

**LOCAL HISTORY
AND
PRIMARY SOURCES**


Growing Apart

INTRODUCTION

Conflict between Anglo settlers in Texas and their Mexican rulers grew in the 1820s and 1830s. Just a week before he died in 1832, the Mexican General José Manuel de Mier y Terán wrote a letter to Stephen F. Austin. In it, Terán said, “The affairs of Texas are understood by none but you and me, and we alone are the only ones who can regulate them.” Terán might have been correct. Still, he and Austin had different views of the situation in Texas in the early 1830s. Those differences become clear in the following passages.

TERÁN ON TEXAS

In 1827, Mexico sent Terán to report on the situation in Texas. He was disturbed by what he found. He did not feel that the Texans considered themselves “Mexican.” In 1828, Terán wrote the following to President Guadalupe Victoria of Mexico:

“The whole population here is a mixture of strange and [separate] parts without parallel in our [country]. [There are] numerous tribes of Indians, now at peace, but armed and at any moment ready for war. . . . [There are] colonists of another people, more aggressive and better informed than the Mexican inhabitants, but also more shrewd and unruly. . . . Added to this [strange] mix were the slaves beginning to learn the favorable intent of the Mexican law toward their unfortunate condition and held with an iron hand to keep them in a state of [slavery]. The Mexican natives were poor . . . and the local civil officers . . . corrupt; and the colonists, imagining that they were typical, despised all Mexicans. The incoming stream of new settlers was unceasing; and the first news of them came by discovering them on land which they had already long occupied; the old inhabitants would then set up a claim of doubtful validity, a law suit would ensue, and the alcalde had a chance to come out with some money.”

Terán urged Mexico to take some steps to make Texas more “Mexican.” He thought that

more Mexican troops should be sent to Texas. Also, Mexico should trade more with Texas. Finally, Mexico should seek immigrants from countries other than the United States. He did not say that he thought immigration from the United States should cease completely. However, in response to Terán’s report, the Mexican legislature passed the Law of April 6, 1830. Among other measures, the law banned all immigration to Texas from the United States.

AUSTIN ON ANGLOS’ RIGHTS

Austin was more sympathetic to the Anglo settlers than Terán. In 1833, he wrote a long letter to Mexican officials. In it, he tried to explain why he opposed parts of the Law of April 6, 1830. Austin was particularly against the part of the law that closed Texas off from American immigration. Here is what he wrote:

“At the period of Mexican independence in 1821, Texas was uninhabited by a civilized population, except the towns of Bexar and Goliad. It was infested by numerous bands of hostile Indians who [rode] forth at pleasure to rob and desolate the settlements on the Rio Bravo. . . . The system of frontier defense used by the Spanish government of establishing military posts or presidios, was never an [effective] barrier . . . A few scanty villages were thus sustained like isolated specks in the midst of a wilderness at an enormous expense to the government and a great waste of men and money. . . . The experience of years had already convinced the

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(continued)

Spanish authorities . . . that the only [effective] and permanent [defense] was population, the settlement of the frontier by a hardy and [hard-working] people before whom the [Indians] would retire. . . . The result of this new opinion was . . . the grant to Moses Austin . . . to settle a colony of North Americans in the wilderness of Texas. . . .

The emigrants to Texas, it is well known, have never received any [help] from the government. . . . They have never cost the government a cent. . . . Left to their own resources and daring enterprise, they have conquered a wilderness, and made known to Mexico and to the world the true value . . . of a large portion of the Mexican territory [that] was before hid in obscurity. They have also greatly contributed to the new system of frontier defense by means of population and fully tested its [usefulness]. . . . What [motives], what incentives, what hopes, could have operated so powerfully upon the minds of the emigrants to Texas, as to have given them fortitude to brave the dangers of savage foes, to despise the hardships and [difficulties] of the wilderness, to support them through trials and [sacrifices] at which the stoutest hearts shrink, . . . surrounded as they were the first year of settlement, by Indians, famine, and sickness and by the dark gloom of moments when even hope almost recoiled

from the future? What impulse of freedom and deeply embedded hope bore them up and carried them through such difficulties? Was it the bare expectation of getting a piece of land in a wild wilderness and there living on the mere products of their manual labor . . . ? NO. But on the contrary the great and [encouraging] hope that drove them onward, was to redeem this country from the wilderness, and convert it into the abode of civilization, of abundance and happiness, and by that means to repay themselves . . . and also to repay the government more than a thousandfold for the privilege of settling in Texas. . . .

On what grounds was such a hope founded? It was founded on the colonization laws, . . . on the faith of the government that such an invitation would not be thus given merely to draw a few unsuspecting emigrants to this wilderness and then to close the door and shut them out forever from their friends and relations."

Despite their strong relationship, the two leaders had very different views on the Anglo settlers in Texas. Terán saw them as a threat to Mexico's authority. Austin believed that they added to the value of Texas and Mexico. These different attitudes show the growing rift between the Texas settlers and Mexico.

COMPREHENSION CHECK

1. How does Terán view the Anglo settlers?

2. How does Austin view the Anglo settlers?



LOCAL HISTORY ACTIVITIES

RESOLVING DISPUTES

In the 1830s, the differences between the Anglo settlers of Texas and the government of Mexico were never settled. They led to revolution. That is not always the case with disputes, however. Many times, people who hold different views find ways of reaching an agreement. They might compromise. In this situation, each side gives up some of its goals to be sure to gain others. They might bring in a mediator. Such a person helps the two sides reach a compromise. They might agree to send their disagreement to an arbitrator. In this situation, both parties agree to accept whatever decision is made by the arbitrator. This person listens to the arguments of both sides and then has the power to decide on a way of settling the dispute.

As you can see, people have many ways of solving disputes. These methods are used in many different situations. Examples are bargaining over union contracts or disputes between different towns or states.

Research an issue that was the center of a dispute in your community recently or in the distant past. Learn how the dispute arose and what the main issues were. Find out what people or groups had opposing views and what those views were. Identify what goals each group had and why they cared about those goals. Finally, learn how the dispute was settled. Try to find answers to such questions as:

- What solution was found for the disagreement? How did that satisfy different groups? What did those groups give up in order to have this agreement?
- What happened after the agreement was made? Was the situation better? Were the different groups happy with the result?
- What other groups were affected by the decision? Did they have a voice in the decision? How did they feel about the decision?

You should be able to find information about past disputes in books covering local history or in newspapers or magazines that were published in the past. Newspapers and magazines will also provide information about current disputes—but make sure that you choose a dispute that has already been settled.

Prepare an oral presentation that sums up your research. After you and your classmates have completed the presentations, discuss what methods people use to solve problems. See if you can agree on which approaches are most effective.