

History of slavery and texas history essay



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When the subject of slavery arises Texas does not automatically come to mind. That is because the state of Texas has historically been portrayed as more as a western state than as a slave holding southern state. Within the text Campbell makes the argument that slavery was so pivotal to society that potential settlers were apprehensive to come to Texas as they were too worried about the status of their human property. People felt that Texas' independence as a Republic was vicarious at best and that Mexico would reclaim what she lost there by ending slavery. If Stephen F. Austin had not been able to find a way around the Mexican laws against slavery Texas never would have made it as a Republic and therefore, never became a state of the union. The importance of slavery to the development of Texas as a state is a topic that is historically neglected until University of North Texas professor Campbell researched the topic in his published work " An Empire for Slavery." Until this publication there was no full length work dedicated to the subject of slavery in Texas. But the truth is Texas has always had a vested interest in the peculiar institution. He concluded that this is a prevalent phenomenon because Texans prefer to be Western rather than Southern. " The state thus becomes part of the romantic West, the West of cattle ranches, cowboys, and gunfighters and seemingly less compelling moral issues... So long as Texas is not seen as a southern state, its people do not have to face the great moral evil of slavery and the bitter heritage of black-white relations that followed the defeat of the Confederacy in 1865." Therefore, its people are not plagued with the legacy of slavery.[1]

" Events and developments during the period, however, were critical in shaping the Lone Star State as part of the antebellum South. By 1861 Texas

was so like the other Southern states economically, socially, and politically that it joined them in secession and war. Antebellum Texans cast their lot with the Old South and in the process gave their state an indelibly Southern heritage.”[2]It seemed from the beginning that Texas would align herself with the slave holding states of the south. It was almost inevitable really. When Moses Austin petitioned for the Spanish grant to colonize Texas the original petition to settle did not directly mention slavery, therefore it was left to question. For all his efforts Moses Austin would never see his colonial dreams fulfilled upon his death in June of 1821. The task was then bequeathed to his son Stephen F. Austin. He retraced his father’s footsteps to San Antonio and continued in his father’s footsteps. He proposed that the land in Texas should be distributed according to the number of settlers that would inhabit the land. For their slaves alone the grant allotted eighty acres. (Campbell) Slavery thus came to Texas with the first Anglo-American settlers and gained a foothold during the colonial period. Austin would petition to the Mexican government many times on the subject of slavery. In Campbell’s opinion, English-speaking settlers were attracted to Stephen F. Austin’s colony almost solely by the opportunity to obtain cheaply fertile lands suitable for growing upland cotton, and few would have migrated there if they had not been permitted to bring slaves with them. Nevertheless, the independence movement, according to Campbell, was more a product of a clash of cultures than a determination to retain slavery in Texas. Yet the cultivation of cotton with slave labor was basic to the Texas economy and thus was a major ingredient in the culture of the Texans. Austin acknowledged that Texas would not be properly and expeditiously settled unless slavery was guaranteed by law. Settlers were afraid of the vicarious

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position of the independence of Texas because Mexico did not condone slavery. Unsure of the status of their chattel settlers were scared to establish themselves in Mexican Texas. To curtail fears Austin and 300 families, as a gesture of faith, brought their slaves with them into the new territory. Almost immediately, however, the settlers of the Austin colony found themselves at the mercy of the Mexican government and their anti-slavery sentiment. This is seen in the

“ Translation of the General Law of Colonization, No. 72,” August 18, 1824.

The President of Mexico issued a law covering the rules of colonization in Mexico. Containing 16 articles, the law covered with issues like settlement, boundaries, who got preference, what the government must do, how much land each settler could have, etc. The general tone of the law was to encourage immigration into Mexico, though with preference for Mexican citizens. Also stipulated a limit to how much land a person could own, forbade out-of-state ownership, and forbade contributions of land to religious communities.[3]

The Mexican officials feared that with the ever expanding population of settlers they would lose their power to control the colony. Therefore, President Vicente Guerrero issued a decree on September 15, 1829, declaring the immediate emancipation everywhere in the republic. This decision further increased the mounting tensions between the Mexicans and slaveholding Anglos. The decree was withheld from publication because the settlers felt that they were guaranteed their property and could not develop Texas “ without the aid of the robust and almost indefatigable arms of that race of the human species which is called negroes, and who, to their

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misfortune, suffer slavery." President Guerrero issued another decree on December 2, 1829, exempting Texas from the general emancipation order on September 15. The slaveholding interest thus received prompt support from Mexican officials who appear to have been nearly as dedicated as Austin to the rapid settlement and development of Texas.[4]In 1829 Mexico abolished slavery, that year Mexico also made the importation of slaves illegal. The abolition of slavery created further tensions between the Mexican government and slave-holding settlers. This angered the Anglo-American settlers and immigration to the province slowed. To thwart the law, numerous Anglo-American colonists simply converted their slaves to indentured servants by having their slaves sign contracts stating that the slaves owed money and were working to pay the debt. The meager wages the slave would receive made repayment virtually impossible. Furthermore, the debt would be inherited by the slaves' children; however legalities prevented a slave from being eligible to receive wages until they reached the age of eighteen.[5]This, however, was merely a band-aid for the underlying tensions that would surface in June of 1832. " In an armed prelude to the Texas Revolution, the Battle of Velasco marked the first bloodshed in the then deteriorating relations between Texas and Mexico. The Mexican commander in charge of a fort at the town of Velasco, attempted to block attempts by the Texans to transport a cannon for possible use against Mexican forces at nearby Anahuac. After several days of fighting, the Texans under John Austin and Henry Smith prevailed when the Mexicans exhausted their ammunition." This slight victory for the Texans further fueled the need for an independent republic. It would take several other small skirmishes and four years. The Texas Declaration of Independence (March 2, 1836) was

produced almost overnight with much haste and urgency. The Alamo in San Antonio was under siege by Santa Anna's army of Mexico. Even though the odds were stacked against them a meager 145 Texans that were in the general vicinity sought refuge and hunkered down in preparation for the impending battle that was coming. After a two-week siege William Travis and his men were overwhelmed. Though the Texans did not win the Alamo, they did not go quietly into the history books. William B. Travis (for the regular army) and Jim Bowie (for the volunteers) and their men were made into heroes as they decimated approximately 1600 Mexicans. This loss of the Alamo led to a period of terror and panic, known as the Runaway Scrape. Tales of atrocities committed by Santa Anna and his army preceded them and a fear of the unknown and uncertainty caused the settlers to flee their homes in terror. To some it seemed that none could stop his reign of terror as he swept across the country unopposed. That is until Sam Houston and the men under his command won the most decisive Battle of San Jacinto and secured Texas' independence. News of this victory soon spread and almost immediately those who had fled began returning to their homes. Once Texans achieved their goal of independence they were swift to draft a state constitution that would ensure the security of their beloved institution of slavery.[6]As they laid the cornerstones of their society and placed the turmoil of the republic behind them, Texans in 1846 projected expansion and prosperity. Instead they found themselves launched into the war between Mexico and the United States that ruined hopes of a peace time just a few short months of annexation. Turbulence in the region would continue until the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ended the war in February 1848. As part of

the defeat Mexico acknowledged Texas as a part of the United States and established the Rio Grande as its border.[7]

As the residents of antebellum Texas began to forge their permanent boundaries and create a unique sense of identity a new wave of settlers emerged. These new Texans were not frontiersmen; at least not in the traditionally accepted meaning of the word. Somehow became an extremely significant part of the frontier. “ King Cotton” reined over the economy of the south, and he soon reined to expand his kingdom into antebellum Texas as well.

“ During the 1850s this cotton frontier developed rapidly. The cotton frontier of antebellum Texas constituted a virtual empire for slavery.” Slave labor made the plantation productive and profitable. Thus, as the cotton frontier of Texas developed during the 1850s, the state’s economy increasingly mirrored that of the Deep South. With an economy of this nature and a Southern-born population predominant in most areas, antebellum Texas naturally developed social practices and institutions that also were Southern to the core.”[8]

So it would