Guide to Reading

Big Ideas
Culture and Beliefs  Americans in Texas hoped to transplant American institutions to their new homeland.

Content Vocabulary
• empresario (p. 264)
• annexation (p. 269)

Academic Vocabulary
• convention (p. 266)
• reinforcement (p. 268)

People and Events to Identify
• National Colonization Act (p. 264)
• Washington-on-the-Brazos (p. 265)
• Antonio López de Santa Anna (p. 266)
• Sam Houston (p. 267)
• Alamo (p. 267)
• William B. Travis (p. 267)

Reading Strategy
Categorizing  Complete a graphic organizer, similar to the one below, by filling in the major battles of the Texas war for independence and the outcome of each battle.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Major Battle</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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A mericans who settled in Texas did not assimilate as the Mexican government had hoped. The struggle over control of that border territory resulted in rebellion and, after some dramatic military encounters, independence for Texas.

Opening Texas to Americans

MAIN Idea  Mexico invited Americans to settle in Texas but insisted that they adopt local customs, obey Mexican law, and convert to Catholicism.

HISTORY AND YOU  Why do you think Mexico required Americans to become Mexican citizens? Read on to learn how empresarios brought American settlers to Texas.

In July 1821 Stephen F. Austin set off from Louisiana for the Texas territory in the northeastern corner of Mexico. The Spanish government had promised to give his father, Moses, a huge tract of Texas land if the elder Austin settled 300 American families there. Moses died before he could fulfill his end of the deal. On his deathbed, he asked Stephen to take his place in Texas.

When Austin settled in Texas, it was not a wild and empty land. Spanish-speaking Tejanos had established such settlements as San Antonio de Bexar and Hidalgo in the southern portion of the region. The land north of these settlements was the territory of the Apache, Comanche, and other Native American groups. In 1824 Texas was joined with Coahuila to become part of the Mexican state of Coahuila y Texas.

Unable to persuade its own citizens to settle on this frontier, Mexico decided to continue Spanish policy and allow foreigners to settle there. Between 1823 and 1825, Mexico passed three colonization laws, which offered cheap land to nearly anyone willing to come. The last law granted new immigrants a ten-year exemption from paying taxes but required that they become Mexican citizens, abide by Mexican law, and convert to Roman Catholicism.

Empresarios and Settlers

Although some American emigrants headed to Texas on their own, most came at the encouragement of empresarios, a Spanish word meaning “agents” or “contractors.” Under the National Colonization Act, Mexico gave 26 empresarios large grants of Texas land. In exchange, the empresarios promised to fill it with a certain number of settlers. The empresarios assigned a plot to each family and governed the colonies they established.
Stephen Austin was the most successful empresario. He founded the town Washington-on-the-Brazos and, by the mid-1830s, had persuaded 1,500 American families to immigrate.

**Americanizing Texas**

Americans in Texas initially accepted Mexican citizenship. The government assumed they would adopt Mexican customs and come to see Mexico as their own country, but few did. Mexican customs and the Roman Catholic Church were alien to most American settlers.

Many Mexicans, in turn, distrusted the settlers because of their American lifestyle and rejection of Mexican ways. Mexicans’ unease increased in 1826, when Benjamin Edwards, the brother of empresario Haden Edwards, led a rebellion against Mexican authority. Angry over disputes about whether Mexico or the empresario ruled the region, Edwards declared that the settlements of Americans in Texas now constituted the independent nation of Fredonia.

When threatened by Mexican troops and a party of Tejanos led by Stephen Austin, the rebels dispersed.

Although most settlers ignored Edwards’s call for revolution, the Mexican government feared it signaled an American plot to acquire Texas. In 1830 Mexico closed its borders to further immigration by Americans and banned the import of enslaved labor. It also taxed goods imported from foreign countries, hoping to discourage trade with the United States.

These new laws infuriated the settlers. Without immigration their settlements could not grow. The import tax meant higher prices for goods they were accustomed to purchasing from the United States. Perhaps worst of all, the Mexican government was making rules for them. They saw no reason to obey a government they hardly considered their own.

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**Examining**

What did Mexico’s colonization laws offer settlers in northern Texas, and what did the laws require of these settlers?
Texas Goes to War

**MAIN Idea** When Mexico tried to enforce its laws, American settlers rebelled and established an independent state.

**HISTORY AND YOU** Have you heard the motto “Remember the Alamo”? Read on to learn how Texas became an independent nation.

With tensions simmering, settlers met at two conventions in the Texas town of San Felipe in 1832 and 1833. At the first convention, settlers chose Stephen Austin to be the convention’s president. The convention asked Mexico to reopen Texas to American immigrants and to loosen the taxes on imports. The second convention recommended separating Texas from Coahuila and creating a new Mexican state. The convention also created a constitution for the new state and designated Austin to travel to Mexico City to negotiate with the Mexican government.

In the fall of 1833 negotiations stalled. An irritated Austin sent a letter to Tejano leaders in San Antonio, suggesting that Texas start peacefully organizing its own state government. Then he visited Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Anna in Mexico City and persuaded him to agree to several demands, including lifting the hated ban on immigration.

As Austin was returning home, he was arrested on January 3, 1834, by Mexican officials, who had intercepted his letter to the Tejanos. He was taken back to Mexico City and imprisoned for treason, without trial. Shortly afterward, in April 1834, President Santa Anna denounced Mexico’s constitution of 1824 and declared himself dictator.

Austin was released from prison in July 1835. Even he saw that further negotiation with Santa Anna was pointless and, in September, he urged Texans to organize an army, which they quickly did.

**The Early Battles**

The Mexican army had serious problems. Continuing political instability in Mexico City had denied the army sound leadership, training, and support. Against this handicapped
force, the Texan army enjoyed its first taste of victory at the military post of Gonzales, about 75 miles east of San Antonio. There, Mexican soldiers ordered the Texans to surrender their arms. In response, the rebels pointed a cannon at the Mexican force and held up a cloth sign painted with the taunt, “Come and Take It.” Having no orders to attack, the Mexicans retreated to San Antonio, and the Texans followed them. The rebels, numbering only about 350, drove the much larger Mexican force out of San Antonio in December 1835.

On March 2, 1836, Texas declared its independence from Mexico. Shortly thereafter, the Texans drafted a new constitution that drew heavily from the U.S. Constitution and specifically protected slavery.

### The Alamo

Few of the Texas rebels had any military training, and at first, no one could agree on who should lead them. Finally, a former governor of Tennessee and proven military leader named **Sam Houston** took command. In the meantime, Santa Anna organized a force of about 6,000 troops to put down the rebellion.

When Santa Anna’s forces arrived at San Antonio in February 1836, they found over 180 Texas rebels holed up in an abandoned Catholic mission called the **Alamo**. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William B. Travis, the small force sought to delay Santa Anna and give Houston’s army more time to prepare. From within the mission, Travis dispatched a courier with a plea to fellow Texans and U.S. citizens for help:

**PRIMARY SOURCE**

“I am besieged by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna. . . . I shall never surrender or retreat. Then I call on you in the name of liberty, of patriotism, and of everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all dispatch. . . . Though this call may be neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible, and die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor and that of his country. Victory or death!”

—quoted in *History of Texas*

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**TIME LINES**

1. **1827** What event occurred in 1827, and what was the result?
2. **1836** In what year did Texas achieve independence?
The call for reinforcements went almost unanswered. Only 32 settlers from Gonzales, deciding on their own to join the fight, made it into the Alamo. Running low on ammunition and gunpowder, the Texans held off Santa Anna’s besieging army for 13 days. It was during the standoff, that the new Texas government met at Washington-on-the-Brazos and formally declared independence.

On March 6, 1836, Santa Anna’s army stormed the Alamo. The Texans fought off the attackers for six hours, killing or wounding about 600 before being overrun. Although the defenders of the Alamo had been defeated, they had bought Houston’s army nearly two extra weeks to organize.

**Goliad**

Two weeks later the Mexican army overwhelmed Texan troops led by James W. Fannin at Goliad, a town southeast of San Antonio near the Gulf Coast. Fannin and his men surrendered, hoping that the Mexicans would disarm them and expel them from Texas. Though the Mexican field general at Goliad wrote to
Santa Anna requesting clemency, Santa Anna demanded execution. At dawn on March 27, 1836, a firing squad executed more than 300 men. The losses at the Alamo and Goliad devastated Texans but also united them in support of their new country.

The Battle of San Jacinto

With the Texan army in disarray, Sam Houston desperately needed more time to recruit fresh volunteers and to train the soldiers who remained. Rather than fight, he chose to retreat, heading east toward Louisiana.

Houston was biding his time. Up against a larger, more disciplined army, he decided to wait for Santa Anna to make a mistake. The mistake occurred on April 21, when both armies were encamped along the San Jacinto River near what is now the city of Houston. Santa Anna no longer saw Houston’s army as a threat, so he allowed his men to sleep in the afternoon, confident that Houston would wait until the next day to launch an attack.

Eager for a fight, Houston’s soldiers convinced the officers to launch an afternoon assault. Shielded from sight by a hill, Houston’s troops crept up on Santa Anna’s sleeping soldiers and charged. The surprise attack threw the Mexican soldiers into a panic.

The Battle of San Jacinto lasted less than 20 minutes, but the killing continued for hours. Yelling “Remember the Alamo” and “Remember Goliad,” Houston’s men attacked the Mexican troops with guns, knives, and clubs. In addition to the hundreds killed, over 700 members of Santa Anna’s force were taken captive. The Texans suffered only 9 killed and 34 wounded.

Among the captured troops was Santa Anna himself. Houston forced Santa Anna to order his army out of Texas and sign a treaty recognizing independence for the Republic of Texas. The Mexican Congress refused to accept the treaty, but it was unwilling to launch another military campaign. Texas had won the war.

The Republic of Texas

In September 1836 the newly independent republic called its citizens to the polls. They elected Sam Houston as their first president and voted 3,277 to 91 in favor of annexation, or becoming part of the United States.

Given that Americans had enthusiastically supported the war, most Texans assumed the United States would want to annex the republic. Many northern members of Congress, however, opposed admitting Texas as a slave state.

President Andrew Jackson did not want to increase North-South tensions or risk a costly war with Mexico, which continued to claim ownership of Texas. Jackson made no move toward annexation, although on his last day in office he did sign a resolution officially recognizing Texas as an independent nation.

Summarizing What difficulties did the Texans face in their war against Mexico?