was badly injured only to continue fighting and receive an additional grievous injury.<sup>47</sup>

With the various traits of Tejano culture, American political and religious notions, Scots-Irish heritage, frontier grit, and Southern tradition all mixing during the early days of colonization in Texas, all that was needed was for these characteristics to be tried by fire to permanently meld them together. This fire was to be the Texas Revolution. Yet, no ordinary conflict would do to fully birth Texas Nationalism. A history rich in mythos that “fostered a people who consider themselves capable of doing anything— an exceptional population imbued with a fierce sense of nationalistic and local rooted in the mythic memoirs of the first Anglo settlers.”<sup>48</sup> Only the epic events at Gonzales, Béxar, the Alamo, Goliad, and San Jacinto could forge these qualities into the Texas Nationalistic fervor that has continued to the present day.

Among Texans, the Battle of Gonzales with the iconic flag with “Come and Take it” has stuck in the popular memory of the people. Today, Texans have adapted the line to defend the second amendment and the right to bear arms. Stickers in the design of the flag with an AK-47 or AR-15 instead of a cannon are tremendously popular. As for how this battle fueled Texas

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<sup>47</sup> Campbell, *Sam Houston*, 8-10.

<sup>48</sup>Michael G. Kelley. "Most Desperate People: The Genesis of Texas Exceptionalism." (Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2011), 2.

Nationalism, Gonzales exemplified now characteristic stubbornness and fighting spirit among the people. After all, they were only protecting a small cannon. Yet, they stood up on principle saying that the Mexican government would not take away the piece of property that they used to defend themselves. As Stephen L. Hardin explains, “The cannon became a point of honor and an unlikely rallying symbol.”<sup>49</sup>

Next, the first major victory occurred for the Texians following the successful storming of Béxar. Now, the already excited Texas “army” had several triumphs under their belts, and they had thrown the Mexican force under General Cós out of Texas. “Despite all the danger and hardship—or perhaps because of it—the Texian veterans of Béxar were enormously proud of their victory” and the interim governor added fuel to the nationalistic fire when he called the soldiers “invincible.”<sup>50</sup> Already the mythos of Texas history had begun as soldiers began to inflate the numbers of how many Mexicans had been killed during the battle. Many Texians thought that the war was won.<sup>51</sup> However, back in Mexico, Santa Anna was irate that his family’s honor had been tainted by this loss (since Cós was his brother-in-law) and the stage was set for the next fight.

The massacre at the Alamo seems like it should have sounded the death knell for the revolution. It certainly frightened a large majority of settlers who bolted for America during the “Runaway Scrape.” Yet, although everyone but a few women and children were killed, the Texians were only more determined to seek retribution from the Mexican army. But, the true puzzlement behind the Alamo comes from the fact that all the men who fought and died there were not born in Texas and had not lived in the state for more than a few years. Only the qualities mentioned earlier can account for the brave final stand they made. As Hardin puts it

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<sup>49</sup> Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

“Most of those who had fallen...readily understood that [Crockett’s] brand of righteous bullheadedness. To remain loyal to their upbringing and the legacy of their forebears, resistance to Santa Anna could be the only recourse.”<sup>52</sup> Much of this kind of honor and loyalty came from a blend of Scots-Irish, American, and Southern qualities.

Unfortunately, the Texians were hit after they were already down. Only twenty-one days after the Alamo fell, the complete massacre of all the Texian troops at Goliad (except for the few that managed to escape) were killed after they had surrendered. Santa Anna had thought this would extinguish the Texian’s will to fight, but he could not have been more wrong. The sheer lack of honor found in killing prisoners of war enraged both the Tejanos and all the American, Scots-Irish, frontier, Southern sensibilities of Anglo-Americans. Such an act was purely dishonorable and needed to be avenged. Santa Anna’s decision had the opposite effect he had hoped – the Texians were not going to stop fighting. The Alamo and Goliad were evidence that even when the Texians lost, they won.

Following the defeats at the Alamo and Goliad, General Sam Houston had to use all of his leadership skills to rein in the fighting appetites of his men. At the start of the revolution, the Texians had been outnumbered, but with the loss of the men at the Alamo and Goliad, the numbers of the Texian army consisted of only the men Houston had with him. If anything happened to this last Texian force, the revolution was lost, and Houston knew it. So, he bided his time until everything lined up perfectly for the Battle of San Jacinto. Then, Houston and the Texian army complete with a Tejano “cavalry” caught the Mexicans napping.

San Jacinto was the perfect storm of events that led to an unlikely Texian victory, but it was also the ultimate fuel for Texas Nationalism. All of the elements of the battle – catching the Mexicans during a siesta, the speed at which the battle was won, finding Santa Anna hiding –

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<sup>52</sup> Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 149.

combined to form the final, epic and exceptional history that cemented Texas Nationalism in the mind of Texians and their descendants. This battle served to reinforce the “never give up, never give in” attitude that already existed in both the Tejano and Anglo-American cultures.

Ultimately, Texas Nationalism began as soon as the “Old 300” moved in. Even today, these first Anglo settlers possess “an almost mythical status” among native Texans.<sup>53</sup> However, not all of the traits associated with Texas Nationalism come from the Anglos. Several came from the interaction between Tejanos and Anglo-Americans throughout the colonization and revolutionary periods in Texas. Although, the similarities between the American and Texan Revolutions also certainly flattered the more American political mentalities of the settlers, it aided the authoring of a Declaration of Independence and Constitution that closely mirrored the United States. The intense fighting spirit of the Scots-Irish helped the Texians win the Texas Revolution and provided the undying honor and loyalty found in native Texans to the present day. Also, the frontier grit of the original Texas colonists provided the force of will and desire to survive in insurmountable odds that were necessary during colonization and the revolution. Then, the Southern traditions of Protestant evangelical religion and military pride would remain dominant in the state and contribute to the overwhelmingly conservative and patriotic culture of modern Texas. Yet, without the catalyst of the incredible events of the Texas Revolution, these characteristics might never have mixed so cohesively and embedded themselves so thoroughly into generations of Texans. All of these qualities still exist in the face of the challenging situations found in more recent history. To this day, Texans are not afraid to confront authority and stand up for what they believe in on a personal and political level. Texas Nationalism shows no signs of receding from the Texas mindset and hopefully, it will endure in the hearts of many

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<sup>53</sup>Kelley, “Most Desperate People,” 1.

generations to come. For, in the end, Texas Nationalism is not an attitude, but an indomitable spirit.

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