

"The Greatest Nation on Earth"

The Politics and Patriotism of the First Anglo American Immigrants to Mexican Texas, 1820-1824

ABSTRACT Between 1820 and 1827 approximately 1,800 U.S. citizens immigrated to northern Mexico as part of that country's *empresario* program, in which the federal government granted foreigners land if they promised to develop and secure the region. Historians have long argued that these settlers, traditionally seen as the vanguard of Manifest Destiny, were attracted to Mexico for its cheap land and rich natural resources. Such interpretations have lent a tone of inevitability to events like the Texas Revolution. This article argues that the early members of these groups were attracted to Mexico for chiefly political reasons. At a time when the United States appeared to be turning away from its commitment to a weak federal government, Mexico was establishing itself on a constitution that insured local sovereignty and autonomy. Thus, the Texas Revolution was far from the result of two irreconcilable peoples and cultures. Moreover, the role that these settlers played in the United States' acquisition of not just Texas, but ultimately half of Mexico's national territory, was more paradoxical than inevitable. **KEYWORDS** Moses Austin, Stephen Austin, Texas, Early Mexico, federalism, Constitution of 1824

In the summer of 1822, William Walker, a recent immigrant to the Mexican province of T^ejas, penned a letter to his relative back in the United States. "It seems as if providence designs this world to outshine the balance of the earth, in every respect," wrote the Mississippi native. "Her streams, her mountains, her soil, her men, her politics, all, allure on great scales—nothing small or contracted on her whole construction." Walker predicted that "the spire of [Mexico's] political fabric, will be seen as a mirror to the civilized world." He concluded, "With these and a thousand other advantages I repeat that Mexico cannot fail, under the influence of a wise and liberal government, to become the greatest nation on earth."¹

1. William Walker, 27 August 1822, Samul E. Asbury Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library, San Antonio.

Walker's views contrasted with those of prominent U.S. leaders at the time. Indeed, as early as 1786, only a few years after the United States had gained independence from Britain and when it still barely extended past the Appalachian Mountains, Thomas Jefferson wrote that "our Confederacy must be viewed as the nest from which all America, North and South, is to be peopled."² Similarly, after the United States acquired Florida from Spain in 1819, John Quincy Adams wrote that the world must be "familiarized with the idea of considering our proper dominion to be the continent of North America."³

Ironically, U.S. leaders identified Anglo American settlers like Walker as the primary agents of national expansion. Jefferson wrote that he looked forward to a time "when our rapid multiplication will expand itself" to "cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws."⁴ This view was particularly true of Texas, which, immediately following Mexican independence, expansionists identified as the next target for U.S. acquisition. As Henry Clay asked just months after Mexico declared itself independent, "[B]y what race shall Texas be peopled?" The Senator argued that Anglo American settlers would tame and moralize the province:

In our hands it will be peopled by freemen and the sons of freemen carrying with them our language, our laws, and our liberties; establishing on the prairies of Texas, temples dedicated to the simple and devout worship of God, incident to our religion, and temples dedicated to the freedom which we adore next to Him. In the hands of others it may become the habitation of despotism and of slaves, subject to the vile dominion of the inquisition and of superstition.⁵

But immigrants like Walker had little intention of serving as the forebears of Manifest Destiny, nor was it evident to them that the United States would emerge as the most geopolitically dominant nation in the Northwestern Hemisphere. While the United States had remained a marginal outpost of

2. Thomas Jefferson, qtd. in Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 86.

3. Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1874-77), vol. 4 of 12, 439; John Quincy Adams, qtd. in D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, vol. 2 of 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 211.

4. Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, vol. 2, 87.

5. Henry Clay qtd in Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 277.

the British Empire, New Spain enjoyed virtually unrivaled control of the continent. Though the United States doubled its size a quarter of a century after independence and gained control of North America's most important river network and port, the newly independent Mexican Empire remained the second largest nation in the Western Hemisphere—it encompassed two million square miles and spanned from present-day Costa Rica to Northern California. Strategically nestled between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, it possessed all manner of climate and topography, was rich in natural resources, and held a population three times larger than that of the United States at its founding.⁶ Furthermore, Mexico had inherited a long tradition of provincial autonomy from Spain, and as a republic it possessed the same commitment to federalism and localism that had once characterized the United States. Mexico's political system was therefore particularly appealing to U.S. immigrants like Walker.

Yet scholars have long considered early Mexican politics to be fatally flawed and ultimately responsible for the nation's disintegration. Indeed, historians have assumed that early immigrants to Mexican Texas were attracted to that country for its economic, rather than political, promise—namely its cheap land. Mexico was still a monarchy, after all, when Stephen F. Austin and his small colony of several hundred Anglo American families first settled there. The settlers were Mexican only in name, the story goes, and they would eventually play a crucial role in claiming the frontier from a degenerate nation, paving the way for a more democratic and functional one.⁷

6. Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, vol. 2, 129–32.

7. Henderson K. Yoakum, *The History of Texas: From Its First Settlement In 1685 to Its Annexation to the United States in 1846*, vol. 1 of 2 (New York: Redfield, 1856), 209. Henderson's view remained the dominant one until well into the twentieth century. See Eugene C. Barker, "Mexico and Texas: A Collision of Two Cultures," in *Mexico and Texas, 1821–1835: University of Texas Research Lectures on the Causes of the Texas Revolution* (Dallas: P. L. Turner Co., 1928), 1–5, 143–46. See also Eugene C. Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin, Founder of Texas, 1793–1836* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), chap. 16; T.R. Fehrenbach in *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2000), chap. 8. Early amateur historians of Texas in the nineteenth century included Mary Austin Holley, Chester Newell, and Frederic LeClerc. Their views were extended into academic and popular knowledge by professional twentieth-century scholars such as George P. Garrison, Walter Prescott Webb, J. Frank Dobie, Charles W. Ramsdell, and Eugene C. Baker. For an excellent synthesis of this first and earliest group of Texas historians who cited Mexican political, cultural, and moral inferiority as the primary cause for the Texas Revolution, see Laura Lyons McLemore in *Inventing Texas: Early Historians of the Lone Star State* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), chap. 2. For a synthesis and critique of Texas historiography until 1991, see Walter Louis Buenger and Robert A. Calvert, "Introduction," in *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1991), ix–xxxv.

Borderlands scholars have done much to advance our understanding of these early settlers. Most studies, including an excellent recent biography of Austin, now conclude that settlers demonstrated a flexible and pragmatic nationalism at a time of weakness for both Mexico and the United States.⁸ But these claims stop short of acknowledging the full power and appeal of early Mexico, and they ignore the extent to which Mexico's political system mirrored the most populist elements of U.S. politics at the time—specifically the desire for a weak federal government.⁹ Recent scholarship in the field of Native American history has done little to challenge longstanding assumptions of Mexican incompetence; rather, it confirms these assumptions by pointing to the role that powerful native groups played in hindering Mexican attempts at national consolidation and social cohesion.¹⁰ Such scholarship fails to acknowledge a profound political irony at the heart of U.S. westward expansion—that it had to do with Mexican political promise rather than failure. This conclusion forces us to reconsider Mexican power in the nineteenth century.

This article focuses on the first cohort of U.S. immigrants to Mexican Texas, those who settled before 1828, primarily under the stewardship of

8. Gregg Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin: Empresario of Texas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). For other examples of works that point to the inherent flexibility of early national identities along the U.S.-Mexico border, see David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier 1821–1846: The American Southwest Under Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800–1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Eric R. Schlereth, “Privileges of Locomotion: Expatriation and Politics of the Southwestern Border Crossing,” *Journal of American History* 100, no. 4 (March 2014): 999.

9. The one exception is Andrew R. L. Cayton, “Continental Politics: Liberalism, Nationalism, and the Appeal of Texas in the 1820s,” in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, eds. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 203–27, 305, 312. Andrew Cayton correctly observes that many U.S. émigrés to Mexico were motivated at least in part by fears of a powerful federal government in the United States that, by the 1820s, appeared to pose a threat to “the sanctity of patriarchal households and local autonomy.” Meanwhile, “localism and patriarchy were more entrenched in Mexico.” This article is in part an attempt to better understand the specific origin and nature of early Mexican politics, as well as the extent and source of its appeal to U.S. frontiersmen in the 1820s.

10. For more on the role of cotton in fueling U.S. westward expansion, see Andrew Torget, *Seeds of Empire: Cotton, Slavery, and the Transition of the Texas Borderlands, 1800–1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013). For Native American power in the Mexican North and its role in facilitating U.S. westward expansion, see Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), chap. 8; Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), introduction and chap. 4.

Austin. Although few in number compared to the thousands who arrived in the 1830s, early settlers' testaments of Mexican promise and appeal both inspired future waves of immigrants and convinced Mexican officials that Anglo colonization was beneficial to their nation's security and interest. I do not refute the claims of prior studies that Austin's words were often strategic. But these claims do not negate the possibility that Mexico nonetheless posed a viable political alternative to the United States, especially for disillusioned frontiersmen along its western border who had experience living under multiple imperial powers before the United States' acquisition of the trans-Appalachian West and demonstrated a preference for the very kind of political system that was emerging in Mexico. Thus, for many of these settlers, U.S. continental domination was far from a foregone conclusion. Mexico—not the United States—appeared poised to become “the greatest nation on earth.”

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As the scholar Jaime E. Rodríguez O. observes, “In contrast to the congratulatory nature of most writing on the emergence of the United States, historians appear diffident, almost embarrassed about the birth of Mexico.” Commonly referred to as the “unfortunate revolution,” Mexico's independence from Spain was long assumed to have ushered in a period of economic decline, social conflict, and political chaos that lasted for at least the next four decades. Scholars have often dismissed early Mexico's political structures and institutions as inherently flawed and insufficiently revolutionary.¹¹ Yet it was precisely these structures and institutions, many of them inherited directly from Mexico's colonial past, that attracted Austin, Walker, and other members of the first wave of settlers from the United States.

In fact, Mexico was not yet independent from Spain when Moses Austin, father of Steven F. Austin, initially sought permission to settle its far northern province of T^ejas in December 1820. Moses Austin specifically cited the Spanish political system as the reason for his decision to relocate when he was summoned before Colonel Don Antonio Mart^ínez, the governor of the Province of Coahuila y T^ejas.¹² According to Mart^ínez's report, the elder

11. Jaime E. Rodríguez O., “Introduction,” in *The Evolution of the Mexican Political System* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 1, 4. For more on the changing historiography of early Mexico, see Timothy E. Anna, *Forging Mexico, 1821–1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), chap. 1.

12. “Examination of Moses Austin,” December 23, 1820, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924, 1928), 370–71.

Austin claimed that he “came to this province for the purpose of applying to the Government for authorization to settle himself in it with his family.” When asked why he had not applied sooner, having obtained a Spanish passport in 1797, he answered:

That, since the year above mentioned, he went to reside at Saint Louis (Missouri) which territory belonged, then to Spain; he had there lead mines, the produce of which he exported to Havana, until the year 1800, when the American Government[,] having prohibited the working of mines by private enterprise, he lost all the benefit of his labor.

Not only did Austin have experience living under the Spanish Empire, but also did he specifically cite the Spanish political system as the primary impulse behind his decision to immigrate. “[B]ut now, in view of the new system of Government adopted by Spain,” Austin continued, he “resolved upon applying for authorization to settle this province.”¹³ The Spanish political system remained as an attraction to Austin even after Mexican independence, as the nation decided to preserve, rather than discard, most of its colonial institutions. But what was this system of government, and why did some frontier Anglo Americans seem to prefer it to that of the United States?

Before 1812, the Spanish monarchy comprised a series of kingdoms and provinces united only in their direct relationship to the king.¹⁴ This long tradition of provincial power and autonomy was reinforced with Napoleon Bonaparte’s 1808 peninsular invasion and capture of the Spanish king, Fernando VII. In reaction to the event, provinces throughout Spain independently began forming their own governing juntas in accordance with Spanish law which stipulated that, in the absence of the monarch, political power transferred to the people in the form of their corporate entities. Each province then elected deputies to represent them in a newly formed Cortes, or assembly, that met in the southern Spanish town of Cádiz. In an act that elevated Spanish Americans to an almost equal status with their *peninsular* counterparts, the Cortes invited each of the American provinces to elect their own deputies to the Central Junta based on a ratio of one deputy per one hundred white male inhabitants.¹⁵

13. *Ibid.*, 379.

14. Sergio Ortega Noriega, “Hacia la regionalización de la historia de México,” *Estudios de la historia moderna y contemporánea de México*, 8 (1980): 9–21; Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 34–42.

15. Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75–82.

The process of forming a new government based on regional sovereignty prompted a number of questions regarding Spain's relationship with the Americas. Soon after the Cortes opened, the American deputies issued a series of demands for greater representation and local autonomy. Their chief advocate was Dr. Miguel Ramos Arizpe, sole representative of the Eastern Interior Provinces, a recently designated administrative unit that included T^éjas, Coahuila, Nuevo Le^ón, and Nuevo Santander. In his appeal for greater regional representation, Arizpe described his region as having long suffered under administrative neglect, incompetence, and over-consolidation as a result of its relative remoteness "from the center of higher government." Specifically, Arizpe cited the absence of "governing bodies engaged in the administration of justice and the supervision of the political economy." Instead, he argued, the provinces were controlled by "arbitrary" governors—many of them military men—who enjoyed protection "from any responsibility whatever for their actions." Such a system, Arizpe insisted, fostered "despotism" and violated the empire's principles of limited and constitutional monarchy. As a remedy, Arizpe called for the establishment in each province of an "*executive council* or a *provincial deputation* to have charge of the government of its community." These deputations would be composed of men elected from the community itself, each enjoying a direct relationship with the monarch. This approach, Arizpe insisted, was consistent with the principles of the monarchy and indeed formed the very basis of the Cortes themselves. At the core of this system of government rested the principles of local autonomy and popular democracy—principles that were then sweeping the Atlantic. "Each community is an association of freemen who are united[,] not to be despotically commanded by the strongest," declared Arizpe, "but by one or more prudent men, capable of being fathers of the republic."¹⁶

American demands resulted in a fundamental restructuring of the Spanish Empire and contributed significantly to a new constitution established on the principles of regional sovereignty, representative government, and free enterprise. The Cádiz Constitution of 1812 limited the monarchy, abolished vice-royalties, and extended citizenship to all men except those of African descent. Finally, it dramatically decentralized power by creating provincial deputations

16. Miguel Ramos Arizpe, *Report to the August Congress on the Natural, Political, and Civil Condition of the Provinces of Coahuila, Nuevo Le^ón, Nuevo Santander, and Texas of the Four Eastern Interior Provinces of the Kingdom of Mexico*, trans. Nettie Lee Benson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1950), 28, 30, 37–38.

consisting of locally elected members.¹⁷ Rather than constituting a dramatic break with the imperial past, the Constitution allowed Mexicans to look to the imperial Spanish legacy during the move toward independence, first as a monarchy and later as a republic.¹⁸

Indeed, while historians have long argued that ideas of popular and regional sovereignty that emerged in Spanish America in the years leading up to independence came from France or the Anglo world, more recent studies argue that these ideas derived from a specifically Hispanic political tradition. Mexico's "impulse to provincehood," as the historian Timothy Anna has termed it, was perhaps its most marked feature and one borrowed directly from its colonial past.¹⁹

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Moses Austin was not the first U.S. émigré to Spanish territory, nor was this his first interaction with the Spanish Crown. Throughout the late eighteenth century, the Lower Mississippi Valley, where Austin and his family resided for nearly twenty-five years before arriving in Texas, was characterized by fluid borders, "multiple frontiers," and overlapping colonial systems. According to the historian Stephen Aron, "At one time or another and sometimes at the same time in the last half of the eighteenth century [the region] played host to each of North America's major colonial powers: France, Spain, England

17. Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*, 84–94.

18. This view has been dominant among scholars of Latin American independence since at least the late 1990s. Timothy E. Anna writes that "the principle of a pact amongst the states forming the origin of nationhood, although apparently similar to the formula of federalism adopted earlier in the United States, was an autochthonous product of Mexican and Hispanic thought. Early Mexican federalists, however, found support and justification for their concepts in the writings of Montesquieu and of the United States federalists." see Anna, "Disintegration is in the Eye of the Beholder: Mexican Federalism and Early Nationhood, 1821–1835," in *Independence and Revolution in Spanish America: Perspectives and Problems*, ed. Anthony McFarlane and Eduardo Posada-Carbó (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1999), 188. Similarly, Jaime E. Rodríguez O. has written that "the independence of Spanish America did not constitute an anticolonial movement, as many assert, but formed part of both the *revolution* within the Spanish world and the *dissolution* of the Spanish Monarchy." Rodríguez asserts that the political system and the impulse toward provincial autonomy came from the Spanish imperial reforms of the 1810s that resulted in the Cádiz Constitution. See Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*, introduction and chap. 3. This interpretation departs from earlier scholarship such as that by J. Lloyd Meacham, who asserts that Mexican independence and federalism were modeled after the United States and denies the significance of the Cádiz Constitution as a potentially revolutionary document related to Mexican federalism. See J. Lloyd Meacham, "The Origins of Federalism in Mexico," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 8, no. 2 (May 1938): 164–82.

19. Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 34.

and the United States.”²⁰ Some of these jurisdictions offered significantly different political and economic systems, especially when it came to land distribution. Borderlands residents took advantage of imperial competition—they capitalized upon rival empires’ need to populate and settle vulnerable regions to secure optimal conditions for themselves.

Before settling in Texas, the Austins had established a mining operation at Mine à Breton on the western side of the Missouri where they enjoyed a virtual monopoly on the lead-mining industry during the brief time that Spain held claim to the territory. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, however, the Spanish transferred jurisdiction to the French, who ultimately transferred it to the United States. During this time the British and Spanish influence in the Missouri Territory all but disappeared in the face of an onslaught of U.S. settlers. Initially, the U.S. government proved reluctant to shift its military and administrative presence to the western theater, prompting frequent complaints from frontier residents about the republic’s indifference. Though this changed by the end of the decade, it was not necessarily to the benefit of pre-existing settlers like the Austins.²¹

Historians are now beginning to acknowledge the role that federal intervention played in developing the trans-Appalachian West. As the historian William Bergmann has observed, intervention proved essential in protecting settlers and fueling local infrastructure through deployment of “fiscal and military powers granted to it . . . to transform the early western economy through land acquisitions, infrastructure, commerce, and communication.”²² The federal government’s increased presence in the West was accompanied by a series of reforms designed to develop, modernize, and integrate the region’s economy with the eastern market.²³

But while the increasing presence of the U.S. government certainly had its benefits, it did not come without formidable costs. For one, the new system clearly deviated from the principles of agrarianism and localism that had characterized the region for decades, and pre-existing settlers such as the Austins no longer enjoyed the privilege they had held under earlier

20. Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), x, xviii.

21. *Ibid.*, chap. 5.

22. William H. Bergmann, *The American National State and the Early West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

23. Aron, *How the West Was Lost: The Transformation of Kentucky From Daniel Boone to Henry Clay* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), chap. 4.

jurisdictions.²⁴ Indeed, throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, localism and federal intervention existed in an uneasy marriage on the frontier. While federal backing for agriculture and industry certainly aided merchants, manufacturers, and settlers, and helped to bring intra-regional trade and commerce to the West, it also fueled speculation, corruption, and, ultimately, landlessness for thousands of frontier residents. Federal incorporation, of which Austin complained in his testimony to Governor Martínez, was one of the most controversial reforms. It allowed the federal government to heavily supplement the funding of private enterprises such as canals, roads, and mines in exchange for the opportunity to use them for government purposes. While such a system facilitated otherwise risky or impossible projects, skeptics argued that it favored insiders.²⁵

The situation fueled a longstanding suspicion of the federal government's supposed consolidationist tendency. Anti-Federalists may have technically lost many of their nation's early constitutional debates, but their suspicion of centralized authority and criticism of the Constitution for its perceived infringement on states' rights persisted well into the nineteenth century, where it found expression in the Democratic-Republican Party.²⁶

In the western United States, from which the majority of early immigrants to Mexico came, antagonism towards centralization emerged most stridently in the 1790s when Alexander Hamilton unleashed an aggressive economic agenda designed to consolidate and develop the young republic.²⁷ Part of this plan involved the establishment of a national bank that promised to stabilize the new economy, attract the support of wealthy creditors, and stimulate economic growth through lending.

The First Bank of the United States, however, received heavy criticism from Jefferson and others who accused it of usurping the power of the states.²⁸ In the West, the First Bank facilitated land purchases while

24. Ibid., *American Confluence*, 185.

25. Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), 68.

26. Saul Cornell, "Introduction," in *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788–1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Ibid., 11, 29. According to Saul Cornell, elements of the Anti-Federalist critique included the need for a Bill of Rights, the charge of "aristocracy" and exclusion among the nation's leaders, concerns about taxation, and anxiety over a standing army.

27. Ibid., 174.

28. For a discussion of the First Bank and the controversy surrounding it, see Edward S. Kaplan, *The Bank of the United States and the American Economy* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1999), chap. 2. The primary mouthpiece for this sentiment was John Taylor, who criticized what he deemed

simultaneously opening the door to speculation by failing to regulate purchases or adjudicate competing land claims. This laxity often allowed individuals to purchase and hold large tracts of land without living there, thereby depriving other less wealthy settlers. Such practices were especially prevalent in places like Kentucky and Tennessee.²⁹

Meanwhile, the U.S. federal government's increasing reach into commerce, trade, law and infrastructure prompted fears that such measures "would stimulate commercial interests unduly, undermine agriculture, centralize power, and violate the Constitution." Many even feared that it would destroy state and local authority all together.³⁰ Nothing, however, ignited criticism of the Federalist reforms more than the collapse of the federal banking system in 1819. Rather than regulating the lending practices of its state branches as the First Bank had, the Second Bank initially permitted state banks to issue notes in excess of their specie. When the Second Bank then attempted to stabilize the economy by calling on state banks to repay their debts, it forced many who had previously enjoyed a policy of near unlimited lending into bankruptcy and foreclosure.³¹

The contraction was worse in the West where lending had been the most liberal. There, the Panic of 1819 took hold earlier and lasted longer than anywhere else in the country. As one legislator put it, "All the flourishing cities of the West are mortgaged to this money power . . . They are in the jaws of the monster! A lump of butter in the mouth of a dog! One gulp, one swallow, and all is gone!"³² The unfortunate turn of events reinforced the sense that moneyed elites had effectively usurped, centralized, and corrupted the federal government, and that the poorest and furthest from the seats of

an unholy alliance between the legislature and a "powerful faction" of banking interests. Taylor claimed they had "no interest and feel but little concern, in all those questions of fiscal policy which particularly affect the land-holder, the merchant and the artist." Instead, this group had redirected the government toward "principles dangerous to the rights and interests of the community" and designed to serve their own interests. According to Taylor, a group of "monarchic speculators" had seized upon the government's legislative functions and "by virtue of this combination [of governing and banking interests] all regard for their constituents has been abandoned." See John Taylor, "Examination of the Late Proceedings in Congress, Respecting the Official Conduct of the Secretary of the Treasury," (Richmond: Samuel Pleasants and Co., 1793), 7, 11–12, 27.

29. Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 82–83.

30. Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 62.

31. Kaplan, *The Bank of the United States and the American Economy*, chaps. 4 and 5; Aron, *How the West Was Lost*, 192. Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Conmen, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 105.

32. Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 39.

economic and federal power were the losers. The sense of betrayal was palpable. By 1824, men like John C. Calhoun warned of a “general mass of disaffection to the government, not concentrated in any particular direction, but ready to seize upon any event and looking out anywhere for a leader.”³³

Moses and Stephen Austin experienced the devastating effects of the Panic first hand. By March 1819, the Bank of St. Louis, which Stephen had helped to establish, filed a credit claim for \$9,000—most likely in response to the sudden demand for payment by the Bank of the United States. Moses assumed responsibility for the debt, but no sooner had he done so than the struggling bank demanded he repay \$15,000 that he had borrowed earlier against the Mine à Breton property. By now, the only thing that kept the Austin family from complete financial ruin was a \$9,000 investment in Arkansas that Stephen had made entirely on credit, making himself even more vulnerable to the pending national economic collapse. When the Panic finally reached Missouri by the fall of 1819, Moses and his son became the targets of numerous creditors who had won civil judgments in Missouri, and the Austins began losing property to foreclosure. Additionally, Moses struggled to sell the Mine à Breton property, which he had mortgaged to the now-insolvent Bank of St. Louis.³⁴

Despite the fact that the events of 1819 and 1820 were in many ways the result of the central government’s attempt to correct the reckless lending practices of state banks, they contributed to a renewed skepticism of the federal government’s power and influence. Nationwide but especially in the West, many people began to express the belief that the central government’s growing influence had wrought more devastation than gain, particularly in economic matters. The Panic, however complicated its causes, lent credibility to the earlier claim that the national banks and other such reforms threatened the political rights as well as the economic well-being of the national community. Not only had it concentrated wealth in the hands of a few distant lenders rather than harmonizing and increasing the wealth of the entire community, but also had it replaced the locally oriented public sphere with a powerful central government that held economic sway over its citizens, thereby undermining popular democracy itself.³⁵

33. John C. Calhoun, qtd. in Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 172.

34. Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin*, 69.

35. Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 172–79.

While for most Americans the events of 1819 and 1820 would reignite an agrarian anti-federalism that coalesced around the philosophy of states' rights, for still others the transformation called into question the very viability of their young republic. Moses Austin expressed the latter view in a formal address to the citizens of Jefferson County shortly after the County Sheriff had besieged his home in pursuance of a debt. As he declared, "When our rights are invaded it is of no consequence to the Citizen or Subject whether it comes by the hand of an Emperor King or Demon in office under Republic. [T]hey are alike destructive of all security to person and property."³⁶ Men like Austin believed they could no longer rely on their government's guarantee of "civil and religious liberties," nor on the political autonomy and protection of local authority. Austin perceived what many had warned would happen—that government corruption was so entrenched and pervasive that it extended all the way to the sheriff's office. So disillusioned was Austin with the turn of events in the United States that he was prepared to renounce the country of his birth: "[A]s I am, ruined in this [country], I found nothing I could do would bring back my property again, and to remain in a Country where I had enjoyed *wealth* in a state of *poverty* I could not submit."³⁷

But Moses Austin may not have been so willing to renounce his country if things had not looked more promising further south. Like many living on the frontier, he had followed the events surrounding the Mexican independence movement since its inception in 1810. According to Stephen, Moses first proposed the idea of forming a colony in Texas in 1819 following the signing of the Adams-Onís Treaty, which confirmed Spain's possession of Texas and helped to pave the way for the authorization of Spanish land grants in the region.³⁸ In February 1820, Moses requested a copy of the passport that Spanish authorities had issued him in 1797. With passport in hand, the fifty-eight-year-old Moses set off for Texas with nothing more than fifty dollars, a horse, a mule, and a slave named Richmond. They were all borrowed.³⁹

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36. Moses Austin to the Citizens of Jefferson County, 10 January 1820, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 352–53.

37. Moses Austin to J.E.B. Austin, 8 April 1821, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 385.

38. Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin*, 73–74.

39. *Ibid.*, 77.

Austin was not the first *norteamericano* to attempt to establish himself in Spanish Texas. Indeed, throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Indians, Anglo American colonists, and Hispanic residents formed extensive networks and communities through land, commerce, politics, and marriage. While Spanish officials feared that the Anglo presence would compromise their hold on the northern frontier, the region's inhabitants welcomed, and often formed close personal connections with, *norteamericanos* who offered valuable goods and skills. As the century progressed, they began to look to Anglo Americans as the answer to developing, enriching, and protecting their struggling and underpopulated province.⁴⁰

Texan officials began arguing that increased settlement and a strong militia were required to establish territorial integrity in the 1810s when exclusion policies were at their zenith as a result of rumored territorial aggression on the part of the United States and Napoleon. “[A]ll indicates a very considerable upturning if this Province is not attended to,” wrote Nemesio Salcedo, the Commander General of the Internal Provinces, in June of 1812. “[H]ow the cares and troubles of this Province daily increase,” he bemoaned, predicting “that their continued succession will alone show the evidence of their reality.”⁴¹ Increased population, he and others insisted, were the only remedy. The senior commandant general at Nacogdoches expressed confidence that men of means would settle the region “for the advantage of finding a good sale for their produce and grains, provided they find themselves protected properly.” But settlement was not possible, he insisted, without an aggressive and relentless war against hostile Indians—namely the Comanche, who had been raiding ranches and settlements in the North since the mid-eighteenth century, forming perhaps the greatest obstacle to the Spanish presence there.⁴² For the next decade, frontier leaders would skirt Spanish restrictions by permitting foreigners, many of whom they had come to know and trust over extended commercial and personal interaction, to establish themselves illegally along the western frontier. They would continue to carry on a clandestine trade with Louisiana as well.⁴³

40. Reséndez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier*, 56–57.

41. Nemesio Salcedo, 26 June 1812, Folder 227, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library and Archive, San Antonio.

42. Manuel Sambrano to the Commanding General, 4 September 1813, Folder 228, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Library and Archive, San Antonio.

43. Mattie Lee Hatcher, “Chapter 3: Establishment of Villas and Difference Over Management of Villas, 1806–07,” “The Opening of Texas to Foreign Settlement, 1801–1822,” *University of Texas Bulletin*, 2714 (April 8, 1927): 102–26.

In the fall of 1820, revolution in Spain necessitated the reestablishment of the Cortes which, among other things, called for local leaders to issue a report on vacant lands and asked for their ideas about how best to distribute them. In response, the new government agreed to offer asylum to all foreigners, whether legally or illegally residing in parish dominions, if they promised to respect the new constitution and laws. The new government also adopted a more liberal immigration policy that invited foreigners to settle in small communities along the northern frontier if they promised to help develop the region and contribute to the government's efforts to combat Indian hostilities. This *empresario* system is precisely what allowed the Austins to establish their colony of three hundred families along the Brazos.⁴⁴ After years of watching the region struggle in the face of Indian incursions, Governor Martínez concluded that Moses Austin was "a man of honesty and formality." He concluded that Austin's proposal was the only arrangement "bound to provide for the increase and prosperity of this province."⁴⁵

Yet Stephen initially had little intention of joining his father in Mexico. Instead, he fled to New Orleans and tried to rebuild his fortune there. But in the summer of 1821, he received news that his father had passed away shortly after returning from a brief trip to Texas. Before his death, however, Moses had managed to secure a land grant to settle three hundred U.S. families along the Brazos, and his last wish was that his son "go on in the business in the same way he would have done had not sickness and oh dreadful to think of perhaps death not prevented him from accomplishing."⁴⁶ Stephen could not ignore his father's dying wish, and that fall he departed for Natchitoches to take claim of the lands that Moses had applied for and received from the Spanish Crown. Determined to fulfill his father's request, Stephen quickly began recruiting colonists.⁴⁷

Despite his initial reluctance to emigrate, the younger Austin appeared pleasantly surprised by what he encountered in Texas where a less imposing and restrictive government meant greater economic prosperity and promise for ambitious immigrants such as himself. As he explained in a letter to prospective settlers intended for publication in the *Arkansas Gazette*:

44. Ibid., "Chapter 4: Final Preparations for a Successful Colony," 278–86.

45. Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin*, 85–86.

46. Moses Austin to J.E.B. Austin, 8 April 1821, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 385.

47. Cantrell, *Stephen F. Austin*, 77–79, 88–91, 98–100.

The Constitution of Spain is in full operation at those provinces and recent accounts state that the beneficial effects of it are already perceptible. The gold and silver mines are getting into more extensive operation than they have for many years. Money is becoming more abundant, a free trade is permitted, and the restrictive system heretofore pursued in regard to foreigners has been superceded by the most liberal encouragement.⁴⁸

Indeed, Stephen envisioned Texas as a place where not just he, but also thousands of other disillusioned American agrarians like him could start over. “Should you yet meet with any Farmers of good character or mechanics, who wish to emigrate to this fine country and participate in the advantages secured to my father by this grant you will oblige them,” he wrote to his cousin James.⁴⁹ New Spain promised rich resources and made it possible for immigrants to benefit from them, and to start their lives over again, in a country where they would not be disadvantaged by a system that seemed committed to serving the interests of a few at the expense of the many.

What the Austins never acknowledged in any of their writings was that the Spanish Empire was in fact on its last legs. The formation of local governing juntas in the Americas paved the way for increased democratization and, eventually, independence. The creation of provincial deputations in accordance with the Cádiz Constitution consummated a pre-existing “sense of provincehood.”⁵⁰

But many conservatives and royalists feared what this might render if carried to its logical conclusion, as had nearly occurred in 1810 when a group of mostly indigenous peasants led by Father Miguel Hidalgo declared independence from Spain. Originating in northern Mexico, a seedbed of radical provincialism, the Hidalgo Revolt began as a call for greater provincial autonomy and quickly turned into a violent demand for independence by the lower classes that carried echoes of the Haitian Revolution.⁵¹ The rebellion was crushed with the aid of Spanish reinforcements, but the autonomist spirit that sparked it was not.⁵²

48. Stephen F. Austin (SFA), 1 July 1821, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 399.

49. SFA to James E.B. Austin, 1 January 1823, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 566.

50. Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 57–58.

51. John Tutino argues that the Hidalgo Revolt was the result agrarian discontent, namely the growing threat to subsistence-based peasant economies. See John Tutino, *From Insurrection to Revolution in Mexico: Social Bases of Agrarian Violence, 1750–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 31. Stanley C. Green seems to concur, writing that the Hidalgo Revolt was largely “lower-class in composition and anti-European in tone” in *The Mexican Republic: The First Decade, 1823–1832* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1987), 7.

52. Rodríguez, *The Independence of Spanish America*, 159–68.

Thus, when Fernando VII returned to the throne in 1820, many hoped for an arrangement that would entail greater political representation while still honoring the legitimacy of the Crown. But this was not to be. Instead, Fernando attempted to turn back the clock on Spanish political reform by re-implementing monarchical absolutism. He not only abolished the beloved Cádiz Constitution, but also vigorously prosecuted liberal constitutionalists throughout the empire, brought back the Inquisition, and appeared to make every effort to reverse the reforms made during his absence. Many in Spain and the Americas struggled to figure out how to restore a constitutional government under the new monarchy. Northern New Spain again became a revolutionary flashpoint when a group of Spanish liberals, aided by a handful of creole, British, and U.S. supporters, attempted to stage a constitutionalist insurrection there that they hoped would extend throughout the rest of the empire. The expedition failed and its leaders were eventually executed, but the constitutionalist impulse did not die as the provinces took advantage of such unrest to reassert their authority under the Cádiz Constitution.⁵³

By 1820 there was a renewed desire for autonomy. This desire was particularly evident in New Spain, which had long been the site of some of the most vehement autonomist sentiment and activism. Cities like Mérida and Veracruz were among the first to reinstate the Constitution and call for elections. Jaime Rodríguez O. observes that political activity was the most intense in North America where nearly all adult males were eligible to vote regardless of literacy or property-owning status. Elections for virtually every type of municipal, provincial, and imperial post throughout New Spain were held in late autumn and winter of 1820 as Moses Austin was applying for land grants in Texas.⁵⁴

Similar activity occurred in other parts of the empire, but to a far lesser degree because of ongoing social violence; so when the Cortes convened in mid-1820, the North American contingents dominated. They dutifully pushed what they referred to as the “American Question,” demanding that provincial deputations be established in every intendency in the New World in an attempt to equalize representation for the Americans. The Mexican deputies also proposed the creation of three separate American monarchies—in Mexico City, Bogotá, and Lima—each with its own prince appointed directly

53. Ibid., 192–94.

54. Rodríguez estimates that over one-thousand elections for *ayuntamientos* occurred during this time. See *ibid.*, 194–97; Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 66.

by Ferdinand himself. But the Cortes never took any further action and the proposal lay dormant.⁵⁵

Sensing that the degree of autonomy to which it aspired might not be possible under the current regime, the independence movement in New Spain began to pick up steam again. In February 1821 a former royalist officer, Colonel Agustín de Iturbide, drafted a proposal that combined New Spain's desire for an autonomous regency with the Cádiz Constitution. Although the *Plan de Iguala* was intended as a compromise that left open the possibility of reconciliation with the Crown, the cause of independence was rapidly gaining support even among disillusioned royalist American officers, including Anastasio Bustamante and Antonio López de Santa Ana, both of whom would later serve as president of Mexico.⁵⁶

The Plan de Iguala declared New Spain to be “a sovereign and independent nation” with a representative constitutional monarchy. Scholars have observed that the Plan's success rested chiefly in its conservatism. It protected the *peninsulares* and royalists from reprisals, affirmed the primacy of the Church and military, and declared Roman Catholicism as the new nation's official religion. In doing so, it was able to accomplish what earlier revolts like that of Hidalgo had not done—unite Mexicans of vastly different interests behind independence.⁵⁷

But the real key to the Plan's success was its affirmation of regional autonomy. Unlike the United States, Mexico entered independence as a collection of provinces. Herein lies the explanation for why Mexicans preferred the term “empire” rather than “nation.” Instead of a singular union, the new nation was, according to Timothy Anna, “an aggregation of provinces, some central and well integrated, some peripheral and scarcely populated,” and all of which had the right to join and leave the empire of their own volition. In this sense, Spanish Americans rejected the French idea of nation and instead embraced a “contractual conception of sovereignty that was fundamentally different from the emerging European idea of sovereignty based on nationhood.” Mexico's independence therefore represented a less dramatic break with Spain and involved less internal violence and class conflict as the pre-existing institutions, interests, and

55. *Ibid.*, 67–68, 194–204.

56. *Ibid.*, 205–8.

57. Rodríguez, “The Constitution of 1824 and the Formation of the Mexican State,” in Rodríguez, ed. *The Evolution of the Mexican Political State*, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1993), 85; *Ibid.* 69, 79, 81–82.

social order were preserved. Even the impulse to provincehood was an affirmation of Spanish imperial constitutionalism.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, just across the border, newspapers in places like Arkansas and Missouri expressed awe and admiration at Mexico's ability to achieve independence without violence. "Not a man has suffered persecution or privation of property in this revolution," reported the *Arkansas Gazette*, "and the traveler now passes in perfect security thro' all parts of the country under the authority of the patriot government."⁵⁹ Welcoming the young nation to the "great family of the new world" the *Gazette* declared of Mexico a "most extraordinary revolution, affected without bloodshed."⁶⁰ The paper praised revolutionary founders for managing to achieve "equality of rights for all persons, Indians, Mulattos, and Negroes, as well as whites," celebrating their remarkable ability to accomplish a revolution that "united all interests, and promised to all; to the soldiery promotion, to the priests their authority over souls, to the titles their titled, to the merchants commerce to the planter commerce, and to the various classes of laborers, liberty, all were consulted and, named and respected, and all interests were reconciled."⁶¹

Regarding the form of government that such conciliation had rendered, the *St. Louis Enquirer* lamented that "the condition of the country, and the inhabitants is probably such, as to have rendered it expedient to adopt a monarchical form of government." However, the paper warned its audience of the dangers that too rapid a transition to a republic could entail, reminding them of what happened when "a more enlightened people"—the French—"ran in their rapid transition from despotism to a republic, and the short duration of their licentious freedom." The paper praised Mexico's "gradual regeneration" as evidence of "a cautious and enlightened policy" informed more by a fear of "aiming at too much to defeat all, than any hostility to a republican form of government." As for Iturbide himself, whom Congress later claimed to have been reluctantly elected president after a series of raucous street protests, the new leader garnered mostly effusive praise from the *Gazette* and the *Enquirer*, both of which were published in places that had once been a part of the Spanish Empire.⁶² Claiming to rely on a source who knew Iturbide personally, the *Enquirer* declared him to be

58. Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 65, 85, 87.

59. *Arkansas Gazette*, 25 August 1821.

60. *Ibid.*, 26 February 1822.

61. *Ibid.*, 9 October 1822.

62. Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 94.

“of the highest encomium,” possessing “moderation, disinterestedness, and heroism.”⁶³

Stephen Austin himself remained undeterred by his adopted country’s chosen form of government. “You must not be frightened at the name of the Imperial Government,” he wrote to his cousin. “You like myself have lived under a Monarchy, when Louisiana belonged to Spain and I think we lived as happy then as under the government of the United States.” This is not to say that Austin viewed imperial monarchy as a superior form of government. He simply saw it as the best form of government for Mexico at that time and one that he himself could live under quite happily. What he could not live under, however, was the system of government that had recently emerged in the United States of the North. “A Central Republic is the worst Gov’t in the world,” he wrote, “for all the power will be in the hands of a few men in Mexico and instead of a Republic it will in effect be an aristocracy which is worse than a monarchy, for in it we shall have 100 Tyrants instead of one.”⁶⁴ Here we see perhaps the strongest evidence of Austin’s hostility to a system he and others believed was taking hold in the United States. For Austin and others like him, newly independent Mexico offered an appealing alternative to the nation of their birth. Although a monarchy, Mexico was a nation founded upon the very principle of decentralized authority.

Yet, while Austin may not have minded monarchy and adamantly opposed a “Central Republic,” his clear preference was for a very particular form of republicanism. “I do not wish to take an active part in politics,” he wrote, “but if I can do anything in favor of the confederate system I will do so with pleasure.”⁶⁵ Despite his attested support for the Spanish and later Mexican Empire, the most ideal form of government in Austin’s mind was one established on the principles of local autonomy and regional sovereignty. That said, Austin was fully prepared to accept Mexico as it was and content to stand on the sidelines while its leaders worked out the kinks of their new nation.

Indeed, Austin did not have to look far to find thousands of willing immigrants among disillusioned and beleaguered Americans, especially those from the South and the West. “There are hundreds on the way and *thousands*

63. *St. Louis Enquirer*, 13 April 1822.

64. SFA to J.E.B. Austin, 20 May 1823, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 644.

65. *Ibid.*

ready to go if one word of encouragement could now be had from you,” wrote James Hawkins, Austin’s friend and former business partner from New Orleans, just months after Mexico had gained its independence from Spain. Many of the people to whom Hawkins referred had by now lost almost all interest in the nation of their birth. “You and your Colony excite more interest than the assembled sages of the nation,” wrote Hawkins.⁶⁶

These people did not speak from ignorance. Many had first-hand knowledge of life under the Spanish Crown and, given the present state of circumstances, did not mind returning to a similar system. “It has become a subject of considerable interest in this section of Missouri,” wrote Daniel Draper of Lincoln in December 1821. “All those who once experienced the gratuity of the Spanish Government (a thing I never have done) speaks, generally, in favor of it with a few exceptions of social inconveniences.”⁶⁷ Indeed, the Austin family had little reason to doubt that their colony would soon be full of former U.S. citizens. “I can assure you that a great Number of Families will move from this State, and from other States,” wrote Austin’s brother-in-law, James Bryan. “I have no doubt that the Colony will be filled up in twelve months.”⁶⁸

Immigrants who planned to settle permanently expressed a greater interest in the political climate of the country. “If you have found a good Constitution and the Government is settled I am clearly of the Opinion that no section of Territory has ever settled so rapidly as the Texas Colony, or the Austin Colony,” Austin’s cousin wrote in April 1822.⁶⁹ Most American immigrants seem to have shared Austin’s opinion regarding the Mexican political system. While perhaps not ideal, it was not bad either, and certainly an improvement over what many perceived as the failed republic of the North. “Yes I am not pleased with the form of government, it is a limited monarchy; but as Mexico has not bought her independence at the expense of much blood, it is perhaps better that the change should be gradual,” wrote William Walker to his father in August 1822. “I think the policy of Mexico at this time, is practically good.”⁷⁰ American-style democracy, after all, was still

66. Joseph H. Hawkins to SFA, 6 February 1822; *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 476–78.

67. Daniel Dunklin to SFA, 25 December 1821; *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 455. For more on U.S. immigrants to Spanish imperial domains of West Florida and Louisiana, see Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785–1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

68. James Bryan to SFA, 4 March 1822; *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 481.

69. *Ibid.*

70. William Walker, 27 August 1822, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, Folder 168, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Archives, San Antonio.

being tested and did not look very appealing to those furthest from the center of political and economic power. Above all, Mexico had promise. “The nation possesses great resources, and its vast and successful effort for independence combined with the general harmony which at this time prevails, furnish, I think, sure pledges of future greatness and prosperity,” wrote Austin.⁷¹

News of Mexico’s natural wealth, impressive topography, and remarkable beauty filled western newspapers as much as reports on the recent revolution. The *Arkansas Gazette* reported that “the fertility of [Mexican] soil is astonishing, and the fields are covered with harvests which exceed in their produce, by twenty fold, the corn fields of Europe.” The paper claimed that Mexico produced twice the wheat of the United States and “in any actual dearth” could feed the whole population of Great Britain.⁷² “The *St. Louis Enquirer* called Mexico’s capital “one of the finest cities built by Europeans in either hemisphere. There does not exist a city equal to Mexico for the elegance, regularity and breadth of the streets.” According to the paper, Mexico’s market presented “a plane of immense commerce, and the shops display a profusion of gold, and silver, and jewels.” The paper referenced the claims of the Prussian explorer Freidrich von Humbolt, who declared that Mexico’s “majesty” surpassed that of Lima, Philadelphia, Rome, Paris, and Naples. Such praise was not unmerited; the nation’s three-hundred-year old capital, Mexico City, had been built on top of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán, established two hundred years earlier, and was home to 120,000 inhabitants. It had served as the political, commercial, and administrative center of the Spanish Empire and capital of New Spain. It was impressive not only for its wide, brilliantly illuminated streets and remarkable architecture—perhaps best exemplified by its imposing presidential palace—but also for its strategic placement on an isthmus with ready access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. All of this seemed to make Mexico “destined to possess a powerful influence over the events which agitate the two continents.”⁷³ Even the soon-to-be U.S. consul to Mexico, James Smith Wilcocks, declared that “we may from this instant consider North America, with the exception of Canada, as divided into two grand and important commonwealths.” Assuring his correspondent, John Quincy Adams, that the Mexican monarchy was “established

71. SFA to Hawkins, 1 May 1822, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 505.

72. *Arkansas Gazette*, October 9, 1822.

73. *St. Louis Enquirer*, August 19, 1822.

on a sure and solid foundation,” Wilcocks predicted that the two countries would cooperate to “give the law to the opposite continent.”⁷⁴

Not even Mexico’s established religion significantly deterred prospective immigrants. To the extent that Austin himself may have had reservations regarding Mexico’s church, he almost never expressed them and he was unequivocal about making sure that other colonists understood that Mexican citizenship meant at least formal adoption of the Catholic faith. “I wish the settlers to remember that the Roman catholic is the religion of this nation,” he wrote. “We must all be particular on this subject and respect the Catholic religion with all that attention due to its sacredness and to the laws of the land.”⁷⁵

Some immigrants actually preferred Mexico’s religious strictures. In a letter addressed to his uncle in the United States, Ira Ingram, a member of Austin’s colony, declared that Mexico’s established religion,

Exempts us entirely from the shameless strife and animosities, too often the offspring of a well meant zeal for the cause of true religion, and invariably the handmaid of intolerant fanaticism. We hear no ravings and see no rompings of indecorious and indecent exhibitions under the cloak of religious assemblage, either by night or by day, no santuaries or pathetic by unholy intention and desires for we have no sanctuaries but private ones, and here all are perfectly free to worship as they please.⁷⁶

Far from limiting religious expression, Ingram argued that Mexican policy enhanced it. “Why, then, it will be natural for you to enquire, have an established religion?” Ingram continued, attempting to explain the logic of Mexico’s founders. “The reply to this enquiry, and it is the best of all good reasons, because the Mexican Nation, at the adaption of the Constitution of the general Governants, knew no religion but the one they adopted.” Ingram correctly argued that there were vocal advocates for freedom of religion in Mexico such as those who existed in the United States—“a few really intelligent and liberal minded patriots,” who were “obliged to concede something to the physical mass of the nation to secure their political independence.” Religion was their compromise as “a nation freed from the bondage of

74. James K. Wilcocks, qtd. in William R. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States Concerning the Independence of the Latin-American Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925), 1599–1614.

75. SFA to the Colonists, 6 August 1823, *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 679–81.

76. Ira Ingram to Roswell Ingram, 29 May 1830, Samuel E. Asbury Papers, Daughters of the Republic of Texas Archives, San Antonio.

centuries, on the cheap condition of being permitted to retain a Name! Where is the patriotic citizen and philanthropist, who does not exclaim, on hearing this, Victory!”⁷⁷ In a nation where the majority of citizens were Catholic, extending religious freedom did not feel like liberty.

Furthermore, an establishment clause served to unite an otherwise extremely diverse nation, thereby avoiding something far more cataclysmic than lack of religious freedom. Given that Catholicism was one of the few things that Mexico’s citizens shared, Ingram insisted that, in order to avoid civil war, the legislator must consult at least some of “the prejudices of the people. He must moderate, modify, remove, or subdue them.” These prejudices “were so many Gordian knots, which must be untied.” While Ingram acknowledged a preference for religious freedom from an ideological standpoint, Mexico’s challenge was achieving a coherent, unified, and peaceful nation. Otherwise, an attempt to “overleap” might lead the people “captive to the temple of reform” and bring on “the whole apparatus of war.”⁷⁸

Yet Ingram remained fully optimistic that Mexico would, sooner rather than later, abolish its establishment clause and embrace religious openness. “From all that I can learn, I have but little doubt that “Free Toleration, on the subject of religion, if it has not already been adopted by this Government, very soon will be.” But he cautioned against embracing the change before “the mass of the nation is prepared for its adoption,” warning that “if the majority of the nation are unprepared for so great a change, it may produce a violent reaction. This might be followed by the loss of everything.”⁷⁹ Democratic change, therefore, had to reflect the wishes of the people.

Ingram also credited Mexico’s leaders for their wisdom and prudence: “The wise statesman whilst he is diffusing light, will conform his measures to the prejudices, the customs, and even to the whims of the nation, whose happiness is committed to his keeping.” Good leaders, according to Ingram, “must prepare innovation at a distance that it may not appear innovation.”⁸⁰ Ingram remained ever vigilant of the challenges that Mexican lawmakers faced and insisted that Mexico’s unique character should dictate its political course. These sentiments are nothing short of remarkable, especially considering that

77. Ibid.

78. Ira Ingram to Roswell Ingram, 15 February 1832, Ingram Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

79. Ira Ingram to Roswell Ingram, 28 May 1830, Ingram Papers, Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

80. Ibid.

they came just as separation between church and state was solidifying in the United States of the North.

No matter what political course Mexico took, Austin and his associates believed that it offered a special appeal to the thousands of struggling agrarians in the United States. “The prospects of the farmer and planter, were nevermore promising in any country, than in this, at the present time,” Austin wrote. “Whatever be the collision arising from difference in opinion as to the course this government should pursue it is gradually gaining strength, and will, I trust, ultimately secure the end of all government, the happiness of the people.”⁸¹ Such happiness, these immigrants understood, was ultimately no more dependent on their country’s rejection of monarchy than it was guaranteed by it. And for many, Mexico’s promise—though still unrealized—was enough to prompt them to forsake all that they had left behind in the North.

Yet many Mexican leaders remained suspicious as the question of U.S. immigration remained contestable well past independence, often pitting local leaders such as Juan Seguín against government officials. The level of interest among prospective settlers in the United States surprised even Austin, who soon requested another contract, and debates ensued over the location of settlements, how seriously immigrants took their Catholic faith, and whether or not they were bothering to learn Spanish. In one such debate, Anastacio Bustamante, the Commandant General of the Internal Provinces, suggested that settlers establish themselves closer to Béxar, the region’s capital, so as to remain “under the protection and observation of our government subject of course to our laws, and under terms that we prescribe.” Permitting them to settle too far from the center of governmental power might compromise the security of the young empire, “facilitating a free pass to the ambitions of the United States” and thereby “paving the way for invasion.”⁸²

The provincial deputation allayed Bustamante’s fears and assured him that, in addition to being “convenient” settlers for the empire, the immigrants would all be Catholics of good character, “giving their obedience to the Government.” They would cultivate cotton, sugar, and corn, and take up arms in defense of the empire or against “the barbarous Indians.” One local official compared the Port of Veracruz to Boston in its promise; if allowed

81. SFA to Joseph H. Hawkins, July 1822; *Austin Papers*, vol. 2, 536.

82. Anastacio Bustamante, 17 January 1822, *Archivo General de la Secretaría de Fomento*, “Colonización: 1821–1834,” Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin.

to settle closer to the coast, the immigrants could secure the “auxiliary provinces.” He suggested that the government take certain precautions while also sweetening the deal for the settlers. The government could prohibit immigrants from holding office for a specified length of time, while also exempting them from paying taxes for ten years and allowing them to bring their slaves.⁸³

By May 1822, only about six months after he had established his first colony and less than a year after he had arrived in Texas, Austin made a formal request for permission to settle eight hundred more families. He couched his words in effusive praise for the empire and its leader, the “hero of Iguala.” He declared, “Participating in the sentiments of joy manifested by the nation at the recent political change, I respectfully approach his Imperial majesty, and offer my congratulations on the happy consummation of the independence of Mexico.” He went on to assure the Emperor that his colonists,

Look to the Sovereign Congress as the pure fountain from whence those blessings are to flow which will diffuse peace, industry, improvement, intelligence, and happiness over this new born Nation. We raise our eyes to him, whose virtues have elevated him to the station he merited, as the Father, who is to distribute those blessings to his People, with a firm, impartial, and benevolent hand.

Austin expressed the hope that his settlement and request to bring more families would “be deemed a sufficient proof that I come to this Empire in good faith, and with a firm determination to be obedient to the established authorities of the Government, and a wish to be useful to the nation so far as I am able.”⁸⁴

Despite Austin’s declaration of loyalty and promises to serve the new empire, Bustamante remained skeptical and initially suggested that the proposal be suspended.⁸⁵ Austin himself acknowledged that a lack of administrative presence was a severe problem in some parts of Texas, threatening the “social pact that should unite us” among some settlers. “The laws and regulations that should rule and govern, do not exist here, and this fault of

83. Unknown Official to Bustamante, date unknown, *Archivo General de la Secretaria de Fomento*, “Colonización: 1821–1834,” Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin.

84. SFA to Emperor Augustín de Iturbide, 13 May 1822, *Archivo General de la Secretaria de Fomento*, “Colonización–Fomento.” Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin.

85. Bustamante to Iturbide, 12 September 1822; *Ibid.*

great consideration has caused disorder and confusion,” he wrote to Iturbide in a separate letter. “The most industrious and dignified settlers will abandon the country and retire to Louisiana [without] laws that protect industry and punish crime.” He warned that “anarchy and disorder” would visit the region, just as it did “for any country that lacks fundamental policy and laws that are the fundamental basis of the happiness of the people.”⁸⁶

But Austin continued to assure federal leaders of the purity of his and others’ intentions. He reminded Lucas Alamán, the noted cofounder of Mexico’s Conservative Party, that his father’s relationship with “the Spanish nation” dated back to 1798 when he became a citizen of Louisiana “and enjoyed the confidence and protection of that Government until the cession of that province to the United States.” Even as he complained of the lack of judicial presence on the frontier, Austin requested an extension of citizenship to himself and his colonists, assuring Mexican leaders that his colony wished to render “advantages and riches of this heretofore deserted and uninhabited portion of the great Mexican Nation.”⁸⁷

With Austin’s urging, and no doubt to quell some of their own concerns, national leaders decided they needed to draft an imperial colonization law, the first article of which stipulated that “the government of the Mexican nation will protect the liberty, property and civil rights, of all foreigners, who profess the Roman Catholic apostolic religion, the established religion of the empire.” The document then went on to stipulate clear terms under which land was to be distributed and maintained. Empresarios, or settlers who introduced at least two hundred families, were to inform the executive “what branch of industry they proposed to follow, the property or resources they intend to introduce” and any other “particulars they may deem necessary.” Immigrants were expected to immediately introduce themselves to the *ayuntamientos* (town councils) of the communities in which they intended to settle “in conformity with the instructions of the executive,” so that local officials “may designate the lands corresponding to them.” The amount of land distributed was to be highly regulated depending on the stated occupation of each colonist, usually either farming or stock raising. Settlers would be permitted to select plots in the order in which they arrived in the country with natives of Mexico getting the first pick—a stipulation that was no doubt designed to encourage the settlement of Mexicans. If empresarios failed to

86. SFA to Iturbide, date unknown; Ibid.

87. SFA to Lucas Alamán, date unknown; Ibid.

“populate and cultivate” the lands contracted to them within twelve years, they would lose their title; if colonists failed to cultivate their land after two years, it would be presumed that they had forfeited their rights to it, and the ayuntamiento could grant it to someone else. Such stipulations guarded against speculation and ensured the primary aim of the colonization program—to populate and develop the region. Colonists were exempt from all taxation of their products for six years and would be subjected to only “half tithes” for the following six.⁸⁸

Immigrants seemed to accept such terms without considerable opposition. Though already benefitting from a favorable government and a magnanimous colonization policy, prospects would improve even further for Austin and his cohort of Anglo immigrants.

* * *

From its inception there had been little consensus regarding the actual structure and form of Mexico’s new government. While local elites seized on the opportunity that independence offered to establish their own governing entities and advance their longstanding aspirations to home rule, Iturbide fostered a different notion—that as the leader of the independence movement and recently appointed head of state, his power was supreme. This notion brought him into direct conflict with the provinces and their representative body, which Iturbide attempted to dissolve in late 1822. Believing their new leader to be in direct violation of the very principles that had sparked their independence movement in the first place, the provinces rebelled several months later. Rebel leaders under the command of a young, ambitious captain named Antonio López de Santa Ana drafted the *Plan de Casa Mata*, which granted greater local authority to provincial deputations and called for the election of a new congress. Sensing his own defeat, Iturbide eventually abdicated in March 1823. A Constituent Congress, composed of appointees of the former emperor and rebel leaders from the provinces, declared itself in session ten days later. One of its first acts was to declare the legislature—not the executive—supreme.⁸⁹

Aside from the primacy of Congress, however, national leaders struggled to agree on much else. Just as in the United States, a political fissure emerged between those who wanted to enhance provincial power (the federalists) and

88. Ernest Wallace, David M. Vigness, and George B. Ward, eds., *Documents of Texas History* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2002), 47–48.

89. Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 89–94, 109.

those who wished the provinces to operate more like administrative units as they had done during the colonial era (the centralists).⁹⁰ Mexico entered a phase of intense political activity as the two factions debated the virtues of their respective positions. In May 1823, the province of Guadalajara dissolved its “social pact” with the central Mexican government. The Guadalajara declaration went on to state that it was time for the provinces to declare “their natural rights” as free, sovereign, and independent entities, “without there being between them, one and another, the slightest inequality.”⁹¹ Before long, seven other provinces followed Guadalajara’s example including Yucatán, Oaxaca, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Nuevo Santander, and Tέjas. Some adjoining states expressed the intention of forming confederations.⁹²

Leaders in Mexico City began to express the fear that their country was on the verge of disintegration. Civil war appeared imminent by late July when the Supreme Executive Authority dispatched troops to Guadalajara and Zacatecas. Eventually, the standoff ended and a new congress was finally elected and convened in November. This congress was more representative of the provinces, but while the delegates agreed that Mexico should be a republic, they could not agree on what kind of republic. Heading the federalist contingent were Lorenzo de Zavala, Valentín Gómez Farías, and Miguel Ramos Arizpe. The first two were great admirers of the United States, had lived or travelled there extensively, and wished to see Mexico adopt a similar form of government. Heading the centralists were Carlos María Bustamante and Father Servando Teresa de Mier.⁹³ Under pressure to draft a constitution that the provinces would approve before the nation deteriorated, Arizpe, the representative from Coahuila who had played an important role in the writing of the Cádiz Constitution, composed an outline known as the *Acta Constitutiva*. Article I of the document declared that “the Mexican nation is composed of the provinces.” Nationhood was understood to be a voluntary social compact among the provinces and the federal government’s legitimacy was entirely dependent on their consent.⁹⁴ Yet the document also

90. Ibid., 110; Mecham, “The Origins of Federalism in Mexico,” 167–68.

91. Rodríguez, “The Formation of the Federal Republic,” in Virginia Guedea and Jaime E. Rodríguez, eds., *Five Centuries of Mexican History* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones, 1992), 318; José María Bocanegra, *Memorias para la Historia de México Independiente, 1822–1846* (Mexico: Imprenta del gobierno federal en el ex-Arzobispado, 1892), I, 260–61. Also discussed in Mecham, “The Origins of Federalism in Mexico,” 172.

92. Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 120–21.

93. Ibid., 319–28; Mecham, “The Origins of Federalism in Mexico,” 174.

94. Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 131.

confirmed the sovereignty of the nation by claiming the right to adopt whichever form of government appeared “most conducive to its conservation and greatest prosperity.”⁹⁵ As in the United States, the relationship between local and central authority remained ambiguous as leaders attempted to privilege the former while simultaneously asserting the latter.⁹⁶

Indeed, scholars have written extensively about the challenge that U.S. founders faced in attempting to establish national cohesion; but Mexico’s challenge was arguably greater, with its vast territory and considerable diversity. Centralist delegates cited these particular challenges in their claims that federalism, such as existed in the United States, was simply unsuited to the particularities of their country. The most eloquent voice for this position came from Father Mier, who insisted that Mexico’s expansive territory, coupled with its long history of revolution and relative lack of experience as a unified republic, meant that a federalist system would only enhance division. Acknowledging the United States as a kind of failed experiment in nation building, other opponents pointed out the fact that their northern neighbor was now turning away from the system—a fact that, centralists argued, pointed to its lack of feasibility.

But proponents of Article 1 countered by insisting that Mexico was suited to federalism precisely *because* of its particularities. An overly robust central government would unfairly subject the remote regions, such as Texas, to the same kind of marginalization and neglect that they had suffered under the Crown. Federalism was Mexico’s salvation, not its doom, particularly for its most extreme provinces. Proponents of Article 1 seemed to suggest that federalism would succeed in Mexico where it had failed in the United States.⁹⁷

Indeed, despite the obvious similarities to the U.S. political system, Mexican federalists did not point to it as their precedent. Instead, they cited the Spanish imperial model and the crisis of 1808, in which the king’s absence had necessitated that the provinces form their own, new social compact. The same was true now with Iturbide’s abdication, they insisted. The responsibility for forming a new government once again rested with the provinces, and they had chosen federalism.⁹⁸

95. *La Aguila Mexicana*, 23 November 1823.

96. John M. Murrin, “1787: The Invention of American Federalism,” in *Essays on Liberty and Federalism: The Shaping of the U.S. Constitution*, ed. John M. Murrin, David E. Narrett, and Joyce S. Goldberg (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1988), 35–43.

97. *La Aguila Mexicana*, December 14 and 15, 1823.

98. Valentín Gómez Farías in *La Aguila Mexicana*, 15 December 1823; Also discussed in Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 144–47.

Still, the ambiguities of both the U.S. and Mexican systems, as well as the debates and ruptures they spawned, were strikingly similar.⁹⁹ Like their Mexican counterparts, U.S. leaders struggled to find an adequate balance between state and federal power, especially when it came to issues such as taxation. As the historian John Murrin has argued, the Anti-Federalist expectation of preserving state sovereignty found only partial fulfillment when the Bill of Rights “injected the sovereignty of the people into the equation”—the U.S. Constitution ultimately undermined the authority of the states by granting the central government direct power over individuals. Murrin and others have argued that it was not until the nullification controversy of 1832 that “the first coherent argument for the republic as a perpetual union emerged.”¹⁰⁰ Yet it did emerge, and unlike Mexico, the central government in the United States was eventually able to assert its supremacy without discarding its original constitution.

By asserting the primacy of provincial sovereignty in the very first article of their Constitution, Mexicans may have demonstrated a greater commitment to it than their northern counterparts and also may have made national cohesion more difficult. Nonetheless, various questions surrounding state sovereignty—perhaps most significantly the right to secede from the union—remained largely unresolved in the United States, just as they did in Mexico, until well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ Indeed, a significant contingent composed mostly of representatives from southern slaveholding states, many of whom were leaders in the 1832 nullification attempt, clung to a radical notion of state sovereignty more in line with Mexican federalism than the views of many of their compatriots, especially in the north.¹⁰² These men

99. Anna has argued that the Mexican Constitution exceeded that of the United States in its privileging of regional sovereignty. In fact, the only other constitution that would come close to Mexico's in this regard was that of the Confederate States of America established nearly four decades later. See Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 127–28.

100. Murrin, “The Invention of American Federalism,” 1, 39.

101. Elizabeth R. Varon, “Introduction,” in *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 1. Elizabeth Varon writes that “disunion” was once “the most provocative and potent word in the political vocabulary of Americans. From the time of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 up to the Civil War, *disunion* conjured up the most profound anxieties of Americans as they considered the fate of their republic.” The fact that disunion was so “jarring” to early Americans proves the power of American nationalism and national identity at that time.

102. In fact, according to Peter Radan, even Lincoln accepted the legitimacy of secession if it was “consensual or pursuant to a morally justified revolution.” According to Radan, Lincoln believed that a state must demonstrate that its population wanted to secede and obtain the consent of the union as a whole. In this regard, Lincoln's views of secession differed from those of both Confederate and

echoed the constitutional philosophies of Thomas Jefferson, who, although he did not know it, was also describing Mexican federalism when he wrote that “the true theory of our constitution is surely the wisest and the best, that the states are independent as to everything within themselves, & united as to everything respecting foreign nations.”¹⁰³

Ultimately, the question of where state or local power ended and federal power began was not resolved until well into the nineteenth century. In the United States, it took a civil war; in Mexico, it took decades of political conflict, abandonment of the original constitution, and the loss of nearly half the nation’s territory.¹⁰⁴

* * *

Upon hearing of Mexico’s new constitution, John Adams declared such a possibility “absurd.” Establishing a federal democracy in such a nation, he claimed, was as likely as “establishing democracies among the birds, beasts, and fishes.” How was it possible, Adams asked, “that a free government, and a confederation of free governments should be introduced and established among such a people, over that vast continent, or any part of it?”¹⁰⁵ But for other norteamericanos, especially those living on the frontier where newspapers had closely tracked events in Mexico for some time, the news was far less surprising, although no less pleasing. The *St. Louis Enquirer* reported that “Days of Prosperity, of liberty, and concord” had replaced “usurpation and despotism.” The paper proclaimed, “Honour and praise to the valiant soldiers of the country!”¹⁰⁶ The *Enquirer* declared that there manifested “the best feeling between the ‘Sovereign Congress’ and the Congresses of the States,” and referred to “the excellent example” supplied by the United States.¹⁰⁷

Mexican leaders who believed that the states or provinces preceded the Union. See Peter Radan, “Lincoln, the Constitution, and Secession,” in *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America’s Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements*, ed. Don H. Doyle (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 56–75.

103. Thomas Jefferson, qtd. in Murrin, “The Invention of American Federalism,” 43. As Varon observes, at the Nashville Convention of 1850 Southern leaders rejected disunion while at the same time confirming their right to secession, thereby laying the philosophical foundation for Southern secession eleven years later. See Varon, *Disunion!*, 227–30.

104. Anna writes, “In short, the great issues at stake in creating the new nation were not laid to rest but continued to be the focus of profound conflict throughout the lifetime of the first federal republic and throughout most of nineteenth-century Mexican history.” Anna, *Forging Mexico*, 149.

105. Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1865), 124.

106. *St. Louis Enquirer*, 7 June 1823.

107. *St. Louis Enquirer*, 24 May 1825.

Several months later it confirmed that “every part of the new political system was in regular and successful operation in Mexico.”¹⁰⁸ The *Arkansas Gazette* referred to Iturbide’s execution in December 1824 as evidence of “how far the spirit of Republicanism has taken root [in Mexico],” and declared that “crowned heads may maintain themselves in Europe by means of bayonets, but here in the New World they are justly consigned to the worms.”¹⁰⁹

Frontier Americans looked forward to freer international commerce and trade with their new sister republic, with whom they envisioned sharing the role of moral and political steward to the rest of the continent. As the *Louisiana State Gazette* claimed, “The use of an unmolested passage between Mexico and the United States is as necessary in a political as in a commercial point of view.” The United States and Mexico were not only “neighboring powers, inhabitants of the same continent, their territories contiguous, and their settlements approximating to each other”—they were also now “two chief powers of the new world, and standing at the head of a *cordon* of Republics, which, stretching from pole to pole across the two Americas, are destined to make the last stand in defense of human liberty.”¹¹⁰

As for Austin and his small cohort of U.S. colonists, they could not have been more thrilled with the direction of Mexican national politics which, more than anything before it, solidified their loyalty to their adopted country. In a formal proclamation issued to the “Fellow Citizens” of his colony on the first of May 1825, Austin declared, “I am convinced that there is not a breast amongst you that will not palpitate with exultation and delight at the prospects of Freedom, Happiness, and Prosperity which the *Federal Republican System of Government* presents to you.” He went on to express full faith in every immigrant’s ability to see their dreams realized if they only remained true and patient citizens of Mexico: “No difficulty or embarrassment can or ever will arise unless produced by your own impatience or imprudence.”¹¹¹

Indeed, in their embrace of extreme federalism, Mexican leaders skillfully combated precisely the fear that the Austins and so many other disillusioned norteamericanos like them had expressed—that of an overly robust central government controlled by political and economic elites. Now, Mexico adopted what many of them considered the ideal form of government—a confederate republic.

108. *Arkansas Gazette*, 15 August 1825.

109. *Arkansas Gazette*, 19 October 1824.

110. *Louisiana State Gazette*, 16 December 1825.

111. SFA, “Proclamation,” 1 May 1824, *AP*, vol. I, Part I, 781–82.

Meanwhile, Mexico's National Colonization Law issued on April 18, 1824 retained most of the stipulations of its imperial predecessor, except that the renewed and robust commitment to state sovereignty permitted state legislatures the right to form their own colonization laws if they did not conflict with the national law. The State of Coahuila y T exas did so the following year when it extended the length of time that foreigners were exempt from taxation to ten years after their arrival, forbade settlement within twenty leagues of the United States, and awarded twice the amount of land to foreigners who married Mexicans.¹¹²

Most early settlers in T exas remained committed to their adopted country until 1836 when, faced with Santa Ana's centralist revolution and overwhelmed by the influx of more immigrants from the United States, they finally declared independence from Mexico.¹¹³ Although Texas was the only Mexican state to ultimately secede, it was not the first to rebel. In fact, Anglo Texans joined the federalist revolt late and reluctantly. When they did, it was with the aim of restoring the Mexican Constitution of 1824, not secession. The sudden influx of U.S. volunteers who had never declared loyalty to Mexico and had arrived long after it had turned its back on federalism made independence a foregone conclusion.

But Texas's ultimate secession should hardly be seen as an example of Mexico's weakness, especially when compared to its northern neighbor. Indeed, just after wresting nearly half of Mexico's territory, including Texas, the United States found itself on the verge of confronting the very same disaster.¹¹⁴ The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, rather than marking the final phase of U.S. consolidation, propelled its deterioration. An enduring primary commitment to confederate republicanism, and the system of human bondage that it protected, would end up threatening the United States' existence on a scale far larger than most people at the time could imagine. ■

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112. Wallace, Vigness, and Ward, eds., *Documents of Texas History*, 48.

113. For a discussion of the causes of the Texas Revolution see Res endez, *Changing National Identities at the Frontier*, chap. 5.

114. For a discussion on how U.S. acquisition of Mexican territory propelled the Civil War, see David M. Potter, *Impending Crisis, 1848–1861*, ed. Don. E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1977).