

# Why Texas Wanted Independence from Mexico

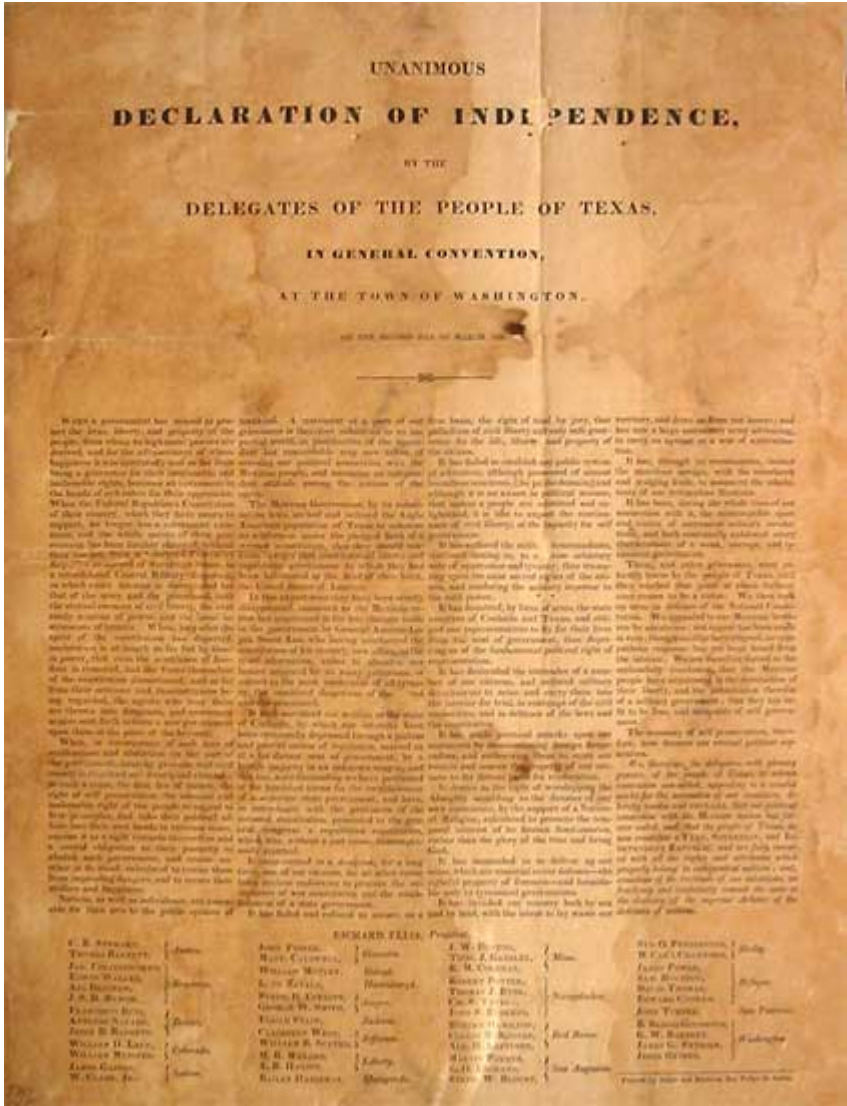
By Christopher Minster, ThoughtCo.com on 10.11.17

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The Battle of San Jacinto, which saw the capture of Mexican President Santa Anna, paved the way for Texan independence from Mexico. Painting by Henry Arthur McArdle, 1901. Image from the public domain



Why did Texas want independence from Mexico? On October 2, 1835, rebellious Texans took shots at Mexican soldiers in the town of Gonzales. It was barely a skirmish, as the Mexicans left the battlefield without attempting to engage the Texans, but nevertheless "the Battle of Gonzales" is considered the first engagement of what would become Texas' War of Independence from Mexico. The battle, however, was only the start of the actual fighting: tensions had been high for years between the Americans who had come to settle Texas and the Mexican authorities.

Texas formally declared independence in March of 1836: there were many reasons why they did so.

**The settlers were culturally American, not Mexican**

Mexico only became a nation in 1821, after winning independence from Spain. At first, Mexico encouraged Americans to settle Texas. They were given land that no Mexicans had yet laid claim to. These Americans became Mexican citizens and were supposed to learn Spanish and convert to Catholicism. They never really became "Mexican," however: they kept their

language and ways and culturally had more in common with the people of the United States than with Mexico. These cultural ties with the U.S. made the settlers identify more with the U.S. than Mexico and made independence (or U.S. statehood) more attractive.

### **The slavery issue**

Most of the American settlers in Mexico were from Southern states, where slavery was still legal. They even brought their slaves with them.

Because slavery was illegal in Mexico, these settlers made their slaves sign agreements giving them the status of indentured servants — essentially slavery by another name. The Mexican authorities grudgingly went along with it, but the issue occasionally flared up, especially when slaves ran off. By the 1830s, many settlers were afraid that the Mexicans would take their slaves away: this made them favor independence.

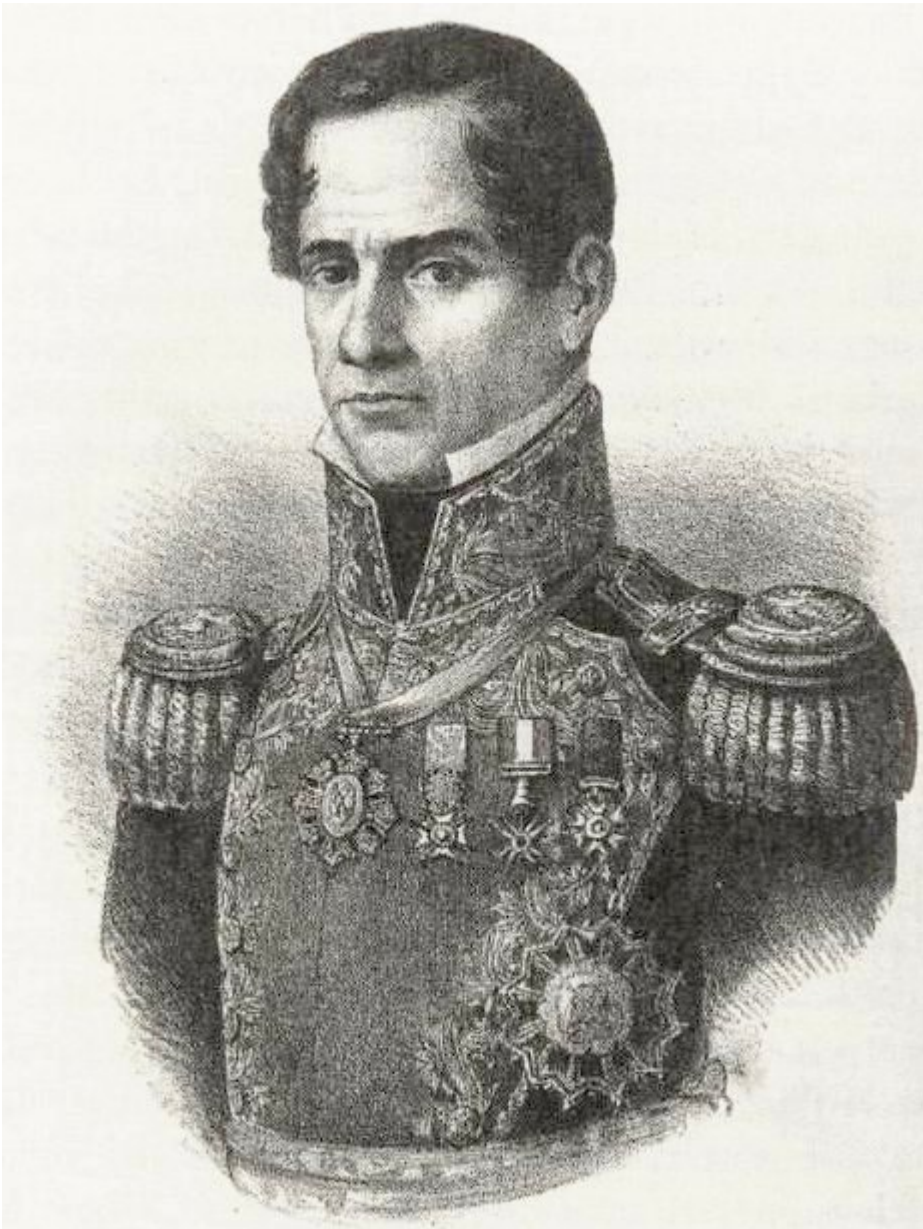
### **The abolishment of the 1824 Constitution**

One of Mexico's first constitutions was written in 1824, which was about the time that the first settlers arrived in Texas. This constitution was heavily weighted in favor of states' rights (as opposed to federal control). It allowed the Texans great freedom to rule themselves as they saw fit. This constitution was overturned in favor of another that gave the federal government



more control, and many Texans were outraged (many Mexicans in other parts of Mexico were, too). Reinstatement of the 1824 constitution became a rallying cry in Texas before the fighting broke out.

### **Chaos in Mexico City**



Mexico suffered great growing pains as a young nation in the years after independence. In the capital, liberals and conservatives fought it out in the legislature (and occasionally in the streets) over issues such as states' rights and the separation (or not) of church and state. Presidents and leaders came and went. The most powerful man in Mexico was Antonio López de Santa Anna. He was president several times, but he was a notorious flip-flopper, generally favoring liberalism or conservatism as it fit his needs. These problems made it impossible for Texans to solve their differences with the central government in any lasting way: new governments often reversed decisions made by previous ones.

## Economic ties with the United States

Texas was separated from most of Mexico by large swaths of desert with little in the way of roads. For those Texans who produced export crops, such as cotton, it was far easier to send their goods downstream to the coast, ship them to a nearby city like New Orleans and sell them there. Selling their goods in Mexican ports was nearly prohibitively hard. Texas produced a lot of cotton and other goods, and the resulting economic ties with the Southern United States hastened its departure from Mexico.

## Texas was part of the state of Coahuila y Texas



Texas was not a state in the United States of Mexico; it was half of the state of Coahuila y Texas. From the beginning, the American settlers (and many of the Mexican Tejanos as well) wanted statehood for Texas, as the state capital was far away and difficult to reach.

In the 1830s, the Texans would occasionally have meetings and make demands of the Mexican government. Many of these demands were met, but their petition for separate statehood was always denied.

## **The Americans outnumbered the Tejanos**

In the 1820s and 1830s, Americans were desperate for land, and often settled in dangerous frontier territories if land was available. Texas has some great land for farming and ranching and when it was opened up, many went there as fast as they could. Mexicans, however, never wanted to go there. To them, Texas was a remote, undesirable region. The soldiers stationed there were usually convicts. When the Mexican government offered to relocate citizens there, no one took them up on it. The native Tejanos, or native-born Texas Mexicans, were few in number and by 1834 the Americans outnumbered them by as many as 4-to-1.

## **Manifest Destiny**

Many Americans believed that Texas, as well as other parts of Mexico, should belong to the United States. They felt that the United States should extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific and that any Mexicans or Indians in between should be kicked out to make way for the "rightful" owners. This belief was called "Manifest Destiny." By 1830, the United States had taken Florida from the Spanish and the central part of the nation from the French (via the Louisiana Purchase). Political leaders such as Andrew Jackson officially disowned rebel actions in Texas but covertly encouraged Texas settlers to rebel, giving tacit approval of their deeds.

## **The path to Texas independence**

Mexicans were keenly aware of the possibility of Texas splitting off to become a state of the United States or an independent nation. Manuel de Mier y Terán, a respected Mexican military officer, was sent to Texas to make a report on what he saw. He gave a report in 1829 in which he reported the large number of legal and illegal immigrants into Texas. He recommended that Mexico increase its military presence in Texas, outlaw any further immigration from the United States and move large numbers of Mexican settlers into the area.

In 1830, Mexico passed a measure to follow Terán's suggestions, sending additional troops and cutting off further immigration. But it was too little, too late, and all the new resolution accomplished was to anger those settlers already in Texas and hasten the independence movement.





There were many Americans who immigrated to Texas with the intention of being good citizens of Mexico. The best example is Stephen F. Austin. Austin managed the most ambitious of the settlement projects and insisted his colonists adhere to the laws of Mexico. In the end, however, the differences between the Texans and the Mexicans were too great. Austin himself changed sides and supported independence after years of fruitless wrangling with the Mexican bureaucracy and about a year in a Mexican prison for supporting Texas statehood a little too vigorously. Alienating men like Austin was the worst thing Mexico could have done; when even Austin picked up a rifle in 1835, there was no going back.

On October 2, 1835, the first shots were fired in the town of Gonzales. After the Texans captured San Antonio, General Santa Anna marched north with a massive army. They overran the defenders at the Battle of the Alamo on March 6, 1836. The Texas legislature had officially declared independence a few days before. On April 21, 1836, the Mexicans were crushed at the Battle of San Jacinto. Santa Anna was captured, essentially sealing Texas' independence. Although Mexico would try several times in the next few years to reclaim Texas, it joined the United States in 1845.

*Editor's Note: The loss of Texas caused a great deal of friction with the United States. Santa Anna carried out various attempts to reclaim Texas, without success. Meanwhile, in keeping with the idea of Manifest Destiny, the United States turned an eye to Mexico's Western territories of California and New Mexico. U.S. President James Polk sought to buy the land from Mexico, but his requests were denied.*



*In 1845, Texans voted to become a U.S. state. The annexation broke down relations between the United States and Mexico, which had not recognized Texan independence. Tension at the Texas border finally boiled over when troops were sent by both parties along the Rio Grande. War was officially declared by the United States and Mexico in 1846.*

*Mexico was outgunned and lost every major battle. After heavy losses on both sides, the American army entered Mexico City and ended the war in 1848. The United States took more than half of Mexico's territory by setting new boundaries with the Treaty of Guadalupe*



*Hidalgo. The United States took ownership of what are now California and a large area including roughly half of New Mexico; most of Arizona, Nevada and Utah; and parts of Kansas, Wyoming and Colorado.*

**Quiz**

- 1 What is the organizational structure of this article?
- (A) It has a sequence structure; it outlines the events that led to the War of Independence in the order in which they happened.
  - (B) It has a cause and effect structure; it first describes all of the causes of the War of Independence and then describes the war's effects.
  - (C) It has a problem and solution structure; it outlines all of the problems Texas had with being part of Mexico and then presents the solution Texas came up with at the end of the war.
  - (D) It has a compare and contrast structure; it compares the frustrations the Texans had with the Mexicans to the frustrations the Mexicans had with the Texans, which ultimately led to war.
- 2 What purpose is served by including the Editor's Note at the end of the article?
- (A) to show how much Mexico valued the territory of Texas since it was determined to get it back after the war
  - (B) to show what has caused the tension between the United States and Mexico over the past 170 years
  - (C) to show how the loss of Texas had a rippling effect for Mexico, causing it to lose even more territory to the United States
  - (D) to show how Mexico prevailed by gaining territories in other countries despite losing the war to Texas and the United States
- 3 Which image included in the article BEST depicts the idea that Mexico was very powerful as a country in the early 1800s?
- (A) the photograph at the top of the article
  - (B) the map in the section "Texas Was Part of the State of Coahuila y Texas"
  - (C) the photograph in the section "The Path to Texas Independence"
  - (D) the map in the Editor's Note at the end

- 4 What limitations do the images have that the article does NOT have?
- (A) The images cannot show why the Texans wanted to break away from Mexico as well as the article can.
  - (B) The images cannot describe the battle scenes from the War of Independence as well as the article can.
  - (C) The images cannot show the scope of the Mexican territories in the 1800s as well as the article can.
  - (D) The images cannot describe battle tactics, weaponry and dress in the 1800s as well as the article can.



## Answer Key

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