

Armed Adventurers:
A Perspective on the Remembered Past
of the Battle of Coleto Creek and the Goliad Massacre

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A Note to the Reader

A thesis is often considered an odd thing. It is too long to be an article and too short to be a dissertation or book. So why bother writing one? Regardless of a thesis' "in-between" status, it opens the door to the student where the scope of research is introduced and the craft of history is explored.

"Armed Adventurers" as a research project only touches the surface of a complicated topic. Nearly all the argument leans heavily on far more extensive scholarship. It is meant to be a brief intellectual history of a military event and is mainly historiographic; therefore, the primary sources in the bibliography are not so in the strictest sense but include sources that fall into the "living memory" of the Texas Revolution.

The story of the Texians at the Battle of Coleto speaks to me, for I am not yet thirty years old, and one is tempted to live vicariously through the characters in any compelling story, especially where American myth has taken hold. It is important to separate myth from history, but who are we without a little dose of the former? The story also speaks to today and how history is remembered in a culture. To quote historian K. Jack Bauer, to explain part of why Coleto was chosen for this project, it "grows out of the truism that every generation must reinterpret history in the light of its own experience."

Many thanks to Dr. Christopher Smith for his guidance and excellent ideas, Dr. Benjamin Esswein, who inspired a portion of my argument in just a conversation in passing, and Mike Cobb for suggesting I think about a "changing narrative" in my research.

Prologue

He was a stalworth knight, and keen,
And had in many a battle been;
The scar on his brown cheek reveal'd
A token true of Bosworth field:
His helm hung at the saddlebow;
Well by his visage you might know
His eyebrow dark, and eye of fire,
Show'd spirit proud, and prompt to ire;
Yet lines of thought upon his cheek
Did deep design and council speak.
His forehead, by his casque worn bare,
His thick mustache, and curly hair,
Coal-black, and grizzled here and there.
 But more through toil than age;
His square-turn'd joints, and strength of
 Limb,
Show'd him no carpet knight so trim,
But in close fight a champion grim,
 In camps a leader sage.¹

They were the glory of the race of rangers,
Matchless with a horse, a rifle, a song, a supper or a courtship,
Large, turbulent, brave, handsome, generous, proud and affectionate,
Bearded, sunburnt, dressed in the free costume of hunters,
Not a single one over thirty years of age.²

¹ An excerpt from "Marmion" describing the knight-errant, Lord Marmion, in Sir Walter Scott, *The Complete Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co. Publishers, 1894), 55.

² An excerpt from "Song of Myself," in Edward Haviland Miller, *Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself': A Mosaic of Interpretations* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 29.

Introduction: “A Most Unfavorable Position”

In 1835, a rebellion erupted in the Mexican state of Coahuila y Texas. The uprising quickly became a war led by Anglo-American immigrants, resulting in the independent Republic of Texas. Aspects of the war are, to this day, heated topics of debate. The traditionalist view tells of a “heroic struggle of determined Americans against overwhelming odds,” while deconstructionists condemn the conflict as a “shameless land grab, a scheme concocted by the slaveocracy.”¹ The war in Texas is not an American story alone. It also belongs in the context of the civil unrest within the Mexican Republic. The period from Mexico’s hard-fought independence from Spain in 1821, the conception of the Constitution of 1824, to the revolt in Texas, was identified as the Mexican Federalist Wars, “during which raged the national civil wars, having for their purpose the destruction or the preservation of the Mexican Federal Constitution.”²

The factionalism in Mexican politics and society led to the abandonment of federalism in favor of a centralized republic by many Mexican citizens, especially among the elites. A land steeped in Spanish traditions, absolutist rule, and a military aristocracy for generations, the new nation was difficult to separate into states which had previously been a “homogeneous and compact mass.”³ But not all Mexicans favored a centralist regime, and rebellion broke out, such as in Zacatecas and Texas. In turning the nation away from the Constitution of 1824, the centralist government severed a compact with its people.⁴ The revolution in Texas, which began

¹ Stephen L. Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), xi.

² Hobart Huson, *Captain Phillip Dimmitt’s Commandancy of Goliad, 1835-1836: An Episode of the Mexican Federalist War in Texas, Usually Referred to as the Texas Revolution* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones Co., 1974), xiii.

³ Michael P. Costeloe, “Federalism to Centralism in Mexico: The Conservative Case for Change, 1834-1835,” *The Americas* 45, no. 2 (1988), 173.

⁴ This was a view from the statesman and intellectual, Lorenzo de Zavala, the former Mexican minister to France under President Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Zavala resigned his post, denounced the centralist takeover,

as a struggle for the right of separate statehood, boiled over into a complete break with Mexico by early 1836.⁵ Within this federalist war in Texas, a unique episode occurred: the Battle of Coleto Creek. The episode projects significant ideas of the American West. The battles of the Revolution, such as those that happened at the Alamo and San Jacinto in 1836, and the individuals involved have been revered in Texas history. The immortalization of these peoples and events has carried the narrative of the Revolution, culminating in an array of viewpoints within the scholarship of the conflict.

On the morning of Palm Sunday, March 27, 1836, nearly four hundred Anglo-Texans⁶ and volunteers from the United States under the command of Colonel James W. Fannin were executed at Goliad by Mexican troops per the orders of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna and the Supreme Government of Mexico. The event sparked outrage from the United States and within the command of the Mexican Army. It has gone down in history as the Goliad Massacre. The executions were not only the result of Mexican law but Fannin's tragic defeat at the hands of Santa Anna's most successful and competent general, Jose Urrea, at the Battle of Coleto.⁷ Fannin's command was caught on an open prairie after a poorly conducted retreat without the proper provisions and natural cover for a sustained battle. The Texians surrendered to Urrea's forces, the terms of which are, to this day, a controversial subject in the history of the Texas Revolution.

and threw his lot in with Texas, in David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 249.

⁵ Huson, *Phillip Dimmitt's Commandancy of Goliad, 1835-1836*, xi; and Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846*, 251. The delegates of the Texas Constitutional Convention signed the Texas Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836.

⁶ Both Anglo-Texans (citizens of Mexico) and Anglo-Americans (fighting volunteers from the United States) are often referred to as Texians battling for a Texian cause. Anglo-Americans will therefore be referred to as Texians in this study.

⁷ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 250.

This thesis aims to approach the issues that have led to certain misunderstandings of the Texian and Mexican sides of Coletto, misunderstandings that influenced how Americans remember the Texas Revolution, the men involved, their motives, and intentions. Analyses of shifting historiography and historical mythology are critical to understanding this changing narrative. The histories of the Revolution written in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century were narrative-driven studies that emphasized stoic heroism among the Texians, leading to notorious misrepresentations of the Mexican side. Last stands lend themselves to historical fame because of the gung-ho, rugged individualism idealistic to the frontier. The Alamo has received much more attention because of the resolve of men like William B. Travis and David Crockett to die fighting. In contrast, the men of Coletto, believing they were to be treated as prisoners of war upon their surrender, were executed brutally, disrupting the vision of an epic West and presenting harsh realities of the nature of the frontier. The actual terms of surrender tell a different story regarding the legality of the executions and what Fannin understood when surrendering at discretion.

Michael Robert Green, in his MA Thesis, “The Battle of Coletto Creek and the Subsequent Goliad Massacre” (1976), poses a fascinating argument, explaining that the Alamo and San Jacinto epitomized the frontier ideal of “rugged individuals struggling against despotism,” but Coletto became the antithesis of this ideal when these “frontier types” surrendered just to be shot down a week later.⁸ The violent and unforgiving nature often inherent in the advance of the American frontier was manifest at Coletto, and the arguments in this text will seek to support Green’s assertion of a “frontier antithesis.” The event serves as an example of the breakdown of the “myth of helpless men falling prey to Mexican treachery” but also

⁸ Michael Robert Green, “The Battle of Coletto Creek and the Subsequent Goliad Massacre” (MA thesis, The University of Texas at Arlington, 1976), i.

presents an intense situation where the “good and bad guys” are harder to tell apart than one expects.⁹ Roy Grimes argues in *Goliad: 130 Years After* (1966) that “an element of hallowed mystery” veiled the Alamo, a site now left “in a ghostly glow of mystic and heroic outlines, dimly seen and always a little unreal.”¹⁰ Benjamin Albert Botkin accurately describes American mythology and the personalities connected, “lacking a body of true myth and ritual, Americans conceive of their heroes, save for vague demigods of the Paul Bunyan type, as strictly of this world, however much they may take us out of it.”¹¹ On the surface, Coeto does not hold such mystic value in the legendary annals of frontier histories.

The accounts of the men at Coeto portray complex characters whose writings raise the issue of whether they believed themselves to be genuinely fighting for a tradition of liberty or personal gain, serving as agents of an ever-growing American empire. Did the Texians who fought at Coeto belong to a “reckless generation” responsible for creating narratives that clouded the true intent to conquer?¹² Does Coeto show instances of “armed adventurers” fighting under a masked cause, and how were their sacrifices remembered in history?¹³ The accounts of Dr. Jack Shackelford, Dr. Joseph H. Barnard, John S. Brooks, Santa Anna, Jose Enrique de la Pena, and many others will address these questions and provide critical insights into the motivations and ideals of contradictory individuals.

The United States was shamelessly expansionist, with an ever-growing, westering tide of settlers, and dealt with its own national contradictions during the period. The story of Mexico’s

⁹ Green, “The Battle of Coeto Creek and the Subsequent Goliad Massacre,” iii.

¹⁰ Roy Grimes, *Goliad: 130 Years After* (Victoria: Victoria Advocate, 1966), 7.

¹¹ Albert Benjamin Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore: Stories, Ballads, and Traditions of the People* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1944), 2.

¹² Jimmy L. Bryan. *The American Elsewhere: Adventure and Manliness in the Age of Expansion* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 10, 12.

¹³ Carlos E. Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution* (Dallas: P. L. Turner Company, 1928), 25.

northern frontier, which intersected the United States' southwestern frontier, "cannot be told in isolation from that of America's westward movement."¹⁴ The United States became neighbors of the Spanish province not only through the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 but also through the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819, pushing the United States toward a continental power.¹⁵ American legitimacy was also validated in the War of 1812, and the Old Southwest, now conquered, became several states in the Union.¹⁶ The nation was in an excellent posture to expand, and at the expense of the rising republics to the south. Mexico gained its independence from Spain and became a sister republic to the United States, but in name only, the two being vastly different, Mexico having "little unity, was torpid, thinly populated, and already weakened by an oppressive clergy and upper class and by the immemorial Latin custom of celebrating today's revolution by toasting tomorrow's."¹⁷ Thus, the stage was set in what would become a long fuse consisting of border disputes, filibustering, and federalist revolts. The "hard-fighting, hard-drinking, straight-shooting," frontiersmen and their surge into the Southwest, carrying with them lofty ideals, served as agents of U. S. expansion and exhibited the American imperial paradox on the frontiers.

The United States, as an "empire of liberty," represented an imperial power that, Anthony Bogues writes, "recognized the natural unfolding of human destiny as embodied in ways of life that were founded on conceptions of American liberty."¹⁸ Given this idea, it is implied that no

¹⁴ Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846*, xvii.

¹⁵ Robert Leckie, *The Wars of America: Quebec to Appomattox*, vol. I (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 317.

¹⁶ The Shawnee chief, Tecumseh, in the north, and the Creek Nation in the southern regions of the trans-Appalachian frontier were defeated in the concurrent War of 1812 and Creek Indian War of 1813-1814. Indian lands were ceded to the United States, 23 million acres of which was Creek land that comprised much of what is now the state of Alabama.

¹⁷ Leckie, *The Wars of America*, 319.

¹⁸ Anthony Bogues, *Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, and Freedom* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2010), 14.

coercive force is necessary for the spreading or unfolding of American liberty. However, Bogues argues that this is a paradox, “because conquest is a consequence of war.”¹⁹ The spreading of liberty, from a non-violent, ideological recognition of representative government and freedom, often met the realities of armed conflict during westward expansion. The project of spreading imperial power was different from the European colonial methods. Although the phrase was coined later, it was the “manifest destiny” and mission to spread liberty that made the imperial character unique and that charged Americans to volunteer in the Texas Revolution.

American scholars have been wide-ranging with the definition of empire, using specific accounts to brand a large swath of history, for instance, the age of expansion. Memoirs, journals, and other written accounts (given a primary source’s biases and intentions) are not always representative and not always so of an imperial state, but the men who served under Fannin carried something of an ideal with them into Texas. Ultimately, the Battle of Coleto reveals the Texian combatants as armed adventurers and insurgents who conjured a spirit of chivalry, channeling the spirit of the American Revolution and, by doing so, perhaps unwittingly, upheld an ideology of expansion. K. Jack Bauer argues that “the War of 1812 hastened the growth of nationalism, which warped the American view of her role into a divine mission to evangelize the rest of the world with her one true way.”²⁰ This evangelism did not play out in the absence of violent military episodes, showing a deep sense of coercion. Thus arises the American imperial paradox, which explains the spirit of chivalry and the ideology of expansion among the Texans.

Coleto, which primarily involved Anglo-American volunteers, was a more significant blow strategically than the Alamo, which represented more political and psychological

¹⁹ Bogues, *Empire of Liberty*, 14.

²⁰ K. Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 1.

significance at the time, as well as serious losses of men and materiel.²¹ These Texians had personal motives for volunteering and did not themselves seek to fulfill a “grand scheme” of empire, a contentious issue that has bulldozed over the nuances of this particular history. This thesis will hopefully stand as an intellectual history of a military event that provides balance and upholds respect for the men written about within these pages.

In *The American Elsewhere: Adventure and Manliness in the Age of Expansion*, Jimmy L. Bryan explores motivations and calls the Texians, “romantic invaders,” or a generation of men who were “peril seekers,” and the archetypal frontier warriors.²² Many in the Texan Army had traveled from afar, and the adventurism that certain men exhibited “energized the mythologies of the American West and structured the justifications for its conquest” and shared a great responsibility in heightening “the romance and exceptionalism that informed generations of unquestioning historians who extolled the Anglo-American triumph over untamed landscapes and unworthy people.”²³ Coleto was one such event within a cultural and political climate that facilitated the adventurism of the nineteenth century. Several Texas historians remained unquestioning of adventurism and, whether unwittingly or purposefully, steered the story of Coleto towards a bias that heavily favored the Texian cause.

Before proceeding with the larger ideas regarding Coleto, it is crucial to provide the reader with a narrative of the events from the afternoon of March 19 to the morning of March 20, 1836, to provide an understanding of the compelling differentiations in various approaches that show the possibilities on how others have remembered the events. Though brief, the battle was

²¹ Fannin, the irresolute commander of the largest contingent of the Texian forces by March 1836 at Goliad, complained over the lack of colonists within his ranks, saying, “that among the rise of 400 men at, and near this post, I doubt if 25 citizens can be mustered in the ranks,” where there was an absence of “old settlers and owners of the soil.” James W. Fannin to Lieut. Gov. James W. Robinson, February 7, 1836, in Roy Grimes, *Goliad*, 21.

²² Bryan, *The American Elsewhere*, 16, 243.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4.

an intricate encounter between Mexicans and Texians. There were marked shifts throughout the engagement, revealing the harsh circumstances of Fannin's position, which made the battle uncertain until Urrea ultimately emerged victorious.

On Saturday, March 19, 1836, Fannin and his band were on the move. With word of a probable enemy advance and an order to retreat, Fannin's destination was Guadalupe Victoria when, upon his arrival, General Samuel Houston was to organize further and consolidate their forces against Santa Anna's sweeping invasion of Texas.²⁴ The invasion was two-pronged, where to the north, Santa Anna would take San Antonio de Bexar, while Urrea moved up along the coastal plains of the southeast to take Goliad.²⁵ In the engagements at San Patricio and Refugio, Urrea successfully picked off Texian outposts, making Fannin's position at Goliad untenable. Upon leaving the fortifications, Fannin and his men did not reach their destination but were intercepted on the way to Victoria by Urrea at the Punta del Encinal del Perdido, a vast prairie without the cover of timber for which the Texian riflemen might make good their marksmanship behind natural cover.²⁶ The plain of del Perdido offered no such shelter, and the conditions of Fannin's retreat from the town of Goliad, now ten miles behind them, with Urrea's force in between, gave the Texians no choice but to give battle on the plain.²⁷

Once Fannin's column had marched a mile from Minnahuilla Creek, the colonel ordered the regiment to halt so that the oxen could graze. The halt lasted for an hour; with no forward

²⁴ Jackie L. Pruett and Everett B. Col, Sr., *Goliad Massacre: A Tragedy of the Texas Revolution* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1985), 67, 144.

²⁵ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 100; and Lester Hamilton, *Goliad Survivor Isaac D. Hamilton* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1971), 14, 15.

²⁶ Gregg J. Dimmick, ed., and John R. Wheat, trans. *General Vincente Filisola's Analysis of Jose Urrea's Military Diary: A Forgotten 1838 Publication by an Eyewitness to the Texas Revolution* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2007), 37, 60.

²⁷ Fannin's command began their retreat to Victoria at mid-morning on March 19, 1836, after a late breakfast and destroying provisions, yet they took a thousand muskets and nine pieces of artillery but no water. By making a stand on the prairie, they had no means of sustaining a prolonged fight, in Grimes, *Goliad*, 88.

movement, precious time was lost. The column resumed its march around 12:45 P.M.²⁸ Fannin ordered Colonel Albert C. Horton and his mounted Matagorda Volunteers to scout ahead and examine the pass at Coletto Creek, nearly two miles to the east.²⁹ As the Texians continued a slow march gaining four miles, Urrea's cavalry emerged from the wood two miles behind them to the west, back towards Minnahuilla. Joseph H. Barnard, a surgeon, and survivor of the battle, wrote, "we had reached a low ridge when we discovered the enemy advancing in our rear. They had just emerged from the belt of timber that skirted along the side of the creek and consisted of two companies of cavalry and one of infantry."³⁰ The Mexican cavalry was employed to good use because Urrea arrived on the plain with no artillery.³¹ The cavalry was split in two, and Urrea sent one detachment to the front of the Texian's right flank, commencing battle. This detachment was sent forth to cut off a Texian advance to the tree cover one-and-a-half miles ahead. The Texians answered this maneuver with three discharges from their artillery but with little effect on the Mexicans. Soon after the battle's commencement, Urrea's infantry emerged from the cover of the wood behind the cavalry.³² In turn, Fannin had his men prepare their small arms and made for the timber towards Coletto Creek. Still, the enemy was too quick, for as the first detachment of cavalry swept down to the right flank, the second's purpose was to cut off the route to the timber, marking the first shift of the battle in favor of Urrea.

What also marked this shift was the breakdown of the Texians' ammunition cart, thus Fannin was resolved to commit his force to battle and make a stand. Herman Ehrenberg, a young German in the Texian ranks, later reflected on the error of Fannin's stand in the open, stating that

²⁸ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 168.

²⁹ The account of Dr. Jack Shackelford, in Michelle M. Haas', *Massacre: The Goliad Witnesses* (Ingleside: Copano Bay Press, 2014), 74. The account can also be found in the Appendices of Henderson Yoakam's *History of Texas* (1855).

³⁰ Hobart Huson, ed., *Dr. Joseph Henry Barnard's Journal* (Refugio: John Henry Barnard, 1949), 21.

³¹ Pruett and Cole, *Goliad Massacre*, 81.

³² Haas, *Massacre*, 74.

“when he was supposed to act decisively and with some independent judgment, he was thoroughly unfit” and did not seek the “safety for his troops in the woods that were hardly a mile away, where the Americans and Texans are invincible, he decided to take a stand and fight in a most unfavorable position.”³³

As the Mexican cavalry and the incoming infantry surrounded them, the Texians formed a hollow, oblong square using their carts and wagons to create a barrier.³⁴ Artillery was placed in the center and stationed at the four corners.³⁵ Fannin could not command the prairie, not only because of the now immobile ammunition cart but because the square was formed in a small valley with a gradual six-foot rise that gave Urrea the advantage of bearing down on his enemy. In his account of the battle, Dr. Joseph Field lamented when he wrote, “our situation was very unfortunate, being in the midst of that large prairie, in a place where the ground was much lower than that around us.”³⁶

The square occupied an area of about a quarter-of-a-mile, and on each side were Texian defenders three lines deep.³⁷ As Urrea’s first charge began to advance around 1 P.M., a quarter of a mile from the square, Fannin ordered his men only to fire at point-blank range.³⁸ The Mexicans fired one volley, advanced, discharged a second volley, and then a third, which began to wound those combatants behind the breastworks. There was no call from Fannin to fire. Within a hundred yards, the Mexicans stopped their advance right when the Texians opened terrible fire

³³ Louis E. Brister, trans., and James E. Crisp, ed., *Inside the Texas Revolution: The Enigmatic Memoir of Herman Ehrenberg* (College Station: The Texas Historical Association, 2021), 271.

³⁴ Haas, *Massacre*, 75. Sources also say that the square was formed while the Texians were in motion towards Coleto Creek and eventually had to stop.

³⁵ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 223.

³⁶ The account of Dr. Joseph Field, in Haas, *Massacre*, 30. Field’s account can also be found in his *Three Years in Texas* (1836).

³⁷ John Crittenden Duval, *Early Times in Texas* (Austin: H.P.N. Gammel and Company, 1892), 40.

³⁸ Haas, *Massacre*, 75; and Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 168.

from all the weapons at their disposal.³⁹ This marked the second shift in the battle. The square presented an extreme obstacle; given this improvised cover, Texian marksmanship proved formidable. Although favoring the Texians, the square only offered the chance to dig in. Breaking through the square and dislodging the combatants within would have to come at a great cost to Urrea's men.

At this point of the fighting, Fannin was wounded in the thigh but still able to exercise command. Urrea ordered a second charge on the square, advancing on the Texians' left and rear. The Mexicans fired at a distance, then fixed bayonets in preparation for close combat. In attempts to overwhelm the square, the Mexicans crossed bayonets with the enemy, fighting along the hastily constructed barriers. Still, the fire from the second and third Texian ranks was "rapid and destructive."⁴⁰ Artillery from the four corners also answered the charge, cutting down Mexican infantry and cavalry. Those who were not shot down fell into the cover of the tall grass around the Texian position. To raise oneself from cover risked getting picked off, yet Mexican snipers in the grass managed to shoot some of the oxen essential to Texian mobility.⁴¹

In the hopes of overtaking the Texians once and for all, Urrea conducted a third charge to "disconcert the enemy before the sad moment arrived when we would be entirely without munitions."⁴² This time, the cavalry "came up at full tilt, with gleaming lances, shouting like Indians."⁴³ As the cavalry approached and reached sixty yards of the target, the entire Texian rear opened fire, thus bringing the cavalry to a stop. Realizing direct assaults on the Texian position were fruitless, Urrea ordered a retreat, concluding that his smaller force could not break

³⁹ Haas, *Massacre*, 76.

⁴⁰ Duval, *Early Times in Texas*, 41.

⁴¹ Haas, *Massacre*, 76; and Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 169.

⁴² Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 225.

⁴³ Jose Enrique de la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas: A Personal Narrative of the Revolution* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975), 7; and Haas, *Massacre*, 76.

through at any point of the square.⁴⁴ At this stage in the battle, there was a third shift when the Texian artillery pieces ran hot for lack of water and were unable to be fired. With no artillery to blast a cavalry charge with canister, the position grew ever more precarious. This shift in the battle, Urrea's retreat, and the coming of the night brought the general engagement to a standstill after five hours of uninterrupted fighting.⁴⁵

By sunset, Urrea nearly depleted his ammunition and chose to wait for reinforcements that had yet to arrive. The delay increased Urrea's anxiety regarding the speed at which he could dislodge the Texian position. That worry aside, Urrea assured his men of the victory to come if only they held their ground and waited for ammunition and artillery.⁴⁶ During the night, Mexican reconnaissance diligently watched over the Texians to thwart a retreat if necessary and kept up incessant noise using bugles and calling out to one another to deprive the sleep of those inside the square.⁴⁷ While the Mexicans kept due diligence outside, inside, the Texians entrenched themselves, digging shallow trenches around the perimeter and using the dead oxen and horses to reinforce the breastworks.⁴⁸ Surgeons like Barnard and Jack Shackelford tended to the wounded, but the pitch darkness made it nearly impossible to dress the wounds properly.⁴⁹

It was during the "dismal night" and into the early morning that the Texians discussed the fateful decision of either making a mad dash to the nearby timber before them, leaving the

⁴⁴ De la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 74; and Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 225. Texian accounts repeatedly report that the Mexicans numbered in the thousands, but the real number was around 80 cavalry and 360 infantry, much smaller than seven to eight hundred cavalry or a thousand infantry. John C. Duval first believed he saw upwards of 10,000 mounted men but contented himself on actually seeing 1,000, and several hundred foot soldiers, in John C. Duval, *Early Times in Texas*, 40. The dark mass of movement coming from the timber around the prairie made it difficult to discern an accurate number while the mind and body prepared for a heated battle.

⁴⁵ Haas, *Massacre*, 76.

⁴⁶ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 226.

⁴⁷ De la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 74

⁴⁸ Haas, *Massacre*, 77; and de la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 75.

⁴⁹ Huson, *Dr. Joseph Henry Barnard's Journal*, 24.

wounded behind and risking another enemy encounter, or staying with the wounded and sharing whatever fate awaited in Mexican hands.⁵⁰ The officers consulted with one another and their respective commanders when, according to Barnard, “if the enemy would agree to a formal capitulation there would be some chance of their adhering to it, and thus saving our wounded men... it was finally agreed that we would surrender if an honorable capitulation would be granted,” but the volunteers were also resolved to fight to the very last man if there was no guarantee for terms.⁵¹

The Texians had hoped for reinforcements to arrive, and for some, victory was still narrowly in sight.⁵² Reinforcements did indeed come, but only to Urrea. At 6 A.M. the following morning, the Mexican forces were reinforced with ammunition, two 4-pounders, one howitzer, and one hundred infantrymen.⁵³ Urrea ordered battle formations to resume the fight as the day dawned, having rifle companies advance along the plain and the cavalry separate into two wings in preparation for a renewed charge on both flanks of the square.⁵⁴ As artillery and small arms fire commenced and whistled past the Texians, a white flag was raised shortly thereafter, sealing the fate of many an adventurer.⁵⁵

Coletto was a unique engagement in the sense that it began as a last stand against the odds, only to devolve into a terrible military blunder for which commanders Urrea and Fannin

⁵⁰ Grimes, *Goliad*, 93.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵² Colonel Horton and his mounted company heard the first shots of the battle and followed suit but decided to retreat to Victoria after seeing their fellow men's terrible and futile position.

⁵³ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 227, 228.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁵⁵ There are contradictions within primary sources on which side raised a white flag first. The Texians say that it was the Mexicans seeking to parlay. Urrea says that the white flag came from inside the square without answering artillery fire from the general's reinforcements. That the Texians raised a white flag and the gesture being answered by one from the Mexicans seeking to confer seems the more accurate, in Grimes, *Goliad*, 96.

have been criticized for their actions, or lack thereof, out on the prairie.⁵⁶ The consequences of surrender created a desperate situation for both Texans and Mexicans. It has gone down in history as one of the most controversial and misunderstood events of the Texas Revolution. Coleto and the subsequent massacre at Goliad were connected events and are essential to the study of the war in Texas, revealing unique aspects of the nature of the frontier and insights into the age of westward expansion. The events provide an interesting window into the American mind and the standing Coleto holds in collective memory. Since the end of the Revolution and up to the late twentieth century, the narrative has changed in fascinating ways that reveal a remembered past often misunderstood and misinterpreted by early scholars, of which heroic and romantic ideals of adventure in the American West influenced many. Before continuing a narrative of the battle on into the surrender, a look at the historiography of the Revolution is necessary to provide context for Coleto.

⁵⁶ In combat, things will often go wrong, and victory goes to the side that adapts to the ever-shifting situation on the ground.

Chapter I: A Shifting Historiography

The Alamo was the famous “last stand” of William B. Travis’s command when the combatants within the old mission resolved to fight to the last man against Mexican forces. Coleto is not so well remembered because there was no last stand but a surrender that led to a tragic end for Fannin and his command at Goliad. So why is Coleto quasi-forgotten in the memory of the Revolution, beyond the fact that Fannin and his men surrendered instead of fighting to the end? The question addresses what historian Sylvia Ann Grider calls the “Texas mystique,” a term used for the ethnocentric or folk version of the events of the Revolution.¹ The ideals of heroism, connected to the Texas mystique, informed much of historiography and how Americans remember Coleto. By analyzing the broader historiography of the Revolution, insights emerge regarding Coleto and the subsequent executions of Texan prisoners at Goliad. There is a continuing narrative that has, as sources emerged and debates continued, yielded changes through the years since the beginning of the Texas Republic, from romanticized retellings of Coleto to more critical and balanced analyses. When approaching the Revolution in the context of the American West, it is important to define significant terms used for the intentions of the Texians who fought at Coleto.

The American West consisted of multiple frontiers with unique situations.² Expansion westward by the conquering of these frontiers was not exactly monolithic, with frontiers falling to a growing republic with imperial characteristics. The Texians as “agents of empire” does sound conspiratorial, but one must contend with Thomas Jefferson’s “empire for liberty.” Expansion is a more fitting term for the intentions of the Texians. The men of Coleto genuinely

¹ Tad Tuleja, *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 274.

² Douglas R. Hurt, *The Indian Frontier, 1763-1846* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), xiii.

believed in the ideals they fought and died for. Joseph H. Barnard wrote of the fallen that “shades of Crockett, Travis, and Bowie, and your band of noble Martyrs for the cause of liberty in Texas, look down upon and see your enemies discomfited and routed – retreating ignominiously from the country they entered with such bravado!”³ The ideals of liberty that men like Barnard spoke of in their accounts were more than posturing or political rhetoric. Theirs was an ideology of expansion, that paralleled American “habits of empire.”⁴

The term “revolution” used for the war in Texas also needs to be addressed to understand the ideals of the Texians during the period, and historians have hesitated to apply the term “revolution” to the conflict.⁵ The Texians were perhaps unconsciously revolting against a traditional system. What began as a war to safeguard rights within the Mexican Republic against a usurper government became a revolution. In William C. Binkley’s survey, *The Texas Revolution* (1952), there is a need for historians to define terms properly. For Binkley, it is too general, and the conflict should be analyzed through the “frontier hypothesis,” which focuses on the Anglo-American frontier experience, the practical application of federalism and self-reliance on the one hand and the Mexican tradition rooted in “nearly three centuries of autocratic Spanish rule” on the other.⁶ The Texas War for Independence, according to Binkley, was a conflict between two groups, Texian and Mexican. National authority pitted itself against Texian local privilege with an underlying racial distrust.⁷ In agreement with an earlier Texas historian Eugene C. Barker, Binkley argues that Mexico lacked the political wisdom to adopt federalism, given its

³ Hobart Huson, ed., *Dr. Joseph Henry Barnard’s Journal*, 44.

⁴ Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York: Viking, 2008), xiii. This work focuses on American imperialism which involved the “occupation and settlement of the American continental landmass.”

⁵ Sam W. Haynes, *Contested Empire: Rethinking the Texas Revolution* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015), 69.

⁶ William C. Binkley, *The Texas Revolution* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

previous traditions, and ultimately, the war was a “result of the difference of racial and political inheritances of the two groups of people who came into contact with each other on Mexican soil.”⁸ The war was a purely American development, given the frontier hypothesis, which became the “manifestation of the Anglo-American frontier process being worked out under unusual conditions.”⁹ The conflict in Texas, therefore, was a development unique to America and its expanding frontier, separate from a general revolution.

Another historian, William C. Davis, agrees that the dominant Anglo-Texan presence was bound to clash with the Mexican centralist government of the mid-1830s. It was difficult for federalism to take root in the political turmoil of Mexico.¹⁰ Davis asserts in *Lone Star Rising: The Revolutionary Birth of the Texas Republic* (2004), however, that a revolution was inevitable in Texas because of the “revolutionary cauldron” of the late eighteenth century that boiled over into the European colonies of Latin America.¹¹ For instance, the descendants of 1776 believed their struggle was no different from their forefathers once Santa Anna compromised their rights under the Mexican Constitution of 1824.¹²

Some historians challenge the notion of the war as a revolutionary movement. German historian Andreas Reichstein concludes that the events in Texas from 1835 to 1836 do not meet a set criterion for a revolution. In his thought-provoking article, “Was there a Revolution in Texas in 1835-36?” (1989), Reichstein challenges applying the term revolution to the war in Texas, beginning with the necessity of clearly defining terms, especially for historians. For Reichstein, the consequences of the war in Texas were not enough to label the struggle a revolution. After

⁸ Binkley, *The Texas Revolution*, 3, 129.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹⁰ William C. Davis, *Lone Star Rising: The Revolutionary Birth of the Texas Republic* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 303.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 166.

consulting the work of political and social scientists, Reichstein's findings show that the war lacked two major components causing a true revolution. Of the five steps in a model by social scientist Crane Brinton, the war lacked pre-revolutionary class antagonisms and a change of allegiance among intellectuals.¹³

The Tejano intellectuals who threw their lot in with the Texians might make up for the change of allegiance, but this intellectual community in Texas was small. Only three Tejanos were present for the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence in March of 1836, a minuscule number compared to the Anglo majority.¹⁴ For a revolution to occur, society must also have a social change. Reichstein points out that there was indeed a change by force but no social change, nor was there a class struggle between the poor and the rich.¹⁵ Like Binkley, Reichstein states that the war was a clash of cultures where the Texians sought to preserve a federalist system of government.¹⁶ Reichstein concludes that the conflict in Texas was a war of secession.¹⁷ In *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: A Political and Social History, 1835-1836* (1992), Paul D. Lack states that the "Texas cause has never gained much credence as a revolutionary phenomenon" and that on the ground, there was "an absence of overall ideological consensus."¹⁸ The Texians did not have the same revolutionary problems as their forefathers experienced a generation before. However, they evoked a similar revolutionary spirit and fervor for their cause, and given the climate in Mexico, with the Federalist Wars that broke out, it became a

¹³ Andreas Reichstein, "Was There a Revolution in Texas in 1835-36?" *American Studies International* 27, no. 2 (1989), 74.

¹⁴Rupert N. Richardson, "Framing the Constitution of the Republic of Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1928), 196.

¹⁵ Reichstein, "Was There a Revolution in Texas in 1835-36?," 75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁸ Paul D. Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience: A Political and Social History, 1835-1836* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), xiv, xix.

revolutionary experience given the successful break from centralism, thus becoming part of the recipe of the revolutionary cauldron affecting Latin America.

In *Contested Empire: Rethinking the Texas Revolution* (2015), Sam W. Haynes' purpose is to expand the narrative of the Revolution and place it in the context of United States history. The Texians participated in a historical re-enactment by claiming themselves as the "heirs of those who fought in the American Revolution."¹⁹ Given the different circumstances between 1776 and 1836, certain distinctions must be made. The Anglo-Texans had representation in the state legislature of Coahuila y Texas, whereas the American colonists had none in the British parliament.²⁰ George Campbell Childress drew up the Texas Declaration of Independence in one night. Thomas Jefferson took seventeen days to draft the United States Declaration with an additional six days of debate.²¹

Despite the significant differences between the two conflicts, Texians knew to reflect on their history as Americans to channel a spirit of revolution. The Texas Troutman Flag featured a five-pointed star, and underneath read the words "Liberty or Death," reminiscent of words from Patrick Henry's speech to the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1775.²² Other examples were the Texas meetings held in the United States concerning recruiting volunteers to join the Texian cause. It was common that orators in the meetings spurred their audience "with allusions to the American struggle for independence."²³ Haynes identifies the Anglo-Texans' revolutionary spirit, broadening the war's context and connecting it to the American West.²⁴

¹⁹ Sam W. Haynes, *Contested Empire: Rethinking the Texas Revolution*, 47.

²⁰ Andreas Reichstein, "Was There a Revolution in Texas in 1835-36?" *American Studies International* 27, no. 2 (1989), 75. It is important to note that the Texians were significantly outvoted.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

²² Haynes, *Contesting Empire*, 54.

²³ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

The struggle in Texas was more so a war of secession, but it produced revolutionary results. It was a fight to retain liberties in a federalist movement in the opposite direction from Santa Anna's centralist government. The Texians did acknowledge the legacy of revolution they shared from their mother republic to the North. The spirit of revolution, which entailed principles of liberty and self-government, informed the armed adventures who journeyed to Texas to fight against a leader they saw as a despotic ruler. The men at Coleto recognized this spirit, and so did the mid to late-nineteenth-century historians who incorporated the spirit of revolution with heroism, American exceptionalism, and romanticism, helping to form the Texas mystique.

American mythmaking took root almost immediately after the Revolution. Of the figures involved, an iconography emerged that did not consult primary source evidence.²⁵ The historiography of Coleto reveals interesting controversies regarding a changing narrative of romanticized heroism, which over time shifted to more balanced interpretations that emphasized the event's significance. Most importantly, the historiography of Coleto displays the ever-present mystery of human nature in what is indeed a stirring drama.

Early historians of the Texas Revolution considered history writing as part of literature. In *Inventing Texas: Early Historians of the Lone Star State* (2004), Laura Lyons McLemore argues that not long after the Revolution, historians saw it as a romantic struggle and peppered their histories with individualism, liberty, and American expansionism.²⁶ Mary Austin Holley, a cousin to Stephen F. Austin, wrote one of the earliest histories of the Revolution. Holley's *Texas* (1836) was highly romanticized with references to classical works.²⁷ Chester Newell authored

²⁵ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, xiii. It is also difficult, directly after an event, to have ready primary sources and historical perspectives.

²⁶ Laura Lyons McLemore, *Inventing Texas: Early Historians of the Lone Star State* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 18, 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

History of the Revolution in Texas, particularly the War of 1835 and 36; Together With the Latest Geographical, Topographical, and Statistical Accounts of the Country, from the Most Authentic Sources (1838), a substantial history given its title. Newell took advantage of sources in the Texas Republic's War Department and interviewed famous participants, including Samuel Houston.²⁸ Newell's purpose for writing *History of the Revolution in Texas* was to provide a useful history with credible sources. Newell concluded that the Revolution was a "victory for the romantic principles of morality, God, and progress, and the virtues of liberty, individualism, and expansion of the Anglo-American race," and the men who perished at Goliad on March 27, 1836, "sustained themselves with the most heroic Resolution."²⁹

Early histories of the Revolution also expressed racial overtones. Henderson Yoakum's *History of Texas: From its First Settlement in 1685 to its Annexation to the United States in 1846* (1855) blatantly asserts a sense of moral and racial superiority over Mexican forces. Fannin was among the last of his command to die at Goliad. He desired that his executioner shoot him in the chest and request that his remains be given a proper burial, for which a Mexican officer appeared to oblige. The requests were denied, however, to the Mexican Army's dishonor. Yoakum states that "these natural and proper requirements the officer promised should be fulfilled, but, with that perfidy which is so prominent a characteristic of the Mexican race, he failed to do either!"³⁰ Yoakum expressed profound biases in his work, even speculating the wrath of God in retaliation for Goliad against Santa Anna, stating:

The "public vengeance" of the Mexican Tyrant, however, was satisfied. Deliberately and in cold blood he had caused three hundred and thirty of the sternest friends of Texas – her friends while living and dying – to tread the winepress for her redemption. He chose the Lord's day for this sacrifice. It was accepted; and God waited his own good time for retribution – a retribution which brought Santa Anna a trembling coward

²⁸ McLemore, *Inventing Texas*, 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*; and Chester Newell, *History of the Revolution in Texas* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1838), 97.

³⁰ Henderson Yoakum, *History of Texas: From its First Settlement in 1685 to its Annexation to the United States in 1846*, vol. II (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1855), 99.

to the feet of the Texan victors, whose magnanimity prolonged his miserable life to waste the land of his birth with anarchy and civil war!³¹

One of the consequences of romanticized, heroic narratives was that the histories lent themselves to an ethnocentric outlook and a morally superior stance.

For the Texians who perished by execution after combat, British historian William Kennedy in *The Rise, Progress, and Prospects of the Republic of Texas* (1841), claims that “thy blood was shed upon a holy altar, and from the smoldering ashes arose a flame...”³² Themes of a sacrificial altar fanning the flames of revolution were often conveyed in the early historiography. In *Texas: An Epitome of Texas History from the Filibustering and Revolutionary Eras to the Independence of the Republic from the Most Approved Sources* (1897), William H. Brooker argues that the men at Goliad “went to the altar of death...and on that altar fed by human sacrifice was kindled into a glowing heat the freedom and independence of Texas, for without an Alamo and a Goliad there never would have been a San Jacinto.”³³ Many early historians concluded, through an exceptionalist interpretation of primary source evidence along with speculative views of the Mexican side, that there was a struggle that required much sacrifice for the ideals of individual liberty. Some historians, however, did weigh the two sides of the Revolution and looked at the conflict in a broader context.

Aside from the romantic interpretation, more recent scholarship is critical of the Texians who, in *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansionism* (2008), Walter Nugent argues, “tiptoed along the edges of literacy, good citizenship, and civility.”³⁴ Nugent asserts that the

³¹ Yoakum, *History of Texas*, 101.

³² William Kennedy, Esq. *The Rise, Progress, and Prospects of the Republic of Texas* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1841), 193.

³³ William H. Brooker, *Texas: An Epitome of Texas History from the Filibustering and Revolutionary Eras to the Independence of the Republic from the Most Approved Sources* (Columbus: Press of Nitchke Brothers, 1897), 77.

³⁴ Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansionism*, 139.

Anglo-American ideology of expansion showed that “military solutions, overlain by rationales and high ideals, have consistently been considered effective and justified.”³⁵ These adventurers, according to Jimmy L. Bryan, “traveled to the preimagined frontiers of North America in search of emotional experiences and personal transformation,” all while admitting “to a romantic ardor that celebrated the visionary, reveled in the emotional, yearned for the elsewhere, and wallowed in the egocentric.”³⁶ However, the motivations for many Texians went beyond a flight of fancy, for the pursuit of a limited and sound government was considered sacred.³⁷ Regardless, the historiography in the mid-nineteenth century remained the domain of Texas historians, while novels and dramas of popular culture prevailed in romanticizing the Revolution.

Don Graham, in his article “Remembering the Alamo: The Story of the Texas Revolution in Popular Culture” (1985), explains the significance of artistic expression and how it is a “valid subject of historical inquiry.”³⁸ Consulting popular materials provide the “truest mirror” for the historian.³⁹ The mirror reveals an ethnocentric understanding of the Revolution. Novelist Andrew Ganilh pits progressive Texians against a backward Catholic Spanish society in *Mexico Versus Texas* (1838).⁴⁰ The Anglo-Americans were usually depicted as freedom fighters protecting individual liberty from the ravages of Mexican *soldados*. Racist themes are found in *The Capture of the Alamo* (1886), where David Crockett’s disdain for the villainous Santa Anna is racially motivated, calling the Mexican general an “old coon,” and other works mention Mexican’s as “greasers.”⁴¹ Popular culture had a considerable impact on how Americans viewed

³⁵ Nugent, *Habits of Empire*, xvi.

³⁶ Bryan, *The American Elsewhere*, 2.

³⁷ Huson, *Dr. Joseph Henry Barnard’s Journal*, 1.

³⁸ Don Graham, “Remembering the Alamo: The Story of the Texas Revolution in Popular culture,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 89, no. 1 (1985), 35.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39, 40. These were the typical racial attitudes of the time.

the Revolution. Plays and novels are two effective ways to project an idea to individuals, and the early artistic expressions of the Revolution created a “dream of history.”⁴² The “dream” of the Revolution can be hard to break down when the most significant parallel made by writers are classical parallels. Historians have made comparisons of this kind as well.

It is important to note interesting parallels between classical works and the events of antiquity in the historiography of the Revolution. The constants throughout are the comparisons of classical and early English literary works. The siege and battle at the Alamo are often compared to the great siege of the walls of Troy, giving the West an “epic treatment.”⁴³ The most authoritative military narrative of the conflict is Stephen L. Hardin’s *Texian Iliad* (1994), which is a title that plays on such comparisons and dubs Fannin the “Texas Hamlet” because of the commander’s lack of decisive action at abandoning Fort Defiance.⁴⁴ Fannin’s indecisiveness became a “tragedy of Shakespearean proportions” when he and his command were later executed.⁴⁵ This all enriches history writing, but where the mystique is concerned, the small number of combatants in the Battle of the Alamo differed from the fall of Ilium, where the multitude of Greek armies assembled “as ravening fire rips through big stands of timber.”⁴⁶ It is also as if Santa Anna, during the chaos at San Jacinto, should have called out, “A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!”⁴⁷

When events in the Texas Revolution are placed in parallel juxtaposition with Homer and William Shakespeare, even in good taste, it contributes to the overall American myth-making so

⁴² Graham, “Remembering the Alamo,” 54.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁴ This was what Texians named the fort. Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 161.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Robert Fagles, trans., *Homer: The Iliad* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 114. Texian accounts of Coletto reckoned Urrea’s cavalry as a multitude, ripping through the timber. Perhaps in their eyes, it was a fitting analogy.

⁴⁷ William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. John Dover Wilson (London: Octopus Books Limited, 1980), V.4.7.

widespread in the historiography.⁴⁸ There have been historians from the past, such as the German historian Johann J. Bodmer, who believed that every culture has its own “Homeric age,” where the written histories, poetry, and drama contribute to the heroics of the time.⁴⁹ It could be that the Texas Revolution was a Homeric time in the context of the American West when heroic individuals distinguished themselves. This carried over into twentieth-century popular culture and the age of cinema, most prominently John Wayne’s *The Alamo* (1960). However, from the late twentieth century to the twenty-first, historians have shifted away from heroic legends and romanticism to a more critical view of both sides.

Recent scholarship has debated the terms of the surrender of Fannin at Coleto and the legality of Santa Anna’s order to have nearly four hundred Texian prisoners executed at Goliad. It is crucial to note Mexico’s no-quarter policy conducted before and during the Revolution. To provide quarter involved “the sparing of men’s lives in battle, and giving them good treatment when they surrender.”⁵⁰ There would be no quarter, however, for soldiers of fortune and pirates if the Mexican government had anything to say about it. Thus, any surrender thereafter would be strictly at discretion, which meant that when Fannin surrendered to Jose Urrea, the Mexican general could not guarantee that the lives of the enemy combatants would be spared, even if they laid down their arms.⁵¹

Coleto and the Goliad Massacre remain obscure events, and historians and sometimes amateur historians have struggled to reconstruct the past. Jay A. Stout, in *Slaughter at Goliad*:

⁴⁸ James W. Pohl and Stephen L. Hardin, “The Military History of the Texas Revolution: An Overview,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (1986), 301.

⁴⁹ Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient Medieval, Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 221.

⁵⁰ Richard Bruce Winders, “‘This is Our Cruel Truth, But I Cannot Omit It:’ The Origin and Effect of Mexico’s No Quarter Policy in the Texas Revolution,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 120, no. 4 (2017): 413.

⁵¹ Winders, “‘This is Our Cruel Truth, But I Cannot Omit It,’” 426.

The Mexican Massacre of 400 Texas Volunteers (2008), argues that there should have been a trial at Goliad for the killings to be classified as executions.⁵² Stout makes an interesting point regarding the indecision of Fannin and the cruelty of Santa Anna. Coletto and Goliad were “largely forgotten because ineptitude and malice are characteristics that no one embraces or endeavors to memorialize.”⁵³ James E. Crisp, in a book review for the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, heavily criticizes *Slaughter at Goliad* because of its lack of citations and source material. Crisp argues that Stout cites a book that actually does not exist, an edition of a German survivor’s account of the Goliad Massacre.⁵⁴ Aspects of Coletto and Goliad remain vague and offer obstacles for historians. Others have considered events in a broader context and from different perspectives.

In his article, “‘This Is Our Cruel Truth, But I Cannot Omit It:’ The Origin and Effect of Mexico’s No Quarter Policy in the Texas Revolution” (2017), Richard Bruce Winders analyzes the terms of surrender at Coletto and the executions at Goliad. Winders weighs the importance of understanding the Mexican side of the Revolution in its proper context and does not justify or excuse what happened at Goliad on Palm Sunday, 1836, but explains the reasoning behind specific actions taken by Santa Anna and his officers. Winders argues that Fannin’s command “represented the largest cache of prisoners taken by the Mexican Army at one time” and that the “examination of the Goliad Massacre reveals how officials responsible for enforcing the Tornel Decree attempted to conform to its legalistic wording, the application of which meant that some

⁵² Jay A. Stout, *Slaughter at Goliad: The Mexican Massacre of 400 Texas Volunteers* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), x.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁵⁴ James E. Crisp, “Reviewed Works: Goliad: The Other Alamo by William R. Bradle; Slaughter at Goliad: The Mexican Massacre of 400 Texas Volunteers by Jay A. Stout.” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 122, no. 3 (2009): 319.

prisoners avoided a death sentence.”⁵⁵ Indeed, some Mexican officials, including Urrea, tried to avoid killing prisoners of war, and a few Texian surgeons and combatants were spared.

Goliad, therefore, should be viewed in the context of Mexican law at the time. In *Remember Goliad!: A History of La Bahia* (1994), Craig H. Roell asserts that “the massacre cannot be considered as isolated from the series of events and legislation proceeding it.” The Tornel Decree and the terms of Fannin’s surrender preceded the executions and provide meaning, a far cry from Jack C Butterfield’s conclusion in *The Men of the Alamo, Goliad, and San Jacinto* (1936) when he stated that “there can be no justification for the massacre. It was foul murder.”⁵⁶ Much like Winders and Roell, historians today attempt to explain the reasons for the Mexican side, not excuse them. This approach justifies an understanding of the nuances in history. Coletto’s “greatest significance remains fixed to its consequences,” which consisted of overconfidence on the Mexican side for having wiped out a swath of the Texan Army and the order to execute, which incurred the wrath of the Texians at the chaotic Battle of San Jacinto.⁵⁷ Winders and Roell reveal the significance of Coletto by considering the context of the Mexican side of the Revolution. Studying the historiography, one sees a shift from a mystique toward more analytical interpretations.

Hardin’s contribution to the historiography placed military events in the larger context of American military history. With historian James W. Pohl, Hardin wrote an article titled “The Military History of the Texas Revolution: An Overview” (1986) and later wrote *Texian Iliad*, where he offers a narrative of the war focused on military aspects, providing analysis of strategy

⁵⁵ Winders ““This is Our Cruel Truth, But I Cannot Omit It,”” 427, 433.

⁵⁶ Jack C. Butterfield, *The Men of the Alamo, Goliad, and San Jacinto* (San Antonio: Naylor Company, 1936), 97.

⁵⁷ Craig H. Roell, *Remember Goliad!: A History of La Bahia* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1994), 67.

and tactics of both sides. Hardin asserts that military historians have unfortunately overlooked the Revolution, passing it over as an insignificant conflict. But Hardin's purpose is to bring the military narrative to light.⁵⁸

Hardin states that "the war is virtually ignored by the major military historians of our time."⁵⁹ Texas historian Archie McDonald spoke of the Revolution as having "no Hannibal, no Napoleon to formulate or demonstrate great tactical or strategic truths...Its only real value is moral."⁶⁰ English military historian J.F.C. Fuller dedicates a short sentence to the Texas Revolution in his three-volume *Military History of the Western World* (1954), and Russell F. Weigley does not mention the Revolution in his work, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (1973).⁶¹ The Revolution is covered only to provide brief context to the Mexican-American War in Robert Leckie's two volume, *The Wars of America* (1968).

Binkley wrote that the Revolution was so concentrated and confused that it is a great subject to study individual conduct and motives because the war involved such a small number of people.⁶² However, those Texians "of mixed and shifting motives," regardless of numbers, fought a short war covering a land mass twice as large as the eastern theater of the American Civil War.⁶³ Therefore, the Revolution should have more than a mere mention in military histories, especially regarding the American West. Hardin's study focuses on the "Anglo-American-Woodland/Hispanic-prairie Hypothesis."⁶⁴ Hardin's hypothesis provides a particular emphasis on Coletto.

⁵⁸ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, xi.

⁵⁹ Pohl and Hardin, "The Military History of the Texas Revolution," 269.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 269, 270.

⁶² Binkley, *The Texas Revolution*, 131.

⁶³ Davis, *Lone Star Rising*, 16; and Pohl and Hardin, "The Military History of the Texas Revolution," 271.

⁶⁴ Pohl and Hardin, "The Military History of the Texas Revolution," 299.

Given their “natural and untutored view of war,” Texians were best suited under familiar tree cover because of their excellent marksmanship, whereas the experienced and professional Mexican army with its cavalry was highly superior on the prairies.⁶⁵ Hardin presents the evidence through his analysis of Coletto, where Fannin and his men were caught out in the open ground by Urrea’s cavalry.⁶⁶ Today, the battlefield remains unchanged where Hardin notes that “if one walks over the ground at Coletto, there is a sense of unmitigated despair unlike that found on any other battlefield of the Revolution,” and the “pall that fell on the vanquished still lingers.”⁶⁷ Coletto was significant not only in its cultural and political aspects but also in its military importance. Hardin successfully separated heroic romanticism from the reality and nature of the frontier.

Coletto is largely overshadowed by the Texians’ last stand at the Alamo. The concept of last stands has enjoyed prominence in collective memory. However, with the publication of the military diary of a Mexican officer, even the Alamo now shares parallels with the executions at Goliad and the themes of a sacrificial altar. Crockett became an American legend whose death remains a mystery. Historians continue to debate the circumstances of Crockett’s death at the Alamo on March 6, 1836. Thanks to the iconography offered by popular culture, the Texas mystique has prevailed to the dismay of professional historians. In *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America* (1997), Grider shows how the Texas mystique is responsible for dramatizing and glorifying events of the Revolution.⁶⁸ It was believed among many Texas historians that Crockett met his glorious end fighting *during* the battle of the Alamo, clubbing enemy soldiers with his rifle, and dying over a heap of dead Mexicans. The translation

⁶⁵ Pohl and Hardin, “The Military History of the Texas Revolution.”

⁶⁶ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 170.

⁶⁷ Pohl and Hardin, “The Military History of the Texas Revolution,” 298.

⁶⁸ Tuleja, *Usable Pasts: Traditions and Group Expressions in North America*, 274.

and publication of Colonel Jose Enrique de la Pena's military diary, *With Santa Anna in Texas: A Personal Narrative of the Revolution* (1975) by Alamo librarian Carmen Perry, gave a different account of Crockett's death, describing the adventurer's horrible execution. The publication shook not only the Texas mystique but Texas historians as well.

Crockett's previously accepted last stand was dispelled by de la Pena, who witnessed the execution. Since the primary source was not published until 1975, a major shift occurred in the historiography in the late twentieth century when historians defended or attacked Perry's translation. In *Duel of Eagles: The Mexican and U.S. Fight for the Alamo* (1990), Jeff Long takes a cynical revisionist approach, calling Crockett a coward for surrendering to Mexican forces.⁶⁹ But far be it from the historian to call dead men cowards. Other historians supporting the diary, Hardin and Paul Hutton, conclude that there was no cowardice on Crockett's part; however, Hutton sought to "dismantle Crockett" from the "shackles of childhood hero worship."⁷⁰ Davis accepts de la Pena's diary but yields that it is not entirely accurate.⁷¹ Albert A. Nofi argues in favor of de la Pena on the death of Crockett in *The Alamo and the Texas War for Independence, September 30, 1835 to April 21, 1836: Heroes, Myths, and History* (1992), and concedes that the Revolution was a "heroic struggle of legendary characters."⁷²

The arduous supporter of Crockett's last stand is Bill Groneman, who wrote *Defense of a Legend: Crockett and the De la Pena Diary* (1994) and *Death of a Legend: The Myth and Mystery Surrounding the Death of Davy Crockett* (1999). In *Death of a Legend*, Groneman states that de la Pena's diary is a fake and the document "should not be treated as if chiseled in

⁶⁹ Edmondson, *The Alamo Story*, 420.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 421. It should be noted that de la Pena's account has Crockett and others captured by physical force used by Mexican troops.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Albert A. Nofi, *The Alamo and the Texas War for Independence, September 30, 1835 to April 21, 1836: Heroes, Myths, and History* (Conshohocken: Combined Books Inc., 1992), 9, 121.

stone.”⁷³ Groneman’s works do not present any hard evidence proving *With Santa Anna in Texas* is a fake or a forgery. Nevertheless, de la Pena presented a fascinating picture of those armed adventurers behind the Alamo’s walls. Describing the handful of Texians still alive after the Alamo was taken, de la Pena wrote that “among them was one of great stature, well proportioned, with regular features, in whose face was the imprint of adversity, but in whom one also noticed a degree of resignation and nobility that did him honor.”⁷⁴ Crockett’s execution was an outrage to many officers including de la Pena, who turned his face from the slaughter.⁷⁵ De la Pena provided an attractively written account of how the Alamo defenders perished with much of their honor intact. *With Santa Anna in Texas* has become a primary source of the Revolution that depicts the “shared and basic human emotions that transcend generations.”⁷⁶ As described by de la Pena, Crockett’s death is an example of the breaking down of American mythmaking.

The historiography of the Battle of Coleto Creek and the Goliad Massacre in the context of the overall historiography of the Texas Revolution reveals histories of a chivalrous nature that championed the Anglo-American expansion westward and condemned the evils of Santa Anna’s forces. Much of the work of historians such as Chester Newell, William Kennedy, and Henderson Yoakum solidified the heroism that still influences America’s collective memory today, and biases continue to bleed through the scholarship from time to time. The major shift in the evolving scholarship was among Texas historians of the mid-twentieth to the early twenty-first century, who acknowledged the need for revisions and innovative approaches in their histories. The works of Richard Bruce Winders, Craig H. Roell, and Stephen L. Hardin shifted

⁷³ Bill Groneman, *Death of a Legend: The Myth and Mystery Surrounding the Death of Davy Crockett* (Plano: Republic of Texas Press, 1999), 133.

⁷⁴ De la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 53.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Tuleja, *Usable Pasts*, x.

from an ethnocentric and heroic interpretation to a more critical view of the Revolution by emphasizing the significance of Coleto and Goliad in a number of perspectives. These two events offer a nuanced story of Texian and Mexican forces.

In the context of the American West, Fannin and his men were not so much agents of empire. Their ideology was one of expansion. The events of the Texas Revolution were not limited to the monolithic idea of empire, but habits of men steeped in republican traditions reaching back to the American Revolution. The Texians were armed adventurers whose ideals of liberty and efforts to retain a federal form of government facilitated expansion westward. The historiography provides insights into one of the war's more significant battles and its consequences for those involved and its remembered past. Butterfield states that "the men of the Alamo died gloriously, fighting to the last and exacting a terrific toll from the enemy."⁷⁷ The same would not be said of Coleto, a tragedy resulting in an act of barbarism in the American mind.

⁷⁷ Butterfield, *The Men of the Alamo, Goliad, and San Jacinto*, 97.

Chapter II: A War of Extermination

The question of surrender hung heavily over the Texians on the restless night of March 19. As their situation became even more fragile, many mulled over the option: should the uninjured men break for the timber, fighting past the enemy, or do they stay with their wounded comrades and share in their suffering?¹ To remain meant either certain death or, perhaps, an honorable capitulation was possible. Herman Ehrenberg of Colonel James W. Fannin's mounted rear guard wrote, "What a terrible choice: we could either leave our friends, our brothers, to a certain death, or we could sacrifice ourselves for them!"² A choice had to be made, but the looming Mexican soldiers were an untrustworthy brood to those inside the fortified square.

Over two weeks before Coleto and back inside the prized fortifications of La Bahia, John S. Brooks, among others, were "resolved to die, to a man, under the walls we have thrown up, rather than surrender to a horde of merciless savages, who have declared their determination to adhere to none of the rules of civilized warfare, but to murder all Americans, indiscriminately."³ These Texians were aware of the Mexican reputation for exercising no quarter.⁴ Nor did the Texians expect to receive it, for if no quarter was offered, then "let them pursue their course of ruthless cruelty; they will encounter spirits as stern as their own...."⁵ Young men like Brooks, now among the wounded at Coleto, did not get the chance to show their merit in this regard because the growing necessity to surrender became clear. The Texians were not inside a well-

¹ John C. Duval reported that three or four men during the night deserted, but a volley heard in the dark towards the timber assured Duval that the deserters "were no doubt discovered and shot by the Mexican patrol," in Haas. *Massacre*, 166.

² Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 276.

³ John S. Brooks to Marry Ann Brooks, March 4, 1836, in Roy Grimes, *Goliad*, 28.

⁴ Quarter: The sparing of men's lives in battle, and giving them good treatment when they surrender, in E. Hoyte. *Practical Instructions for Military Officers* (Greenfield: John Denio, 1811), 454.

⁵ John S. Brooks to Marry Ann Brooks, March 4, 1836, in Grimes, *Goliad*, 28.

garrisoned stronghold but were boxed in on the prairie with no water, a number of wounded, and no reinforcements in sight.⁶

So it was that in the night, a council met “to devise means and measures” of reaching a truce and to “obtain a treaty, if upon fair and honorable terms.”⁷ After further consultation and overcoming division and opposition to a capitulation, the officers and their companies concluded not to leave the wounded and decided to surrender “if an honorable capitulation would be granted, but not otherwise, preferring to fight it out to the last man in our ditches rather than place ourselves in the power of such faithless wretches, without at least some assurance that our lives would be spared.”⁸ What also informed their decisions for the next day was that, as the light of the morning of March 20 arose, Texian “hopes disappeared for the fulfillment of what Fannin had so courageously believed the day before,” which now revealed that no reinforcements were to come from Victoria.⁹ The morning also saw the late, yet successful, arrival of General Jose Urrea’s own support of men, ammunition, and artillery.

Urrea began preparations to renew battle on the morning of the 20th, displaying his now larger force before the defensive square. The general “fired a chain shot out of a large cannon” that flew overhead of the Texians in a gesture that said that Urrea’s enemy was now within range.¹⁰ After a repeated shot, the Texians raised a white flag.¹¹ Urrea answered the flag by sending Captain Juan Holzinger, Colonel Juan Morales, and an aide, Jose de la Luz Gonzales, to

⁶ Fannin’s advanced guard, led by A. C. Horton, chose to retreat from Coleta after weighing the great cost of engaging in a desperate fight with what Horton saw as an overwhelming enemy force.

⁷ Account of Benjamin H. Holland in Haas, *Massacre*, 55.

⁸ Bister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 293; and Account of Joseph Barnard in Haas, *Massacre*, 137, 138.

⁹ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 277.

¹⁰ Account of Abel Morgan in Haas, *Massacre*, 97.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Other accounts, both Mexican and Texian, tell of regular artillery fire that led to a white flag. Jose Enrique de la Pena wrote that Urrea “had hardly opened battery fire when the enemy hoisted a white flag” in de la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 75.

ascertain the Texian's intentions.¹² The three men returned to the Mexican line with a proposal wherein Fannin wished to capitulate.¹³ Urrea, in turn, sent Morales and Mariano Salas back with a reply that he could only accept a surrender at discretion, to which Fannin promptly refused by way of Morales and Salas.¹⁴ This back-and-forth negotiation was not leading anywhere for Urrea, who decided that his presence at the enemy camp was needed to end the affair.

Urrea reiterated that he could not accept capitulation while "at the same time he refused to sign a surrender order which Fannin proposed to him with these terms."¹⁵ The two commanders, accompanied by their respective officers, finally agreed to a surrender. Inside the square, Joseph Barnard, Jack Shackelford, and other Texians were convinced by what they heard and saw that "a capitulation with General Urrea was agreed upon, the terms of which were that we should lay down our arms and surrender ourselves as prisoners of war."¹⁶ After the surrender and giving up their arms, the Texians believed they would be taken back to Goliad and later paroled and sent to New Orleans. However, Urrea agreed to no such thing, having no authority to ratify Fannin's draft proposing an "honorable capitulation."¹⁷

But to which surrender did the two sides agree? That question has become one of the Texas Revolution's greatest conundrums. The issue cannot be solved here; only perspectives can be explored. Two copies of Fannin's surrender at Coleto were written, one in Spanish and the other in English. Captain Benjamin H. Holland was the only Texian to witness the formal

¹² Urrea's *Diario* in Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 228.

¹³ Ramon Martinez Caro, Santa Anna's secretary wrote "that the enemy then sent him (Urrea) a short note, written in pencil, proposing several articles of capitulation; and that he replied to this note by saying that he had no authority to enter into any terms, being able to grant only an unconditional surrender," in Castaneda, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 105.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 228; and Vicente Filisona, and Wallace Woolsey, trans., *Memoirs of the History of the War in Texas*, vol. II (Austin, Eakin Press, 1987), 202.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Account of Joseph Barnard, in Haas, *Massacre*, 138, 139.

¹⁷ Roell, *Remember Goliad!*, 64.

surrender who lived to tell of it. Holland was present with Fannin when “the following treaty was concluded upon, and solemnly ratified....”¹⁸ Below are the terms of surrender as reported by

Holland:

Seeing the Texian army entirely overpowered by a far superior force, and to avoid the effusion of blood, we surrender ourselves prisoners of war, under the following terms:

Article I. That we should be received and treated as prisoners of war, according to the usages of civilized nations.

Article II. That the officers should be paroled immediately upon their arrival at La Bahia, and the other prisoners should be sent to Copano, within eight days, there to await shipping to convey them to the United States, so soon as it was practicable to procure it; no more to take up arms against Mexico until exchanged.

Article III. That all private property should be respected, and officers’ swords should be returned on parole or release.

Article IV. That our men should receive every comfort and be fed as well as their own men.

Signed Gen. Urrea

Col. Morales

Col. Holzinger

On the part of the enemy; and on our part by

Col. Fannin

Maj. Wallace¹⁹

This version of the surrender reads quite differently from that of Urrea’s Spanish copy, which was discovered many years later in the Archives and War Department in Mexico City by Texas historian Eugene C. Barker:

Article I. The Mexican troops having placed their battery one hundred and sixty paces from us and the fire having been renewed, we raised a white flag; Colonel Juan Morales, Colonel Mariano Salas, and Lieutenant Colonel of Engineers Juan Jose Holzinger came immediately. We proposed to surrender at discretion and they agreed.

Article II: The commandant Fannin and the wounded shall be treated with all possible consideration upon the surrender of all their arms.

Article III. The whole detachment shall be treated as prisoners of war and shall be subject to the disposition of the supreme government.

Camp on the Coleta between the Guadalupe and La Bahia,

March 20, 1836

B. C. Wallace, commandant

I. M. Chadwick, Aide

Approved, James W. Fannin

Postscript of March 7, 1837: Since, when the white flag was raised by the enemy, I made it known to their officer that I could not grant any other terms than an unconditional surrender and they agreed to it through the officers expressed, those who subscribe the surrender have no

¹⁸ Account of Benjamin Holland, in Haas, *Massacre*, 55.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; and Grimes, *Goliad*, 99.

right to any other terms. They have been informed of this fact and they are agreed. I ought not, cannot, nor wish to grant any other terms. – Jose Urrea.²⁰

The surviving Mexican copy, along with the remembered version that the Texians understood their surrender to be, presented an extreme and unfortunate misunderstanding. What may have been the cause for the Texians wholeheartedly embracing their being taken as prisoners of war, their property respected, and later parole to the United States were the *proposed* terms from Fannin to Urrea, but the latter made void the proposal by his annotation to the Mexican copy in 1837. Holland, Barnard, Shackelford, and other Texians did not lie when they shared what they believed were the terms but likely relied on the proposal in the back-and-forth negotiations with the Mexicans and the brief consultations among each other. Carlos E. Castaneda, in *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution* (1928), addresses the misunderstanding:

The truth of the matter seems to be that Fannin and his men proposed to surrender on terms; that these were not accepted by Urrea, who nullified all the proposals by his note added at the end of the said terms; and that, due to the fact that all the negotiations were conducted through an interpreter, many were left under the impression that the surrender had been on terms, and not unconditionally.²¹

However, the confusion came from someone other than the interpreters, for Fannin had to have informed his men of their situation. In *Remember Goliad!*, Craig H. Roell states that “Urrea made it clear to Fannin in person that he could only offer to intercede on the Texans’ behalf with Santa Anna to treat them with respect *until* the government ruled on their fate.” Time and again throughout the negotiations, Urrea stated that capitulation was an impossibility.²² As much as Urrea desired to give his enemy guarantees, he was under the authority of his commanding officer, Santa Anna, and the law of the Supreme Government.²³ Holzinger recounted the

²⁰ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 62.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 62, 63.

²² De la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 75.

²³ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 228.

surrender in June 1836 concerning Fannin's proposed terms, accepting a surrender as prisoners of war:

If the Mexican Commander would engage to treat them according to the usages of civilized nations. We (Holzinger and the other Mexican officers present) were acquainted with the law²⁴ that establishes the penalty of death for those individuals who may come armed for the purpose of carrying on war in Mexican territory and that the door was therefore closed against any agreement; I offered, however, to make known his disposition to General Urrea; which in effect I did, and received for answer, that inasmuch as the law prohibited his entering into such agreements he could not enter into any, nor listen to any other proposition than a surrender at the discretion of the Supreme Government of Mexico; adding that I might individually assure him (Fannin) that he would use his influence and endeavors with the Supreme Government of Mexico for the alleviation of his fate and that of his men, treating them, during the time which would transpire previous to receiving the answer from said government, as prisoners of war, according to the right of nations.²⁵

With these mixed assurances from Holzinger, Fannin could have believed that he and his command received the best deal possible. Upon relaying this, the Texians thought their proposal had been accepted by their enemies. The Texians knew that an attempt could be made on their lives if they gave themselves up, and by the Tornel Decree, the Mexicans had no authority to make solid guarantees. Given the conditions, Fannin and his men had no other choice. The vague assurances from Holzinger and Urrea may have confused the Texians into believing an alternative and ultimately misleading Mexican intention. This was no act of Mexican treachery. James E. Crisp, in *Inside the Texas Revolution: The Enigmatic Memoir of Herman Ehrenberg* (2021), writes that John C. Duval said it best regarding Urrea's intent in his memoir, *Early Times in Texas* (1892):²⁶

I have always believed myself that Gen. Urrea entered into the capitulation with Col. Fannin in good faith, and that the massacre of the prisoners, which took place some five days afterwards, was by the express order of Santa Anna, and against the *remonstrances* of Gen. Urrea. If Gen. Urrea had intended to act treacherously, the massacre, in my opinion, would have taken place as soon as we had delivered up our arms, when we were upon an open prairie, surrounded by a large force of cavalry, where it would have been utterly impossible for a single soul to have escaped,

²⁴ The Tornel Decree of December 30, 1835.

²⁵ Grimes, *Goliad*, 116.

²⁶ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 267.

and consequently he could then have given to the world his own version of the affair without fear of contradiction.²⁷

The intentions of Fannin must also be weighed to explore why he gave his command a different conclusion to negotiations on the plain of del Perdido. Crisp asserts that “given Urrea’s intransigence with regard to an unconditional surrender, and his (Fannin’s) own troops’ insistence on accepting nothing less than an ‘honorable capitulation’ that would preserve their lives, what else could Fannin have done to maximize their chances of surviving the war? Telling his men the truth, after all, could well have sparked a mutiny and a bloodbath.”²⁸ While blame can be placed on Urrea, Santa Anna, Holzinger, and others, Roell finds a significant “pattern of duplicity” in Fannin’s time in Texas.²⁹ Fannin was involved in the illegal slave trade, splitting the Texas provisional government over the Matamoros Expedition, and actively sought to taint the character of Governor Henry Smith.³⁰ Also, as a military commander, Fannin lost a deep sense of confidence that influenced significant strategic and tactical decisions and was likely a present factor during negotiations on the morning of March 20 and was indeed apparent in earlier excursions.

By late February 1836, the Alamo was under siege, with its commanders sending out word of their plight and calling on the assistance of their fellow Texians. Fannin decided to leave the fortifications at La Bahia and risk the lives of “chivalrous volunteers” to aid the besieged at Bexar.³¹ Unfortunately, within just two hundred yards of Goliad, a wagon broke down, causing

²⁷ Account of John C. Duval, in Haas, *Massacre*, 169. See also *Early Times in Texas* (Austin: H. P. N. Gammel Publishers, 1892), 49.

²⁸ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 267.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 268.

³⁰ Roell, *Remember Goliad!*, 65.

³¹ James W. Fannin to James W. Robinson, February 25, 1836, in John H. Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV (Austin: Presidential Press, 1973), 429. The mission at Goliad was known as La Bahia, before the Texians called it Fort Defiance.

the march to improvise with double teams of oxen.³² To exacerbate the lack of adequate transportation, this small expedition to the Alamo had little provisions, barely any beef, no breadstuffs, and only “half a tierce of rice.”³³ Brooks wrote that three wagons broke down while trying to cross the San Antonio River, and some of the oxen strayed away while they encamped in the night.³⁴ The decisive defeat of Colonel Frank Johnson and his men also informed Fannin’s decision to turn back toward Goliad.³⁵ Through a council of war, it was decided prudent to return to Goliad and continue to fortify the town and thus remain a presence on the coast. Fannin put too much stock in strengthening La Bahia.

Although “critically situated,” acting as an isolated garrison at Goliad, unwilling to move and consolidate numbers, presented a strategic problem for the divided Texian forces.³⁶ On February 23, Fannin noted, “I have about 420 men here, and if I can get provisions in tomorrow or next day, can maintain myself against any force. I will never give up the ship, while there is a pea in the ditch. If I am whipped, it will be well done – and you may never expect to see me.”³⁷ The Texians’ infatuation with the old presidios led to unnecessary deaths and wasted time in the face of an advancing professional Mexican army.³⁸ After receiving orders from Houston to fall back on Victoria, which Fannin was desperate to receive, he left late morning on March 19, effectively “giving up the ship.”³⁹

³² James W. Fannin to James W. Robinson, Feb 26, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 443.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 485.

³⁵ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 223.

³⁶ Ibid., 398. Not only were they divided physically, but there was also political infighting among the Texian leadership.

³⁷ James W. Fannin to Joseph Mims, February 28, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 454.

³⁸ The Alamo was of great political and psychological importance, more so than militarily. Remaining too long at Goliad played a role in Urrea catching up to Fannin near Coeto.

³⁹ Samuel Houston to James W. Fannin, March 11, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. V, 51; vol. IV, 398.

As ineffective as Fannin was in the role of commander, blame cannot be placed on one man alone for the unsuccessful or controversial outcome of a conflict. Urrea was not only branded with treachery, but second-in-command to Santa Anna, the Italian-born General Vicente Filisola, believed that the boastful Urrea took the great risk of sacrificing soldiers needlessly in engaging with a larger enemy force at Coleto, all for the sake of honoring his birthday.⁴⁰ Santa Anna, infamous to many, has received the greatest criticisms. Harbert Davenport suggests that:

Had Santa Anna seized the opportunity of Fannin's surrender to dump his men... on the wharves of New Orleans, humiliated, starving, half naked, penniless, homesick, and forlorn, and each with his painful story of Texan mismanagement and Texan neglect, Texas's standing with the American people would have fallen to a new low; and American men, and American money, for the Texan venture would have been scarce indeed.⁴¹

Davenport's argument can also be compared to Roell's, who emphasizes Texas' dependence on the United States for material aid and sympathy. If Santa Anna dumped the adventurers off at a U.S. port, "the popular Texas cause in the United States most likely would have fallen critically and with it sources of help."⁴² Many factors, which deserve to be viewed in context, converged into a tragic occurrence when Texian prisoners were executed at Goliad on March 27. Influenced by events insulting Mexican honor, the law and loopholes in the law, as it pertained to making war with other sovereign nations, explain the adamant nature of surrender at the discretion of the Supreme Government and the campaign policies of the Mexican Army during the Revolution.

In the Fall of 1835, a small armed force of Anglo-Americans, led by the exiled federalist Brigadier General Jose Antonio Mexia, were outfitted in New Orleans and sailed to the Mexican port city of Tampico, Tamaulipas. The expedition aimed to take the Revolution out of Texas and into Mexico to ignite Texian sympathies there.⁴³ A soldier of fortune and former exile from

⁴⁰ Dimmick and Wheat, *General Vicente Filisola's Analysis of Jose Urrea's Military Diary*, 43, 44.

⁴¹ Harbert Davenport, "The Men of Goliad," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (1939), 5.

⁴² Roell, *Remember Goliad!*, 73.

⁴³ Jose Antonio Mexia believed that the public opinion in Tampico favored his efforts against Santa Anna, in George Fisher, *Memorials of George Fisher* (Houston: Telegraph Office, 1840), 45. There were sympathies for a

Texas who served with Mexia in the Tampico Expedition was a Hungarian, George Fisher. Now living in New Orleans because of his opposition to the centralist movement in his newspaper, *Mercurio del Puerto de Matamoros*, in which he had targeted the governor of Tamaulipas and Santa Anna's brother-in-law, General Martin Perfecto de Cos, Fisher had been well acquainted with tyranny during his earlier life in Eastern Europe.⁴⁴ In his *Memorials* (1840), Fisher lamented Santa Anna's usurpation of the Constitution of 1824. Mexia's expedition, therefore, was not a fight against the Mexican people but an act of defiance from a member of the Mexican Confederation, Coahuila y Texas, against military despotism.⁴⁵

At the outbreak of the Revolution, Fisher believed that Texas was a "peaceful village that is suddenly assailed by a furious hurricane," and "the truth is, that a storm, that originated elsewhere, threatened to involve them in its desolating ravages."⁴⁶ To protect their interests as citizens under the Constitution of 1824 and as landholders and speculators on the Mexican frontier, action had to be taken to combat the hurricane winds of centralism. After all, the men who truly acquired the rich country brought civilization. It was the Texians' "sacred obligation" to preserve themselves and their lands "in conformity with the guarantees of the federal compact under which they were acquired. It is equally so, that they should obey the first law which God has stamped upon the hearts of men, civilized or savage, which is, self-preservation."⁴⁷ It was time to take the fight to the centralists, to divert their invasion of Texas and deprive them of strategic port cities.⁴⁸ Mexia declared that "I cast off with one hand the mantle of philosophy in

liberal form of government, but the expedition could have been more about joining forces with fellow anti-centralistas and rewarding involvement accordingly.

⁴⁴ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 32; and Fisher, *Memorials of George Fisher*, 2.

⁴⁵ Fisher, *Memorials of George Fisher*, 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁷ The General Council of the Provisional Government of Texas to the Mexican People, December 11, 1835, in Fisher, *Memorials of George Fisher*, 31.

⁴⁸ Vincente Filisola argues in his memoirs that Mexia barely failed in taking Tampico, "which would have been of course of incalculable value in facilitating the complete achievement of his goals and for making it

which I have invested myself, and with the other, the sword which I never have yet unsheathed unless it was to sustain the cause of the people,” and with this determination, he descended on Tampico.⁴⁹

With aid from the “Committee on Texas Affairs in New Orleans,” Mexia sailed towards Tampico on November 6, 1835.⁵⁰ The schooner, *Mary Jane*, was maned with fifty men, armed with a twelve-pound cannonade, two eight-pounders, and one hundred and fifty men equipped to fight on land with provisions to last nearly two months.⁵¹ Despite its successful departure, disaster was on the horizon for this ill-fated expedition. After a seven-day voyage, the *Mary Jane* hit a bar just off Tampico and thus became shipwrecked. A storm caused the surrounding sea to crash upon the schooner’s deck, drenching the ammunition.⁵² When Mexia was able to commence landing in the early morning of November 15, it was impossible to begin a march because the wet ammunition and muskets had to be checked and cleaned. The necessity to halt and clean the muskets lost precious time, the whole affair lasting from 2 AM to 5 PM. When Mexia finally marched and reached Tampico, the city’s commandant, Gregory Gomez Palomino, was preparedly waiting with three hundred men.⁵³

After skirmishing with the enemy and fighting in and out of fortified houses, Mexia ordered a retreat to the *Mary Jane* when on November 26, they made their escape to Texas.⁵⁴ Not all who served in the enterprise made it out with Mexia. Thirty-one men were abandoned, three died from wounds, and the remaining twenty-eight were executed on December 14, 1835.⁵⁵ The

impossible to carry out the expedition already planned in Mexico for Texas, in Filisola, *Memoirs of the History of the War in Texas*, vol. II, 86.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 44

⁵⁰ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 32; and Fisher, *Memorials of George Fisher*, 51.

⁵¹ Fisher, *Memorials of George Fisher*, 44.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 106.

execution of the prisoners and the following decree of the Minister of War and Navy Jose Maria Tornel sixteen days later set the tone for the Supreme Government's objectives and policy to combat the Texian revolt.

Anglo-American volunteers represented a significant portion of the Texian forces in the Revolution, and the war effort relied on aid from outside Texas. Companies of volunteers were recruited and furnished *in* the United States, often acquiring weaponry from state armories such as Alabama. In an account of expenses paid to the state of Alabama in 1836, Jack Shackelford, captain of the Red Rovers, recorded a payment of \$600.00 for fifty muskets and accouterments and amputation instruments and box medicine for \$30.00.⁵⁶ Accounts of this nature present one of the many contradictions regarding the partial involvement of Mexico's neighboring republic. But the repeated idea that the Texas founding emulated that of America solidified an obligation for many an adventurer. In mid-March 1836, as the Texas Constitutional Convention was forming a new government, the presiding officer, James Ellis, asked a great deal of the people of the United States and proclaimed:

Will you, brothers and friends, refuse to do so to us, as in the hour of your calamity was nobly done for you? And will you calmly witness the destruction of your kindred and the triumph of tyranny, and make no effort to save the one and arrest the other? It cannot – it will not be!!! The sainted spirit of Washington would rebuke your apathy, and could pain invade the beatitudes of Heaven, would mourn over the recollection of '76.⁵⁷

Regardless of "the spirit of Washington," the United States sought to prosecute individuals accused of recruiting soldiers to attack Mexico. New Orleans attorney William Christy, the chair of the same committee that styled itself as the "friends of Texas" that had been

⁵⁶ Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 431.

⁵⁷ James Ellis to the People of the United States, March 16, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. V, 89.

in contact with Mexia, was accused of violating the act of Congress of April 18, 1818. Christy was charged with violating the sixth section of the act, which clearly stated:

If any person shall, within the territory or jurisdiction of the United States, begin or set on foot, or provide or prepare the means for, any military expedition or enterprise, to be carried on from thence against the territory or dominions of any foreign prince or state, or of any colony or district or people with whom the United States are at peace, any person so offending shall be deemed guilty of a high misdemeanor, and shall be fined not exceeding three thousand dollars, and imprisoned not more than three years.⁵⁸

In February 1836, Christy was therefore called upon by the U. S. district attorney to answer the accusation before Associate Judge E. Rawle of the city court of New Orleans.⁵⁹

Representing himself, Christy emphasized the love he had for his own country and the cause of liberty. This veteran of the War of 1812 was just chairman of a committee for Texas only to receive donations for that province, not to recruit men.⁶⁰ Anyone who visited Christy's office and wished to enlist in the Texas Army was promptly reminded that he had no authority to accept such an application. The accused also clarified that he was unaware of Mexia's destination, only that it was "beyond Texas."⁶¹ Witnesses called to testify all said they had no knowledge that donations were used to fight against Mexico.⁶² As chairman of the committee, Christy was "very frequently called upon by persons wishing to immigrate," and that was all they were: immigrants, not soldiers.⁶³ If the men who traveled beyond Texas decided to act in a military capacity, Christy made it understood that if captured, they would be treated as rebels by the Mexican authorities.⁶⁴ During the five-day trial, no evidence showed, beyond a shadow of a

⁵⁸ William Christy, *Proceedings in the Case of the United States Versus William Christy* (New Orleans: Benjamin Levy, 1836), 4.

⁵⁹ Jenkins, *The papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. V, 14.

⁶⁰ Christy, *Proceedings in the Case of the United States Versus William Christy*, 13, 14.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23

doubt, that Christy was responsible for recruiting and funding the Tampico Expedition, however “long, close, and minute” the examination process was.⁶⁵

The United States v William Christy could have served better to halt volunteers from flowing into Texas. Christy sang quite another tune in March compared to the previous month before the court. In a series of letters to Governor Robinson, Christy pledged himself to the Texian cause:

Tis true that the part I have taken in favor of the cause of Texas, has been some what conspicuous, and has injured me Considerably in a pecuniary point of view; But in doing do I but indulge those predilections in favour of National Constitutional and Religious Liberty, which a Republican birth implanted in my nature, and which have been quickened into a lively and permanent Existence by proper discipline....⁶⁶

Christy continued his letter offering his services and proposed to send a two-hundred-man cavalry by the summer and asked Robinson if he could receive the authority from the Convention to raise such a force.⁶⁷ Christy also wished to have some discretionary power given to him by the Convention to hasten the expeditionary force, writing that “I am well satisfied that it will not do to depend upon the aid of scattered adventurers who may go among you in small numbers....”⁶⁸ Christy was interested in raising a large, organized, respectable force for Texas. Public opinion in the United States in mid-March, according to Christy, seemed to take a low turn when he informed Robinson that “the general impression now prevailing in the U. States that you are all more or less adventurers upon whom no reliance can be placed,” but in spite of what public opinion said, Christy was determined that his “last dollar shall go before Texas shall fall.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁶ William Christy to James W. Robinson, March 13, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. V, 63.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 66, 231.

Christy's enthusiastic attitude following the court case can be explained by the actions taken by the Texas Convention of 1836. In November 1835, Texas, as a provisional government, had not declared independence, nor was it in the process of creating a constitution for a sovereign republic. By the time Christy wrote to Robinson, independence had already been declared on March 2, 1836. So perhaps Christy did not recognize anything unlawful, for he was now dealing with what he believed to be an independent government that enjoyed the right to bestow authority. William Christy represents one of the many contradictions in the position of the people of the United States and their institutions. This position is rather gray and not at all black or white. There was also great subtlety on the Mexican side of the Revolution, theirs concerning the characteristics that constituted a lawful war.⁷⁰

Events like the Tampico Expedition, with invading adventurers, were recognized by Mexico's Supreme Government as "predatory expeditions" to plunder.⁷¹ The war in Texas was unjustly provoked by a "mob" of ungrateful colonists whom Santa Anna was convinced must be taught a severe lesson for crossing into the Mexican nation.⁷² While encamped at the Nueces River in February 1836, Santa Anna told his army they "are the men chosen to chastise these assassins...Mexicans, though naturally generous, will not suffer outrages with impunity – injurious and dishonorable to their country – let the perpetrators be whom they may."⁷³ The Texians, whose ranks consisted of Anglo-Americans and foreign soldiers of fortune, many of whom had only been in Texas for a few months, were conducting an informal and illegitimate war against a sovereign power.

⁷⁰ Emmerich Da Vattel, and Joseph Chitty, ed. *The Law of Nations, or Principles of the Laws of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns* (London: Law Booksellers and Publishers, 1834), 319.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁷² Santa Anna to the Mexican Army, February 17, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 373.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

The Mexican military, versed in the laws of warfare, saw this conflict as the “depredation of pirates.”⁷⁴ According to Emmerich Vattel’s *The Law of Nations, or the Principles of the laws of Nature, Applied to the conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns* (1758),⁷⁵ an informal war of this nature, undertaken without cause or right, was called “depredation,” and therefore, “a nation attacked by such sort of enemies is not under any obligation to observe towards them the rules prescribed in formal warfare...she may treat them as robbers.”⁷⁶ With this “loophole,” so to speak, Mexican officials found that the end justified the means, and they were well within their rights to execute the foreign robbers of their nation and exact just reparations. Soon after the executions of the prisoners of the failed Tampico Expedition, the Supreme Government released a brief circular on the enemy’s status in hostilities thereafter. The Tornel Decree of December 30, 1835, became a manifesto that served as a “criminal indictment and final sentence with no provision for appeals,” making it legal and just in Mexico to execute prisoners of war.⁷⁷ Well aware that public meetings were held “with the avowed purpose of arming expeditions against the Mexican nation,” the Supreme Government sought to provide the punishment deserved by the volunteers that were so obviously avoided and neglected in the United States:⁷⁸

Article I. All foreigners who may land in any port of the republic or who enter it armed and for the purpose of attacking our territory shall be treated and punished as pirates, since they are not subjects of any nation at war with the republic nor do they militate under any recognized flag.

Article II. Foreigners who introduce arms and munitions by land or by sea at any point of the territory now in rebellion against the government of the nation for the purpose of placing such supplies in the hands of its enemies shall be treated and punished likewise.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 320.

⁷⁵ Vattel’s work was edited and republished in 1834; it is speculated that copies were readily available to officials like Tornel. In *With Santa Anna in Texas*, de la Pena cites Vattel in an argument concerning blind obedience.

⁷⁶ Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 320.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 319; and Winders, ““This is a Cruel Truth, But I Cannot Omit it””, 424.

⁷⁸ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 55, 56.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

The Tornel Decree set the tone for the Texas Campaign of 1836, and Santa Anna carried out this no-quarter policy with a vengeance. Regardless of what may have been perceived as just for the Mexican Army, the executions during the campaign stirred an international uproar. For, as Vattel states, there are limits to having the right to kill in war, and the methods of achieving the just end should not be of “the odious kind;” therefore, “in a battle, quarter is to be given to those who lay down their arms....”⁸⁰ Nations should mutually conform to general rules, but if the enemy does not represent a recognized nation, the rules of warfare must somehow be subject to change. How the Mexican Republic sought to achieve these ends by seeking to expel all foreigners and make an example of the belligerent ones turned the Revolution into a murky condition and placed military officers in a profoundly conflicted situation.

The Texians saw the Mexican policy as a “war of extermination”⁸¹ because of the executions being carried out in a nearly automatic succession from one battle to the next. Here, the honor⁸² of the Mexican nation and the desire for immediate satisfaction superseded just warfare between civilized nations. While garrisoning Goliad, Fannin and his men knew at least partly the consequences of falling into enemy hands. Before Coletto, the disasters at San Patricio, Agua Dulce Creek, and Refugio impressed upon the Texians the dangerous game they played along the coastal prairies.

On February 27, Colonel Francis W. Johnson was south of Goliad at San Patricio with thirty-four men when General Urrea, sweeping up the coast, caught them unawares.⁸³ Urrea overwhelmed the small force and took command of the town, Johnson having escaped by a slim

⁸⁰ Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 347, 348.

⁸¹ From George Fisher and John S. Brooks to James W. Fannin and David G. Burnet, the phrase “war of extermination” was often repeated among the Texians.

⁸² Ideas of honor, “confused and indefinite as they are,” in Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 358.

⁸³ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 158.

margin. Johnson and a few other escapees trickled into the town of Refugio on the evening of the next day.⁸⁴ Eighteen Texians from the engagement at San Patricio were taken prisoner and executed, but not after Urrea attempted to spare them that fate by communicating with his commanding officer. Santa Anna responded and said that Urrea “must not fail to bear in mind the circular,” to which it remained clear that “an example is necessary, in order that those adventurers may be duly warned, and the nation be delivered from the ills she is daily doomed to suffer.”⁸⁵ For Urrea, it would be challenging to keep potential prisoners alive.

Soon after San Patricio, on March 2, Dr. James Grant and his mounted men fell into a trap set by Urrea near Agua Dulce Creek, twenty miles south of San Patricio.⁸⁶ Grant had been dismounted and brutally lanced to death by the end of the fighting. A known landowner in Coahuila, Grant was more valuable to Urrea alive. According to de la Pena, Urrea recognized this advantage, but Grant’s “flashy firearms and other valuable jewels” became the target of officers who “shamefully murdered him.”⁸⁷

The third successive blow to the Texians from Urrea’s movements was the Battle of Refugio. On March 10, Fannin sent Captain Amon B. King of the Kentucky Company to Refugio to evacuate American settlers in anticipation of Urrea’s arrival.⁸⁸ By March 12, King was engaged with Urrea’s cavalry at Refugio, of which the latter forced King to take refuge inside the Mission Nuestra Senora del Rosario.⁸⁹ With reinforcement from Goliad, King managed to send the surrounding Mexicans into a retreat but proceeded to split his command and search for Mexican spies who were rumored to be operating in the surrounding *rancheros*.⁹⁰ In

⁸⁴ Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 445.

⁸⁵ Santa Anna to Jose Urrea, March 3, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 501.

⁸⁶ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 159.

⁸⁷ De la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 69.

⁸⁸ Grimes, *Goliad*, 52; and Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 164.

⁸⁹ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 164.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

blundering to search for spies, King and his men were captured and taken back to the mission to be executed on March 15.

Reporting on the executions to Santa Anna the following day, Urrea wrote that King and thirty-one others surrendered. The general “authorized the execution, after my departure from camp, of thirty adventurers taken prisoner during the previous engagements, setting free those who were colonists or Mexicans.”⁹¹ A volunteer *and* colonist who survived, Lewis Ayers, recalled his experience at Refugio when Urrea made exceptions for his safety. Ayers, whose life was spared on account of his wife, left Refugio with his liberty, “after receiving a severe lecture on account of my hostility to Mexico and charging me to behave myself better in the future and let politics alone – I merely bowed and said nothing.”⁹²

The odd account of Lewis Ayers, who received a firm chastisement from who may have been Urrea himself, is plausible, not only because of Urrea’s feelings and uneasy application of the Tornel Decree but those of his officers. Ayers was also a colonist accompanied by his family, and in the correspondence with Santa Anna, Urrea mentions his granting liberty to colonists and Mexicans. Texians deemed innocent and unarmed had nothing to fear. To the citizens of Bexar on March 7, the day after the fall of the Alamo, Santa Anna declared that “it became necessary to check and chastise such daring...These ungrateful men must also necessarily suffer the just punishment that the laws and the public vengeance demand.”⁹³ Those who were innocent, their persons would be respected. It was a far cry from a war of extermination, but these were fearful and brutal methods of conducting a “just” war, nonetheless.

⁹¹ Grimes, *Goliad*, 75. Between sources, the numbers are somewhere around 30 and 31.

⁹² Grimes, *Goliad*, 68. Ayers’ wife and young children were with him at Refugio, among the colonist families that needed a safe escort.

⁹³ Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. V, 21.

Urrea received heavy criticism for his actions at Refugio, killing Anglo-American prisoners but letting colonists and Mexicans go free.⁹⁴ General Vicente Filisola provides a perspective on Urrea's conduct and the exceptionality of the war in his memoirs. The Supreme Government decreed the measures taken against all adventurers from the United States or elsewhere who were "profaning the territory by shedding Mexican blood...who were fighting without a banner."⁹⁵ Filisola emphasizes that the Texians were reckless adventurers and robbers, as many Mexican officials agreed. The pirates were there to steal Mexico's national territory, and Filisola separates the conflict from the larger civil war occurring in Mexico at the time and concludes the just nature of the Tornel Decree:

The war in Texas was exceptional; it was not a civil war; nor was it a war of one nation against another. In it the thief was fighting against the owner, the murderer against the benefactor, and nothing was more natural than that these hordes of assassins⁹⁶ and thieves should be done away with. There is no reason then to place blame upon General Urrea, as there is none to blame the government which had issued just such provisions.⁹⁷

Jose Maria Tornel, like Filisola, made a distinct separation of the Texas Revolution from the larger federalist and civil unrest in Mexico. It was an international conflict born of vicious U. S. expansionism.⁹⁸ In *Relations Between Texas, the United States of America, and the Mexican Republic* (1837),⁹⁹ Tornel offers a stinging rebuke of the ideology of expansion held by the United States and the volunteers who poured into Texas from that republic. In providing a broad and quite overstretched scope of context to Mexican ills, Tornel asserts that Mexico's neighbor was guilty of practicing a "ruthless policy of expansion."¹⁰⁰ In the revolutionary cauldron that

⁹⁴ Filisola, *Memoirs of the History of the War in Texas*, vol. II, 198.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ The Texians were often labeled "assassins" by Mexican commanders. Indeed, many on both sides sang the same tune such as "war of extermination," "adventurers," etc.

⁹⁷ Filisola, *Memoirs of the History of the War in Texas*, vol. II, 198.

⁹⁸ Will Fowler, *Tornel and Santa Anna: The Writer and Caudillo, Mexico 1795-1853* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 161.

⁹⁹ This work is found in *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*.

¹⁰⁰ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 290.

began to spill into Latin America in the early nineteenth century, the United States saw only ample opportunity. It became a vital interest “to encourage by their example, their counsel, and their material help the insurrection of Spanish America.”¹⁰¹

The United States, therefore, set itself up as a beacon of liberty but also as a predator after new governments’ weaknesses. According to the condemning minister, “egoism is an inseparable vice of the genius of the Anglo-Saxon race. If they proclaim or sustain the august rights of liberty and independence, it is not because of the noble sympathy felt for a just and sacred cause; rather it is out of regard for their interests, it is their own improvement which they seek with indefatigable zeal.”¹⁰² The Anglo-Americans, being absorbed into the Texian cause, held the same “concealed policy of conquest” as their mother country. Tornel argues that the Tampico Expedition was “really but a phase of the history of the Texas Campaign,” and the expedition’s outcome became a significant turning point on how the Texians were seen under Mexican law for the duration of the war:¹⁰³

Where is the Mexican who does not feel his blood boil at the injustice of this expedition, organized in the port of a nation that calls herself our friend, for the avowed purpose of assassinating our countrymen, violating their rights, and upsetting public order? If there are laws in the United States prohibiting such expeditions, it was a perfidy not to have enforced them. If such laws do not exist, that country is one of the most dangerous on the face of the globe, for no nation can feel safe against which the executive of that country has no power to prevent or condemn.¹⁰⁴

The December circular was part of Mexico conducting a lawful war, however irregular it was to other nations. The Supreme Government precisely determined who its enemies were,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 295.

¹⁰² Ibid., 295, 296. Jackie L. Pruett and Everett B. Cole argue that on the other side of the war, “the Mexican officials, with their cultural background derived from Spain, and thence from the old West Gothic and Arabian civilizations, found it virtually impossible to sympathize with, or even to understand the attitudes, beliefs and habits of the independent descendants of American pioneers,” in Pruett and Cole, *The Goliad Massacre*, 4. Among both primary and secondary sources, there are inquiries and analyses of ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the kind, which is a necessary aspect of understanding the events and the scholarship, but still, only one aspect of a complex event.

¹⁰³ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 344.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 345.

foreign invaders and soldiers of fortune.¹⁰⁵ What was an internal crisis, Tornel successfully turned into an international struggle and a “patriotic crusade.”¹⁰⁶ Tornel was focused with incredible energy on Mexico’s national integrity and sovereignty over its frontier. Within the context of the Revolution as an international conflict, rogue volunteers from the United States, armed not only with rifles and cannons but a conjured and shaky representation of the revolutionary spirit of their forefathers, were invaders whose ambition must be checked, no matter how harsh. Thus, the Tornel Decree was embraced among Mexican officials in congress and the military as legal *and* just.¹⁰⁷

While campaigning, Santa Anna saw himself as a magistrate to uphold the law. The sanctioned deaths of Fannin’s command were no exception because, as Santa Anna put it bluntly, “law commands, and the magistrate has no power to mitigate its rigor...The prisoners at Goliad were condemned by law, by a universal law, that of personal defense, enjoyed by all nations and all individuals.”¹⁰⁸ The commander-in-chief was in no position to “divert the sword of justice” and posed the question to the skeptic reader that would not the worst outcome of such a situation be to “impute the crime to the dagger and not to the hand that wields it?”¹⁰⁹ Santa Anna never “soiled victory with murder,” and only acted in the interest of Mexico’s sacred rights and integrity as a sovereign republic.¹¹⁰ For their part, however, the survivors of the executions at Goliad, which dissolved into a bloody massacre, told another story of treachery and murderous intent.

¹⁰⁵ Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 321.

¹⁰⁶ Fowler, *Tornel and Santa Anna*, 155.

¹⁰⁷ Winders, “This is a Cruel Truth, But I Cannot Omit it,” 422.

¹⁰⁸ Castaneda, *The Mexican Side of the Texas Revolution*, 18.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

The Mexican victory at Coleto gave General Urrea the largest contingent of enemy prisoners, a huge military blow to the Texian cause because of the large number captured at once. The Texian force that would fight at San Jacinto had yet to be formed. On March 20, the day of the surrender, Urrea continued his march toward Victoria, occupying it the following day, while the Coleto prisoners were taken back to Goliad. The Texians believed that upon the earliest, they would gain passage to New Orleans and be paroled.¹¹¹ Until then, La Bahia, what was once Fannin's prized fortress, was now a prison.¹¹² The conditions during the Texians' week in captivity were harsh. Ehrenberg witnessed how the Spanish mission was tightly packed, "one man next to another, that only a fourth of us at the most was able to squeeze together in order to sit down."¹¹³ Surgeons like Barnard found themselves deprived of medical equipment, believing it had been stolen. Joseph E. Field desired a more sanitary environment to see to the wounded, noting that in the mission, "our only resting place was the bare ground, offensive with filth; Mexican churches being without floors, or any marks of cleanliness."¹¹⁴ It is to be noted that Goliad was torched on Fannin's retreat on the 19th, which would also give account to the poor conditions for the wounded.

During their captivity, the Texians still believed their capitulation should be honored. Given their poor treatment, many, including the surgeons, insisted the Mexicans adhere to the terms of surrender in order to provide adequate service to both Mexican and Texian wounded. Barnard wrote that "Colonel Fannin, at my request, addressed a note to the Mexican commandant, in which he claimed sundry instruments and other articles, not only as private

¹¹¹ Account of Joseph Barnard, in Haas, *Massacre*, 139.

¹¹² Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 298.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 300.

¹¹⁴ Account of Joseph E. Field, in Haas, *Massacre*, 31, 32, and 140.

property according to the articles of capitulation, but from the necessity of the surgeons....”¹¹⁵

Fannin’s men, it seemed, believed they had come to an honorable capitulation to the very end.¹¹⁶

The prisoners at Goliad were from places other than the plain of Perdido. Urrea had pursued Colonel William Ward from Victoria. Near Dimmit’s Landing, the general accepted the surrender of Ward and one hundred men at discretion. Also caught by Urrea were Colonel William P. Miller and his battalion of volunteers who landed at Copano Bay from New York.¹¹⁷ On March 23, Fannin was brought from Goliad with Holzinger to get Miller to surrender. On the 24th, Miller and his volunteers entered Goliad. Since they surrendered to Urrea while unarmed, their lives were spared on Palm Sunday, March 27.¹¹⁸

The Battle of Coleto marked the antithesis of the frontier ideal. The Goliad Massacre, therefore, engraved the antithesis of the ideal. Through the massacre was the fall of the noble, isolated, small “r” republican frontiersman. The Texian prisoners, being soldiers, had their lives cut short and could not live a fulfilling life on the frontier. Ehrenberg described the romantic ideal:

These men still did not know the exhilarating life that the prairie, teeming with game, offers those who roam and hunt there all through the year the way the red-skinned Comanche does. The frontiersman (ranger) in his splendid frontier attire, has no worries about a house, food, or even clothes. Everywhere he finds an abundance of food, and the few other little things he needs to get from the regions of civilization he obtains in trade for the game he kills with his rifle. He is happy just to roam across the magnificent western territory. He visits the settlements only infrequently. But when election day comes, when the highest-ranking government official is elected, then the ranger is right there among the other citizens of the nation to cast his vote for the good of his country.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Account of Joseph Barnard, in Haas, *Massacre*, 141.

¹¹⁶ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 306.

¹¹⁷ On enforcing the Tornel Decree, Miller’s men were an exception to the rule, showing how Mexican officials “attempted to conform to its wording, the application of which meant some prisoners avoided death sentence.” The Texians captured at Copano were unarmed and therefore, it justified keeping them alive on March 27, in Winders, ““This is Our Cruel Truth, But I Cannot Omit It,”” 433.

¹¹⁸ The water was shallow in Copano bay, and “they had gotten into boats to reach the land yet half a mile away and had left their rifles behind,” in Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 305.

¹¹⁹ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 280.

Republican virtue also disadvantaged the Texians, for every decision was made democratically, yielding to the majority. This gullible characteristic led the volunteers to sign a capitulation at Coleto, so thought Ehrenburg, who wrote that “we paced back and forth in camp and cast angry looks at Fannin and the others who had voted for the surrender.”¹²⁰ Through their captivity, the Texians felt only “shame and dejection” at the predicament, a different feeling than what was projected on the men who died at the Alamo.¹²¹

On March 27, Fannin and his command were executed by order of Santa Anna and the Supreme Government of Mexico.¹²² Historian Roy Grimes stoically described the ominousness of the day, “now the direst of prophecies must come to pass. Now the hour struck when all the brave young men must fall – fall before the fearful slugs of smooth-bore Mexican *scopetas*, the thrust of Mexican bayonets, the slash of Mexican sabers.”¹²³ The executions degenerated into a disorganized mass killing that sealed the idea of “Mexican treachery.” Not only does the circumstances of Fannin’s surrender tell a different, more nuanced story disproving Mexican treachery, but so does the predicament where Colonel Jose Nicolas de la Portilla found himself as the commandant of Goliad.

Portilla received two conflicting orders, one from Santa Anna and the other from Urrea. At nightfall of the 26th, a dispatch arrived for Portilla from the commander-in-chief,¹²⁴ reiterating the treatment of foreign pirates. Santa Anna expressly stated to the commandant, “I have been

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 281.

¹²² The massacre was regarded with international horror, but it was “not without its illustrious examples” of cruelty in war. Waddy Thompson reminds his readers of the slaughter of Turkish prisoners at Jaffa, the Battle of River Raisin, and Fort Meigs. On the shooting of Texians, “if the law was a sanguinary one, that the odium should attach to this legislature which passed it, and not to the military commander who obeyed and executed it,” in Waddy Thompson, *Recollections of Mexico* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 70, 71.

¹²³ Grimes, *Goliad*, 123.

¹²⁴ The same was sent first to Urrea, and both dispatches included a transcribed copy of the Tornel Decree: Santa Anna to Jose Urrea, March 23, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. V, 175.

surprised that the circular of the said supreme government has not been fully complied with in this particular.”¹²⁵ Portilla was promptly ordered to execute the prisoners. However, later that same evening, the colonel received word from Urrea, who said that the prisoners should be treated with consideration and to have them employed in repairing the town’s ruins. Portilla wrote that night, “how cruel is my state of uncertainty; my mind vacillates between these conflicting orders; I pass the whole night restless and uneasy in mind.”¹²⁶ With a stern grasp of the military hierarchy, Portilla was compelled to follow the orders of the higher-ranking officer, Santa Anna.¹²⁷ After the massacre, Portilla wrote to Urrea and voiced his intense agony at playing a part in such a demeaning action:

I feel much distressed at what has occurred here; a scene enacted in cold blood having passed before my eyes which has filled me with horror...I am perfectly willing to do anything, save and excepting the work of a public executioner by receiving orders to put more persons to death. And yet, being but a subordinate officer, it is my duty to do what is commanded me, even though repugnant to my feelings.¹²⁸

In his correspondence, it was Portilla’s desire not to receive an order again because of how it would cast his character. De la Pena later wrote in his military diary that Portilla was all too eager to oblige the order and said that the commandant “committed a crime against humanity...He could have won honorable renown had he refused to serve as an executioner, but since he felt it his duty to carry out such a painful office, he could have and should have done it in a less cruel fashion.”¹²⁹ Portilla’s letters, however, reveal that he was not acting in blind obedience but struggled deeply and ultimately chose his course, the only one that he believed was sufficient.

¹²⁵ Grimes, *Goliad*, 119.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹²⁷ Portilla wrote to Urrea on the 26th that “in compliance with the definitive orders of his excellency the general-in-chief,” the prisoners were to be shot early morning, March 27, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. V, 175.

¹²⁸ Jose Nicolas de la Portilla to Jose Urrea, March 27, 1836, in *Ibid.*, 209.

¹²⁹ De la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 91.

Other Mexican officers were troubled by the executions, and one man wrote to his wife saying, “this day, Palm Sunday, March 27, has been to me a season of heartfelt sorrow. At six in the morning the execution of 412 American prisoners was commenced and continued until eight, when the last of the number was shot.”¹³⁰ Some officers, as was the case in situations such as these, tried as individuals to ensure the safety of prisoners. Colonel Francisco Garay was the only other at Goliad to know of Santa Anna’s order to Portilla, for the latter relayed the message to him. Garay took initiative to save both Barnard and Shackelford. Now this could have been for the sole reason the Mexicans desperately needed surgeons. Still, the two Texians were effectively hidden from the execution in Garay’s quarters near where Miller’s company from Copano was camped.¹³¹ The surgeons were instructed to stay where they were, inside the tent, to wait for Garay’s return. Upon hearing volley fire from a distance, Barnard and Shackelford rose in concern and, through the trees, partially saw “several of the prisoners running at the utmost speed, and, directly after, some Mexican soldiers in pursuit of them.”¹³²

Barnard related a particularly touching moment of their time in captivity, of how he saw Shackelford's reaction to the sounds in the distance after Garay returned and informed them of the order carried out. Barnard wrote, “Dr. Shackelford, who sat by my side, suffered perhaps the keenest anguish that the human heart can feel” for his son and two nephews, along with “the young men of the first families in his own neighborhood,” all perished.¹³³ Shackelford remembered the dark day, “never whilst the current of life rushes through this poor heart of mine can I forget the horrors of this fatal morning.”¹³⁴ With Jimmy L. Bryan’s “reckless generation”

¹³⁰ This letter is anonymous but could have been Portilla, Francisco Garay, or Urrea, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. V, 213.

¹³¹ Garay’s tent was situated in a peach orchard near La Bahia, in Barnard’s account, Haas, *Massacre*, 143.

¹³² Account of Joseph Barnard, in Haas, *Massacre*, 144.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Account of Jack Shackelford, in Haas, *Massacre*, 83.

thesis in mind, this is perhaps a tragic example of volunteers from the United States and of men from the same town who, in a reckless gesture to uphold high ideals, became the victims of a massacre instead of fighting to glory. There were, however, survivors of the Mexican volleys who escaped into the surrounding woods or jumped into the San Antonio River as the executions lost all order.

On the morning of the infamous order, the Texian prisoners still believed, as they were awakened and marched in three separate divisions from the fort, that all were on the way to be paroled to their mother country. Ehrenberg recounted that “we were filled with suspense as we looked forward to the news, hoping bravely, in keeping with the terms of capitulation,” believing their march was headed to Matamoros to embark from there.¹³⁵ “Finally, we would sail up the mighty Mississippi, the father of waters of North America,” wrote the German, and on to “the city that with joyful enthusiasm we had just left seven months before.”¹³⁶ The prisoners grew curious when the direction of their march was on the road to Victoria instead to a port like Matamoros or Copano. The focus of the march, together with the overwhelming silence of the Mexicans, “was like a heavy weight on each man’s chest.”¹³⁷ Dillard Cooper gave his account of the grim realization among the Texians that their march to parole had become a death march.

Cooper and his comrades were marching half a mile from La Bahia when a Mexican officer commanded a halt and asked if any Texians understood Spanish. It was at this time, Cooper said, “there began to dawn upon the minds of us, the truth, that we were to be butchered, and that, I suppose, was the reason that none answered.”¹³⁸ The Mexican soldiers filed to one side, facing the prisoners, and the crack of musket fire resounded. John C. Duval, while standing

¹³⁵ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 319.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 319, 320.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹³⁸ Account of Dillard Cooper, in Haas, *Massacre*, 116.

in his division, heard the fire taken upon the others. Duval wrote that “someone near me exclaimed, ‘Boys! They are going to shoot us!’ and at the same instant I heard the clicking of musket locks all along the Mexican line.”¹³⁹ As the infantry continued their fire, any unfortunate man who made for the nearby river or the cover of timber was bayoneted or stabbed to death by knives.¹⁴⁰ Texians, including Ehrenberg, Cooper, and Duval were fortunate enough to escape, at times having to flee and hide from pursuing infantry and cavalry. Duval described his own near-death experience from a bayonet thrust:

As he drew his musket back to make a lunge at me, one of our men coming from another direction, ran between us, and the bayonet was driven through his body. The blow was given with such force that, in falling, the man probably wrenched or twisted the bayonet in such a way as to prevent the Mexican from withdrawing it immediately. I saw him put his foot upon the man, and make an ineffectual attempt to extricate the bayonet from his body. One look satisfied me, as I was somewhat in a hurry just then, and I hastened to the bank of the river and plunged in.¹⁴¹

There are numerous accounts that describe such carnage and terror at the sight of dead and dying companions. Over twenty Texians escaped the massacre, while upwards of four hundred were killed.¹⁴² The wounded inside the fort were dragged out of the mission and shot, in short order. The deaths of the wounded Brooks and Fannin were told in several accounts in compelling ways. The death of Brooks presented an example of the adventurer whose fate was tied to the Texian cause only to become a martyr of sorts for the ideals of liberty and courage. “My life has indeed, been a wayward and useless one,” Brooks wrote to his sister in early March, but he found his purpose and was acting in the sphere that nature intended.¹⁴³ Brooks believed

¹³⁹ Account of John C. Duval, in Haas, *Massacre*, 172.

¹⁴⁰ Hardin, *Texian Iliad*, 173.

¹⁴¹ Account of John C. Duval, in Haas, *Massacre*, 172.

¹⁴² Davenport, “The Men of Goliad,” 37. The numbers that escaped do not include the men spared as surgeons, hospital orderlies, etc.

¹⁴³ John S. Brooks to Mary Ann Brooks, March 4, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 507.

himself a soldier of destiny, “and all the premonitions of my child hood early told me that I should be one...It is the only pursuit in which I could feel a throb of interest...”¹⁴⁴

Brooks belonged to what Harbert Davenports calls “that remarkable band of young knight-errants who were Colonel Fannin’s men...”¹⁴⁵ The wayward young man was an example of the “adventurous persona,” and made quite an impression on Barnard and Field.¹⁴⁶ The two survivors wrote to Brook’s family, praising his conduct, saying that at Coletto, Brooks fought “in the most cool and chivalrous manner,” and inquiring on the wound received from that engagement, he “spoke of death with perfect composure.”¹⁴⁷ Brooks was taken outside the makeshift hospital on the 27th, lifted from his cot, and shot; his body was stripped and thrown onto a ravine by the road.¹⁴⁸ Fannin was also executed, but in such a way that survivors remembered the event, whether or not they witnessed it, with vivid mortification.

As the prisoners had been shot outside La Bahia, their wounded commander, who had a room for his own use in the mission, was brought forth to the northwest corner of the fort. Joseph Spohn, an interpreter and survivor at Goliad, offered a detailed witness account of Fannin’s death. Spohn served as interpreter for the execution, repeating the words of a Mexican officer back to Fannin, “that for having come with an armed band to commit depredations and revolutionize Texas, the Mexican Government were about to chastise him.”¹⁴⁹ On this news, Fannin asked his executioner that he not be shot in the head and that he be given a proper burial while offering a fine gold watch to be given to the commandant. Along with his watch, Fannin also handed the officer a coin purse and a silk handkerchief, believing that his wishes would be

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Davenport, “The Men of Goliad,” 1.

¹⁴⁶ Bryan, *The American Elsewhere*, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Jack Shackelford to Norborne C. Brooks, August 5, 1836, and Joseph E. Field to Absalom H. Brooks, October 7, 1836, in Grimes, *Goliad*, 143, 144.

¹⁴⁸ Grimes, *Goliad*, 130.

¹⁴⁹ Account of Joseph Spohn, in Haas, *Massacre*, 44.

honored and the trinkets presented to Portilla. The opposite was the case however, and once Fannin was blindfolded and sat in a chair, the unfortunate colonel was shot in the head, “and from thence rolled into a dry ditch, about three feet deep.”¹⁵⁰

De la Pena gave his opinion of Fannin’s death, shocked by the depravity of the officer who oversaw the execution—by denying Fannin his last dying requests, Don Carlino Huerta, captain of Tres Villas, added to the crime a further vileness when he kept Fannin’s treasures for himself.¹⁵¹ Ehrenburg did not witness Fannin’s execution, for he had fled from the volleys outside the fort but recounted from other sources the event, infused with dramatic flair. Ehrenberg portrayed his commanding officer as having tears of deep anguish, but “the tears streaming down his cheeks were the bitter tears of remorse and compassion...he approached his executioners with firm resolve,” and once Fannin wished the shot to pierce his body, he was blindfolded, “a few moments later, as the smoke was clearing, the colonel lay on the ground with a shattered skull. The drama was over.”¹⁵²

The prisoners killed at Goliad did not receive a proper burial until June 1836. In a funeral oration on June 4, General Thomas J. Rusk paid his respects to the “remains of the noble and heroic band who, battling for their sacred rights, have fallen beneath the ruthless hand of a tyrant...Their murderers sank into death on the prairies of San Jacinto under the appalling cries: ‘Remember La Bahia!’”¹⁵³ Rusk continued his speech by proclaiming, “while liberty has a habitation and a name their tragic fate will be handed down to remotest posterity on the brightest pages of history.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 45. In Shackelford’s account, Major Miller informed the surgeon that he later “saw Fannin lying in the prairie among a heap of wounded, and that he was shot in the *head!*”

¹⁵¹ De la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 89. As far as the English copy of the surrender was concerned, it must have been consumed by the flames along with the body of Fannin among the pile of the other fallen Texians.

¹⁵² Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 335.

¹⁵³ Grimes, *Goliad*, 147.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Through the words of Texian leaders like Rusk, what came out of the events of Coleto and Goliad was a sacred Texian tale, with a mythical nature, relying on a chivalrous revolutionary spirit. However significant these events were, they were overshadowed by the sacrificial altar of the Alamo. By incorporating the frontier's literal, often grey realities into a dream space, the Texas mystique emerged to create a Texan identity that held popular imagination.¹⁵⁵ Turning from the critical history of Coleto to popular culture and mythmaking, significant works led a particular narrative. They left the critical aspects of the Revolution behind.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Christensen, "The 'Wild West:' The Life and Death of a Myth," *Southwest Review* 93, no. 3 (2008), 310.

Chapter III: “The Silvery Sounds of Distant Trumpets”

Harbert Davenport called the Texians of Coleto remarkable young knight-errants.

Davenport was not the first to call Fannin’s command a gallant band and to give them fantastical treatment. The sacred tales of the Texas Revolution had already been ingrained into the Texan and American consciousness, for popular culture was infused into the early scholarship of the Revolution, where American myth abounded. The adventurous persona of the Texians in the early nineteenth century expanded into one of the knightly republicans who went forth with a banner of liberty and a providential obligation to spread ideals to a dark frontier. The Texians of 1836 became what Jimmy L. Bryan calls the “American archetypes of manhood and nationhood.”¹ One of the many archetypes of this kind was John S. Brooks, whose letters serve as a “poignant relic” of events surrounding the battle at Coleto.²

The letters of Brooks reveal an adventurism that many a volunteer adopted in Texas.³ The cavalier Virginian wrote to his family about the deteriorating situation at San Antonio in February 1836, writing, “we hope that The God of Battles will be with us – that victory will again perch on the bright little banner of Texian liberty... that the young lion will arise in the majesty of his untried strength and our youthful Republic make herself worthy of the high destiny at which she aims.”⁴ Joseph Luther and Mike Cox in *The Odyssey of Texas Ranger James Callahan* (2017), provide an explanation for the intention behind these volunteer citizen-soldiers, stating that, “if the truth be known, many of these volunteers went to war to find

¹ Bryan, *The American Elsewhere*, 15.

² Grimes, *Goliad*, 26.

³ Barnard wrote that he was in the highest of spirits on the journey to Goliad in February 1835 when he anticipated the “opening of new scenes of adventure, the excitement of the enterprise, and the novelty of the scenery,” in Huson, *Dr. J. H. Barnard’s Journal*, 7. Even de la Pena’s descriptions of the scenery, and his experiences in Texas in general, sound as if they came from a side quest within Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. See de la Pena, *With Santa Anna in Texas*, 34, 35, and 167, 168.

⁴ John S. Brooks to Mary Ann Brooks, February 25, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 425.

themselves.”⁵ By looking at the letters of the Texians, it is clear that many a young man was in pursuit of who he was and whom he would become. Brooks reflected on his situation in what he believed was in its proper context, stating, “I am a soldier both morally and physically. Death is one of the chances of the game I play, and if it falls to my lot, I shall not murmur....”⁶ Roy Grimes critiques the embrace of the “chances of the game” from the Texian knight who clung to dreams of glory:

...they wanted to joust with at least one windmill⁷ before they accepted the life or death necessity of retreat...young men, in the main, many of them from families of substance in the states of the Deep South,⁸ too many of them unaccustomed to discipline, unwilling to give up their Sir Walter Scott quest for adventure to meet the demands of rigid military obedience. Fannin humored them with councils of war and an apparent deference to majority opinion which was his own and their undoing.⁹

Regardless, in Brooks, one might find the tragic hero, a figure who found himself torn by his waywardness, especially with the mysterious silence from family members.

In a passionate inquiry into the silence of his sister, Brooks questioned whether fraternal bonds should be dissolved because of war but admitted that he was a wayward brother. Brooks never forgot the place of his birth with its abounding liberties or the love of familial ties. Such thoughts kept the young adventurer from “deeper recklessness.”¹⁰ However careless or misguided young men like Brooks were, their courage was without question, and they were anything but cowardly. Brooks, with his enthusiasm, stood as a symbol designating the frontier personality. But the actions of the Texians at Coletto were drowned out in the Texas mystique by the more noteworthy frontier personalities inside the Alamo.

⁵ Joseph Luther and Mike Cox, *The Odyssey of Texas Ranger James Callahan* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing Inc., 2017), 13.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ A reference to *Don Quixote*, when the crazed, reckless, self-styled knight of La Mancha fought with windmills, believing the structures to be living giants.

⁸ A strong sense of national honor and chivalry in this region of the United States.

⁹ Clarence Wharton, *Remember Goliad!* (Glorieta: The Rio Grande Press, Inc., 1968), x.

¹⁰ John S. Brooks to Mary Ann Brooks, March 4, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 507, 508.

The term “myth” no longer pertains solely to mythology, such as that of antiquity. Mody C. Boatright asserts that myth-making is not just a characteristic of the primitive mind of ancient cultures but continues even today and was certainly the case in the 1830s.¹¹ Myths from the Revolution have been warmly revered and were associated with the values of the believers, such as liberty, and as Boatright states, “the more these values are threatened, the more vigorously will the myth be defended.”¹² The foundations of myths are not always values or even literary forms, but some symbols that serve as the bedrock can be personalities. The famed David Crockett was the Texas revolutionary myth personified. The frontier personality of Crockett played a heavy role in the creation of the Texian identity. Individual heroes, according to Benjamin A. Botkin, are “the most potent folk symbols,” and even before the Alamo, Crockett was a man from that “American elsewhere,” and a vision of what American strength embodied.¹³

In his article, “To the People of Texas & All Americans in the World” (1988), Michael R. Green argues that the siege of the Alamo was the single event in the history of the Southwest to capture the popular imagination of the United States.¹⁴ The men who gained immortality in national memory were like Crockett, William B. Travis, and others who became irrepressible adventurers by their actions. According to Green, they were more so “men being naïve victims of ‘Sir Walter Scott’s Disease’ – a preoccupation with romance and chivalry,” but regardless of later criticisms, they made a major impact on the American consciousness.¹⁵

The Alamo, much like Coleto, was a substantial Texian defeat. But tales like Travis’ mythical line in the sand and Crockett’s last stand at the battle’s end, all in a strange fantastical

¹¹ Mody C. Boatright, “On the Nature of Myth,” *Southwest Review* 39, no. 2 (1954), 131.

¹² *Ibid.*, 132.

¹³ Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore*, 2.

¹⁴ Michael Robert Green, ““To the People of Texas & All Americans in the World,”” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (1988), 483.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 484.

sense, outshined Fannin's last stand on the lone prairie. Travis' own talent with the pen helped to create the Alamo legend. In a plea for aid to any Texian or American who would answer the call, Travis declared, "*I shall never surrender or retreat. Then I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all dispatch.*"¹⁶ If Travis received not a reply, then out of necessity, all within the Alamo would die like soldiers with their honor intact. Crockett literally went down swinging among a horde of Mexicans, or so the legend has been told, until the translation of *With Santa Anna in Texas*.

The situation inside the Alamo and the bold and bloody outcome of the event was fertile ground for legendary appeal. Fannin, nonetheless, enshrined among the heroes of the Revolution, surrendered to outnumbered Mexican forces, the terms of which have become a controversy of the Goliad Campaign. Inside the Alamo, the proposal to surrender was answered with a cannon shot from within. Santa Anna himself conducted the siege of the mission and saw to the destruction of all the combatants. Every myth requires a Caliban, a monster standing in the way of progress, and that resistance was personified in the man, Santa Anna.¹⁷ Urrea, often pulled by the unwillingness to execute prisoners, did not fit the mold of the villain in this story.

In "The 'Wild West: The Life and Death of a Myth" (2008), Paul Christensen offers an explanation that can be applied to why the memory of Coleto was lost, explaining, "why some narratives get elevated to the role of myth over others remains something of a mystery in their dispersion, their great appeal to people who demand some core of belief in which to identify themselves..."¹⁸ The Alamo stands as a coherent story that exhibits that even when all was lost,

¹⁶ William B. Travis to the Public, February 24, 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol. IV, 423.

¹⁷ Caliban is the dark creature of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a backward monster that ironically felt quite misunderstood. Christensen, "The 'Wild West,'" 311.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 310.

there was a victory in death, as martyrs on an altar of republican virtue and liberty, ideals that, through the changing narrative, have been oversimplified. In “The Mythmakers of American History” (1968), Thomas A. Bailey states, “historical myths and legends are needful in establishing national identity and stimulating patriotic pride.”¹⁹

The Alamo is the story of the Texan identity and a new collective self in the Southwest, bursting outward away from Mexican tyranny.²⁰ In the myth, it was Crockett, not Fannin or Ehrenberg or Brooks, that was swinging away with his spent musket as the quintessential soldier from necessity.²¹ As Christensen puts it, “behind all such heroes was the uninterrupted rise of America’s fortunes, which sanctioned and validated the successful struggle of the lone individual out on the raw edge,” thus fulfilling the frontier ideal and leaving the men of Coletto shrouded in collective memory. With spartan valor, the Texians of the Alamo fought in what, according to popular culture, became their Thermopylae.

The “Thermopylae phrase” so often interlocked with the Alamo, in the words of Frank Dobie, “pulses power to make men defend liberty and fight like tigers against tyrants.”²² The phrase, “Thermopylae had her messengers of defeat – the Alamo had none,” is one of the mythmakers of the Revolution. Thermopylae, the ancient battle, and the comparison with Texian resolve connotated the idea that rather than surrender, the adventurers would rather die fighting in combat than give an inch to the enemy. The Alamo became a symbol of the great last stands of

¹⁹ Thomas A. Bailey, “The Mythmakers of American History,” *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 1 (1968), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 311.

²¹ The face of the Revolution (as far as the nature of the Texas mystique is concerned), David Crockett was well known as serving under Gen. Jackson, became a congressman, and ultimately a martyr. His famous “brag” in American folklore goes as follows: “I’m that same Davy Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half-horse, half-alligator, a little touched with the snapping-turtle; can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning...can whip my weight in wild cats...” As the martyr of the Alamo, he did indeed ride upon a streak of lightning and into the mythos. Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore*, 56.

²² Frank Dobie, “The Alamo’s Immortalization of Words,” *Southwest Review* 27, no. 4 (1942), 410.

antiquity. The artful use of phrases came from a “noble imagination,” where individuals with historical knowledge coined powerful sayings.²³ Had Coletto turned out differently, with Urrea beaten back while Fannin made a successful escape, Fannin could have, as Chester Newell suggests, “prepared to make another Thermopylae” at La Bahia, but the Texians abandoned that fort and in such poor fashion as to be overwhelmed on the plain of del Perdido.²⁴

Coletto, and later Goliad, had numerous survivor accounts from combatants, so there were few mysteries and secrets to unravel as opposed to the few “messengers of defeat” from the Alamo, such as the trials of Susanna Dickinson. It was not until much later that a bigger picture emerged when Mexican accounts were translated, as in the works of Carlos E. Castaneda and Carmen Perry. Witty phrases were not the only aspect of mythmaking, dramatic flair in literature played a key role in the appeal of legend.

Playwrights, akin to the poets, as well as historical novelists, constructed epic sentiment and created historical mythology for Texas.²⁵ Fiction published during the period, according to Botkin, played a part in forming what Americans recognize as the frontiersman, his “rough diamond chivalry” and skill with a firearm.²⁶ One such play that embodied the mythology of the Alamo was Hiram H. McLane’s *Capture of the Alamo: A Historical Tragedy* (1886). The play depicts “America’s Thermopylae” when the hero Crockett comes to head with Santa Anna, the despotic ruler struggling with prudence and reveling in death.²⁷ Once the dictator was finished

²³ Dobie, “The Alamo’s Immortalization of Words,” 406.

²⁴ Chester Newell, *History of the Revolution in Texas*, 97. Conjecture regarding these men in history and legend is relegated to speculation.

²⁵ Bailey, “The Mythmakers of American History,” 6.

²⁶ Botkin calls these types the Backwoodsmen, skilled riflemen whose image came to prominence following the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, in Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore*, 3.

²⁷ Hiram H. McLane, *Capture of the Alamo: A Historical Tragedy* (San Antonio: San Antonio Printing Company, 1886), 73, 82.

crushing the Texians and then ridding himself of the puppet congress in Mexico City, in eloquent verse, Santa Anna states:

I will in haste dismiss them then,
And will so rule that none shall dare
My right to rule to question.
For he, who would such rule assume,
Must have no sharer but his will...²⁸

Within the Alamo and rising against Santa Anna's iron will in the drama, Crockett, with his wilderness intuition, ruggedly says, "the trail I'm on does only have the scent of a Republic."

As the heat of battle draws to its close, Santa Anna has Crockett surrounded. The Mexican general commands that the Texian be brought to a swift end so that he may reign supreme, as if killing Crockett alone would achieve this goal. Crockett, who has been clubbing *soldados* to death, yelling "now I has yer; zip, I tuk yer," each time he clubs one, promptly rolls up his sleeves as if to fight Santa Anna one-on-one, spits in his hands and lunges towards his target but is met by bayonets.²⁹ This near comedic representation of events brings the script to an end, but not without underlining the enthusiastic frontier ideal of the hero rolling up his sleeves to finish what Mexican tyranny started.

McLane includes references to Henderson Yoakum's history in *Capture of the Alamo*, in part to claim historic authenticity, but the Homeric strain of the drama which McLane purposefully sought, washes out the critical and historic.³⁰ One thing is clear in McLane's drama; patriotic fervor, which is articulated in a note to the reader: "to every lover of Liberty, having the right appreciation of the sacrifices made by men, in all ages of the world, to secure it for

²⁸ Ibid., 16. Another cloudy misconception was the propaganda against Santa Anna and his character, "he was energetic and confident, determined to have his own way and cruel enough to get it. He liked the sensuality of silk bedsheets and the willing young women who shared them. He was arrogant and impatient, contemptuous of advice, and some said these traits were exaggerated by an addiction to opium," in Hamilton, *Goliad Survivor Isaac D. Hamilton*, 6.

²⁹ McLane, *Capture of the Alamo*, 85-87.

³⁰ Ibid., 9.

themselves and their fellow-men, this work is respectfully dedicated....”³¹ What McLane’s play told of the Revolution was that it was a moral contest. Regardless of what may or may not have occurred during the conflict, the moral contest, its outcome, and its lessons were paramount.

In his historical novel, *Mexico versus Texas* (1838), Anthony Ganilh, a work following rapidly on the heels of the Revolution, provides a descriptive story, by a Texian, about living persons, with all the biases that perspective provides. With an expansionist bent, “Texas may be considered as a leading crusade in behalf of modern civilization, against the antiquated prejudices and narrow policy of the middle ages, which still govern the Mexican Republic,” and the Mexican states still under Santa Anna’s yoke will soon call on Texas for deliverance when they “will learn to bless her name, as that of a benefactress, and rejoice in her success, as that of an adoptive mother.”³²

Despite carrying on the story of such a crusade, Ganilh admits the weaknesses in his work; the book itself is loosely put together, and the plot “presents none of the complicated *imbroglios* accounted so essential in modern novel writing for stirring the imagination of the reader,” but the weaknesses should not give the reader too much pause.³³ Ganilh continues in the preface, “to the first account, we plead guilty; but answer, with Sir Walter Scott, ‘who the devil minds the frame of a picture, provided the painting itself be well executed?’ To the second accusation, we answer that we would rather think it a motive of praise, should we be found to have interested our reader by faithful descriptions of the workings of the human heart.”³⁴ The important takeaway for the reader is the moral implications of the Revolution and the souls who

³¹ Ibid.

³² The Author’s Dedication, in Anthony Ganilh, *Mexico versus Texas* (Philadelphia: M. Siegfried, Printer, 1838).

³³ Ibid., vi.

³⁴ Ibid.

struggled to do right in the contest, both Texian and Mexican. A significant aspect of *Mexico versus Texas* is Ganilh's own commentary on the characters amidst the Goliad Campaign.

At the Battle of Coleto, Fannin "had neither the knowledge to fight, nor the discretion to retreat," and as for the shameful surrender, it was "with a facility which can have been atoned only by the fortitude and sangfroid with which he met an unjust and barbarous end."³⁵ Urrea had no intention of recognizing a capitulation and, after the surrender, found himself opposed while he spoke at length in a consultation, asking the opinions of his officers. A captain by the name of Farialega consented to his commander that the adventurers had no nation, but they were still men, and thus should not be killed. Urrea heatedly replied, "Men! Confound them, a parcel of heretics who want to introduce Protestantism into the republic! If they were Christians, they might have some plea, but as things are...." Urrea and the officers were still cautious about reaching a clear solution, for it was indeed a "weighty affair."

The general continued to prod the small audience before him, but despite broad hints hoping some would be of his opinion, Urrea's aide de camp spoke up, saying, "I could not think of shooting them, according to the President's orders, even had they surrendered at discretion, but that was not the case. They laid down their arms on certain specified conditions; and if we violate them, we trample upon our military honor: we defile our own glory."³⁶ In this particular scene, it is clear to the Mexicans what the truth of the matter was, that an honorable capitulation was agreed upon. The purpose of the gathering was to conclude whether or not to abide by such terms. Urrea soon realized that his officers were all trying to wash their hands of the whole affair. They each knew full well their orders, and the general referring to himself in the third person, says, "Urrea is something of a fox, I assure you – I will not, in this business, act by

³⁵ Ibid., 170, 171.

³⁶ Ibid., 179.

myself.”³⁷ In novels like *Mexico versus Texas*, with scenes as the one described, the canard that Urrea agreed to a capitulation only to conspire to turn his back on his word and honor, became part of the ethnocentric, folkloric mystique.

In *The Wonderful Narrative of Lieutenant Harrison* (1848), E. J. Harrison presents a fictitious account of a Goliad survivor in a brief Texian odyssey, depicting “dastardly cut-throat Mexicans” in one of the “blood epochs in the history of Texas.”³⁸ The novelette represents the armed adventurer on a brave journey where the heroes and villains are quite clearly discernable. At the beginning of *The Wonderful Narrative*, the character, Harrison, believed, along with the rest of his comrades, that, having surrendered at Coleto, the Texians would all receive good treatment and parole to New Orleans, but what Mexican treachery! Thus, the historical myth of an honorable capitulation, through literature, is used for dramatic affect and to justify heaping curses upon Santa Anna, “this incarnate fiend.”³⁹

As the execution of the Goliad prisoners commenced, Harrison witnessed Mexican faces go “dark with malignant and hellish expressions of triumph, their ugly brows lower, and their black snake like eyes look red and fiery with their thirst for blood.”⁴⁰ The executions quickly dissolved into chaos, with every man to defend himself against the approaching Mexican killers. As the prisoners were falling “beneath the red reeking blades of their treacherous foes,” in an act of bravery, Harrison seized a pistol from a dead Mexican and shot another *soldado* out of the saddle.⁴¹ Harrison then mounted the riderless horse and, with a cutlass, slashed past the enemy

³⁷ Ibid., 180.

³⁸ E. J. Harrison, *The Wonderful narrative of Lieutenant Harrison* (Cincinnati: E. J. Harrison, 1848), 5, 8.

³⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

and on to freedom, only for the time being, however, for part of Harrison's journey to New Orleans would be through the hazardous slave labor of the Mexican silver mines.

The Wonderful Narrative serves as an example of how the story of Coletto and Goliad was carried away by the popular culture of the time, steeped in historical mythology. The side to enjoy such colorful interpretation and reconstruction of events was the Texian or Anglo-American side of the Revolution. The noble imagination following Texian independence affirmed the "high stakes" of the frontier ideal, for such fantastical rhetoric played into an ideology of expansion. The southwestern elsewhere of the American nation was a dark place scourged by the old ways of medieval Europe and crude peoples. By the mid-twentieth century, scholars recalled not so much the mythos, but the true events of Goliad, but they used the gallant nature of the youthful men under Fannin as a chastisement and a subtext for current affairs in the tumultuous 1960s.

During all the uncertainty of the '60s, the war in Vietnam, civil rights, and the overwhelming tide of "free love," Texan scholars inclined their ears to the bygone era of the Texas Revolution. In a timely reproduction of Clarence Wharton's *Remember Goliad!* (1968), Robert B. McCoy and John T. Strachan offer a stinging rebuke of the time in which they lived, in the publisher's preface. McCoy and Strachan write, "a story like this, sad as it may be in retrospect, is a breath of fresh air in a land stifled by the pollution of personal and individual irresponsibility."⁴² In an aggressive historical comparison with the young men of Coletto and the young, long-haired draft dodgers of the '60s, McCoy and Strachan condemn "hippie" cowardice and praise the freedom-loving boys of 1836:

⁴² Wharton, *Remember Goliad!*, iv.

Their story echoes through the corridor of years like the silvery sounds of distant trumpets.⁴³ Americans today can look at too many of their younger generation and weep at the sight...to see the yellow-bellied cowards afraid to be drafted, afraid to fight – the barefooted, dirty, unkempt, effeminate, dope-ridden tramps burning draft cards... Too many, too many, commit public indecencies which reflect their own degeneracy and make of them human abominations... What a shame it is to realize that young American men have died...to make America safe for criminals, cowards, traitors, rapists, arsonists, looters, rioters, the lazy, the foul, the very scum of a sick society, the effluent of a so-called affluent society, the worthless dregs of what Lyndon B. Johnson likes to call his “Great Society.”⁴⁴

With nostalgia for an idealized past, McCoy and Strachan impose a heavy theory of American exceptionalism in such a dialectic manner that the diatribe above should be taken with a grain of salt. Now, American exceptionalism is not toxic, nor is it a deadly “ism,” but the preface of *Remember Goliad!* begins to cross into the misleading historical comparison by idolizing too much the past, which is shaky ground for the historian. With the subtext of the ‘60s in mind, *Remember Goliad!* “is to read with thoughtful reverence, for it is about heroes.”⁴⁵

The story of Coletto is undoubtedly about bravery, for who are we, who in the present enjoy historical perspective, to study such an intense and violent situation that young men voluntarily thrust themselves into, and not recognize heroics? However, the self-indulgent, one-sided, stoic romanticism of these adventurers should not cloud an analysis either. The chivalrous intentions behind the Texians, their project of knight-errantry, upheld an ideology of expansion. The spirit of chivalry, as it was connected to romantic nationalism, was a significant motivating factor of Anglo-American volunteers. This code of honor aside, a secondary channel of lofty idealism adopted by the men of Coletto, was the spirit of the American Revolution.

In February 1836, Judge John W. Hall addressed the Texas public with a proclamation calling all willing and able to join in the Texian cause, declaring that Santa Anna and his “vassel

⁴³ Such a description, however eloquent, commemorative, and enriching, recalls the myth of the Texian knight-errant.

⁴⁴ Wharton, *Remember Goliad!*, iii.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

myrmidons, are fast displaying their hostile columns on the frontier.”⁴⁶ The despot wished to kill every Anglo-American in the region, but Hall beseeched his readers to remember how their forefathers expelled the veterans of Europe from North America in the Revolution of 1776, “the soil of an independent people is not to be polluted by the footsteps of a mercenary soldier.”⁴⁷ Therefore, loyal Texians must not suffer the “colored hirelings of a cruel and faithless despot” to lay waste to Texas.⁴⁸ Let their motto be, “victory and independence, or an honorable grave,” and their watchword be “the tyrant dead or alive, or a visit to his palace.”⁴⁹ In yet another call to arms, Governor Henry Smith wrote to the public, naming them the “descendants of Washington,” and charging the people to awaken and imitate the example of their forefathers.⁵⁰ In the Goliad Declaration of Independence, the Texians were portrayed as “a band worthy to have stood by Washington and receive command, and worthy to participate of the inheritance of the sons of such a Father...”⁵¹ Fannin’s command thought the same way, for their knightly mission required a watchword, which was “liberty.”

Joseph Barnard, upon joining the cause for independence in Texas, recognized that those men in the Southwest, “were in arms for a cause that I had always been taught to consider sacred, viz; republican principles and popular institutions.”⁵² In concluding his memoir, Herman Ehrenberg expressed his desire for how the new republic should freely operate, stating, “there must be no restraint on brilliant ideas, and none on the tongue that speaks the truth!!! These are the principles of the Texanians. For these principles – yes, for these principles we gladly risk our

⁴⁶ A Classical reference to Achilles’ Myrmidons, an elite group among the Greek soldiers in the fight for Troy. John w. Hall to the Public, February 1836, in Jenkins, *The Papers of the Texas Revolution*, vol IV, 470, 471.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 470.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 492.

⁵¹ Declaration of Independence, Made at Goliad, December 20, 1835, in Huson, *Captain Phillip Dimmitt’s Commandancy of Goliad*, 204.

⁵² Huson, *Dr. J. H. Barnards Journal*, 1.

lives, and again I proclaim: Liberty! Law! And Texas forever!”⁵³ The sentiment of the men who fought at Coleto, like Barnard and Ehrenburg, however reckless, were authentic.

The adventurers were not genuine revolutionaries,⁵⁴ but emerged from and enjoyed a revolutionary tradition, and this generation came off the experience of America’s Second War for Independence, which ended in 1815. In this war for continental legitimacy, the Americans conquered the trans-Appalachian frontier, nearly in simultaneous fashion subjugated pan-tribalism, and expelled a British invasion from the Gulf Coast. There were Texians who had served in the War of 1812 and embraced national pride and the pursuit of liberty. During his journey to Texas, Ehrenberg wrote of his meeting a veteran of the Battle of New Orleans, listening by fire about how General Andrew Jackson’s famed riflemen pushed the British back in a desperate fight when “the freedom of the Union had been saved, and all the hopes of the British crown to subjugate again the colonies across the Atlantic had vanished forever.”⁵⁵ The feeling of American legitimacy was fresh and prominent. Alabamian, Jack Shackelford served under Jackson’s staff in the Mississippi Territory and later threw his lot in with the Texians.⁵⁶ Alabama, a state that emerged from the territory, became one of the first to lend aid to the Texians because of a strong sense of brotherhood.⁵⁷

If any nation could sympathize with the desire for independence, it was the United States. Liberty’s sure course was essential to preserving a traditional culture established in 1776, validated in 1815, and ready to expand in 1835. In Mobile, Alabama, on February 13, 1836, *The*

⁵³ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 542.

⁵⁴ Lack, *The Texas Revolutionary Experience*, xv.

⁵⁵ Brister and Crisp, *Inside the Texas Revolution*, 39. This is another myth, the frontier rifleman that gained legendary fame from the Battle of New Orleans. It was more so the duel between British and American artillery, not sharpshooters, deciding the fate of the battle.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, *Goliad Survivor Isaac D. Hamilton*, 11.

⁵⁷ Claude Elliot, “Alabama and the Texas Revolution,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1947): 315.

Daily Commercial Register and Patriot included a charity announcement stating, “the friends of Texas and of humanity, the descendants of heroes and patriots, all those who truly love the cause of civil and religious liberty...are now called upon to make every exertion.”⁵⁸ From the Deep South poured into Texas a knightly youth with a revolutionary spirit and an aim to throw off the yoke of Mexican tyranny and further legitimize their high ideals on the not-so-distant frontier. This was the ideal, and a piece of the mixture that has become the Texas mystique, but the realities proved that the need for the practical far outweighed the lofty. It was apparent that gallantry trumped the military necessities of the Revolution and the violent realities of the frontier. Nothing made this more apparent than the Battle of Coleto and the ensuing consequences.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 320.

Conclusion: Different Pastures

On the afternoon of March 19, 1836, out on a lone, open prairie not far from Coletto Creek, Texians under the command of Col. James W. Fannin engaged in an unfavorable battle against one of Mexico's finest generals, Jose Urrea. The time squandered during a retreat now gone, Fannin was forced to form a hollow square that halted on the plain of del Perdido, where a six-foot rise surrounded the defenders. After one failed cavalry charge after another against the square, Urrea reconsidered his tactics and retreated from the field but made sure to surround his enemy and hound them with noise the next night. The following day, with reinforcements of men, ammunition, and artillery, Urrea made the strength of his force known by checking his range, to which the Texians realized they were well within. A white flag was then raised. During the previous night, Fannin and his officers decided to stay with their wounded and share in their fate. The intention was to gain an honorable capitulation from the Mexican general. A conclusion was finally reached after negotiating, but not before a grave misunderstanding or miscalculation on Fannin's part occurred. The Texians believed in one set of terms, while the Mexicans finalized and ratified another.

The Texians, now prisoners, were marched back to Goliad while Urrea continued in the opposite direction on the road to Victoria. During a week of poor treatment and living in unsanitary conditions, the prisoners were flabbergasted as to why the terms of their surrender were disregarded in such a manner. By March 26, Colonel Jose de la Portilla received two conflicting orders regarding the execution of the captive adventurers. Compelled to follow the strict orders of the higher-ranking officer, Santa Anna, Portilla made the fateful decision to have Fannin's command taken outside La Bahia and shot. The result was a resounding terror from the Texians and Mexican officers. It was a dark moment in Texas history, a gray moment when the

straightforward, black and white did not exist. The accounts of the Texians and Mexicans involved in the battle and massacre exhibit a far more nuanced story.

Self-styled frontier personalities were rich in the Texas Revolution. What occurred on the battlefields along the East Texas coast in 1836 crossed the line into mythology – last stands lend themselves to these kinds of interpretations and later embellishments. The Alamo, in this fashion, surpassed the Battle of Coleto. The frontier personalities there became the faces of the Revolution as they all met their deaths at the hands of the Mexican Army. Rather than surrender, the Texians inside the Alamo were resolved to die, thus fulfilling an ideal that became a lightning rod for the mythical West. From the event, writers and historians found heroic characters in an epic to forge a Texan identity. What was a federalist war within the tumultuous Mexican republic was a unique phase when the frontiers were being subdued to make way for the coming tide of American liberty. A changing narrative comes into view by analyzing shifting historiography and historical mythology.

At the outset of the Revolution's historiography, ethnocentrism excluded the Mexican side, not just for the lack of translation but also for a predominant narrative meant to keep the ideological path of expansion unobstructed by contradictory sources. Henderson Yoakum's *History of Texas* sets this tone by exaggerating the perfidy of the Mexican race. As accounts were discovered and translated in the twentieth century, historians began to take a more critical look at events, and the mystique started to break down not only with the investigations of concrete military aspects but of the death of David Crockett, quite the alternate ending in Jose Enrique de la Pena's account of the war.

Coleto, presenting its mythical tendencies, produced the antithesis of the frontier ideal and practical flaws when the Texians on the plain of del Perdido surrendered to Urrea. The

fantastic vision of these knight-errants crowded military necessity. What Coleto projects today was an example of the ever-present paradox during expansion and the picture of the Texians as armed adventurers who conjured a spirit of chivalry, channeling the revolutionary spirit of their mother country, and all the while, in their exploits, upheld an ideology of expansion.

The spread of American liberty across the continent did not come without violent periods. Many controversies and misunderstandings have come from this mixture of motives. The Mexican side should not be blanketed by the blame of treachery with racial undertones, and the Texian side did not solely embrace a conspiracy to wrest lands from a “lesser” people. The armed adventurers at Coleto presented these insights in their words and actions. By separating history and myth and analyzing aspects of written histories, the lofty ideals carried by the Texians did not stand pragmatically before the nature of the frontier except to excite a Texas mystique that has been intertwined in historical perspectives. “What we have to do,” suggests Stephen L. Hardin, “is graze our myths and our histories in different pastures.”¹ The actual events surrounding Coleto, the lost opportunities of the Texians on the prairie, the terms of surrender, and the conflicted mind of Mexican officers all explain deeper nuances alongside the symptoms of Sir Walter Scott’s Disease that compelled the Texian soldiers of destiny to act recklessly. Nevertheless, it describes how in this generation, many young men worked within the reasonings of their own time.

The surrender terms of James W. Fannin and his command quickly became a myth in its own right. The surviving sources show that Fannin surrendered to the Mexican government's sole discretion, along with Urrea’s failed attempts at making exceptions for his Texian prisoners. Santa Anna, the military leader-made-magistrate charged with carrying out the Tornel Decree,

¹ Stephen L. Hardin, “Texas Talks: Part II The Alamo: Fallacies and Canards” (video), TSHA Online, October 28, 2019, 6:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvT1h7UP2c0>.

did so to draconian effects. The prisoners were executed at Goliad per the Supreme Government's policy. The Mexican authorities believed that Anglo-American robbers were blatantly invading their young republic all the while; the other side saw Santa Anna's campaign into Texas as a war of extermination. The Tampico Expedition of 1835 informed the Supreme Government on how it was to conduct the campaign in Texas the following year. General Jose Antonio Mexia's mission to take the war to Mexico via Tampico was a blunder, leading to the executions of twenty-eight prisoners. The Tampico controversy also set the spotlight on American involvement in Texas.

The line between lawful and illegitimate blurred significantly regarding military practices. Americans took it upon themselves to outfit small expeditionary forces equipped by states, yet the Federal Government had outlawed such activity. A New Orleans lawyer, William Christy, was held on trial for the accusation that he outfitted the men for Tampico and, by doing so, broke the act of Congress of April 18, 1818. However, Christy was later acquitted and hatched a plan to raise an entire cavalry unit for the Texian Provisional Government. Christy's republican nature demanded that he at least try. *The United States v William Christy* shows that Americans were not neutral in the Revolution, despite what the Federal Government declared.

By discovering lawful but unjust loopholes, Mexico City, bending understood rules of war to the nation's will, carried out a no-quarter policy that darkened its own cause. Santa Anna missed an opportunity to strike Texian and Anglo-American morale with a crippling blow. Instead, he ordered the killing of prisoners of war to make a highhanded example for those who dared dishonor Mexican sovereignty. The Tornel Decree, with its basis in Emmerich Da Vattel's *The Law of Nations*, identified predatory expeditions conducted by pirates as informal depredation. The Texians were thus exposed as a dangerous rabble who fought under no

recognized flag, and the invaders were to be executed as the only sure form of national satisfaction.

The decree was effective because Mexican officials separated the revolt in Texas from the larger civil strife in the republic, justifying its lawful and extensive use. Mexico's province was under siege by infatuated robbers. Minister of War and Navy Jose Maria Tornel eloquently marked the American imperial paradox when he wrote that Anglo-American interests were the sole reason for expansion, with the rights of liberty in the foreground. The United States was a beacon for independence, yet with predatory aims. Any Texian taken as a prisoner upholding these aims within Mexican territory was to be chastised.

Coleto and Goliad highlighted the tragic knight-errant whose journey's end came to disaster. John S. Brooks sought his calling as a soldier of fate and became an archetype of manhood on the frontier. Despite Brooks' waywardness, every bit of his being drew him to Texas. Brooks crossed the Rubicon and cast his die with the Texians, and he would die with them.²

With a noble imagination, early writers carried on the moral contest for liberty when the Texians died upon its sacrificial altar in popular culture. Fannin's command could have become another Thermopylae as the Alamo had been. Still, the armored square on del Perdido dissolved into what many a Texian believed to be shame and dejection. However, through the lens of historical mythology, heroism did emerge with E. J. Harrison's *The Wonderful Narrative of Lieutenant Harrison*. Harrison painted the picture of the stalwart knight who escaped his fate at Goliad and fled from the clutches of Mexican treachery.

² Bryan, *The American Elsewhere*, 244.

With thoughtful reverence, Fannin's command was remembered by historians to argue that the generation of the Revolution should serve as an example of what unquestionable men looked like and applied their plight to a more recent time full of un-American and irresponsible young men. Recalling the mythos for the sake of historical comparison was not, therefore, restricted solely to popular culture. With nostalgia for a distant past, Robert B. McCoy and John T. Strachan praised 1836 as a breath of fresh air as opposed to 1968. The Texians also subscribed to an idealized past and proclaimed the watchword of liberty from their American forefathers to expand the ideal and impart it to a dark frontier. From a revolutionary tradition birthed in 1776 and a victory of legitimacy in North America in 1815, adventurers filled the Texian ranks in 1835-1836. There would not be the attempted subjugation of liberty again, especially from what many viewed as a medieval society clinging to Iberian autocracy.

The historiography of Coeto, in the shadow of the Alamo and in the context of the Revolution as a whole, presents an ever-shifting narrative. The scholarship may cling to Texian gallantry one way or another but moves forward to more balanced and critical interpretations. The scholarship of the struggle is an evolution of historical nuances. The rebellious development on the frontier, although separate from a general revolution as scrutinized by strict criteria, was a war of succession effected by a revolutionary cauldron in Latin America. What is apparent, that perhaps only an evolving narrative can tell, is a story of armed adventures involved in a stirring drama that was a phase of American westward expansion. Because of this Homeric age in nineteenth-century America, the Texian imagery goes beyond generations. One can find an abundance of heroics in the story of Coeto that has been consigned to American mythology and high ideals that did not always stand firm out on the unpredictable frontier.

Epilogue

Then flight your way to glory,
The haughty Don o'erthrow,
Your deeds shall live in story
If valor nerve the blow.

Swear by your homes and altars
To conquer or to die,
The Coward only falters
When freedom's foes are nigh.¹

¹An excerpt from "Ode to the Texian," in J. F. Waddell, *Texas, Fall of San Jacinto, Death of Milan, Goliad and other Poems* (New York: W. M. Applegate, 1844), 23.

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