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Author(s): Paul D. Lack

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Slavery and the Texas Revolution

PAUL D. LACK*

IF LANGUAGE SERVES AS A USEFUL GUIDE, THE MATTER OF SLAVERY OCCUPIED an important place in the minds of the leaders of the Texas Revolution. Their rhetoric brimmed with imagery depicting a struggle between freedom and bondage. In their view Mexico sought to enslave the only people in the land who still dared to defend the cause of liberty. A group of volunteers in October, 1835, labeled Mexican rule as “worse than Egyptian bondage”; the following June General Thomas J. Rusk sought to rally the people to the field against an enemy who intended “to make [them] the slaves of petty military commandants.” The opposing soldiers thus became “menial slaves” of military despotism. However appealing Texans found this vision of themselves as sufferers “*in the cause of Freedom and the Rights of Man,*” in candid moments they acknowledged that the conflict involved the issue of slavery in a manner far different from that portrayed in this propaganda.¹

Wars for independence had invariably subjected the institution of slavery to profound tensions since the time of the American Revolution. Throughout the new world in the subsequent half-century a variety of forces shook the foundations of bondage and led to its overthrow, by a combination of black revolution and state action, in Haiti, the British West Indies, and the South American republics. In all these slave societies radical ideologies, accompanied by sudden shifts in political, economic, and military power, emerged during times of crisis to undermine the old order. Wars—international, internal, or both—ac-

*Paul D. Lack is a professor of history at McMurry College in Abilene, Texas. He has published on urban slavery in the Southwest and is currently working on a social history of the Texas revolution.

¹*Texas Republican* (Brazoria), Oct. 10, 1835 (1st quotation); Thomas J. Rusk to the People of Texas, June 27, 1836, John H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Papers of the Texas Revolution, 1835–1836* (10 vols.; Austin, 1973), VII, 287 (2nd quotation); Haden Edwards to James W. Robinson, Nov. 29, 1835, William C. Binkley (ed.), *Official Correspondence of the Texan Revolution, 1835–1836* (2 vols.; New York, 1936), I, 135 (3rd quotation); Council to the People of Texas, Feb. 13, 1836, *ibid.*, I, 419 (4th quotation).

celerated these challenges to slavery and enabled many blacks to seize their freedom. Emancipation had not triumphed uniformly or without struggle even where the slaveholding classes had been weak, but revolutionary movements had left slavery isolated and threatened from outside and within.²

This study of slavery and the Texas Revolution concentrates on the impact of the 1835–36 struggle on both slaves and slaveholders. The conflict with Mexico raised before Anglos the spectre of slave revolt, created for blacks other avenues to freedom besides rebellion, generated forces that weakened the hold of masters over bondsmen, and placed the very survival of the institution in Texas on the success of Texas arms. In order to understand the events of these two years, some attention will also be given to the status of slavery in the earlier period of Mexican rule and to the difficult question of slavery as a factor leading to the Texas movement for independence.

This latter issue attracted attention as soon as war erupted between Mexico and Texas; antislavery zealots quickly attributed the Texas Revolution to a proslavery conspiracy. The most thoroughgoing of these denunciations, *The War in Texas* by Benjamin Lundy, appeared in 1836. Lundy's suspicions regarding the conflict grew out of a decade-old career as an antislavery writer and his visits in Brazoria, Bexar, and other Mexican provinces in 1833. Lundy viewed the origins of the Revolution as exactly opposite to those identified in public pronouncements in Texas, which stressed liberty and human rights. His historical narrative developed the theme that southern-born immigrants had evaded Mexican emancipation measures and had finally sought separate statehood in order to establish the institution on a firm constitutional basis. When foiled in this and other proslavery efforts, a "vast combination" of slaveholders in Texas, supported by land-jobbers, slave-breeders and dealers, and their political lackeys in the United States, implemented a "treasonable" "scheme" to divide Texas from Mexico and reestablish slavery. Like most abolitionists, Lundy placed blame on individual sin: the Texas war derived from "motives of personal aggrandizement, avaricious adventure, and unlimited, enduring oppression."³

²David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), 255–342.

³Merton L. Dillon, "Benjamin Lundy in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXIII (July, 1959), 60 (the *Quarterly* is cited hereafter as *SHQ*); Stephen F. Austin to Thomas F. Leaming, Apr. 30, 1836, Andreas Reichstein (ed.), "The Austin-Leaming Correspondence, 1828–1836," *SHQ*, LXXXVIII (Jan., 1985), 282; [Benjamin Lundy], *The War in Texas: A Review of Facts and Circumstances . . .* (2nd ed., 1837; reprint, Upper Saddle River, N.J., 1970), 3–7, 14 (1st quotation), 20 (2nd quotation), 27 (3rd quotation), 33–34 (4th quotation).

When historians like Eugene C. Barker challenged this conspiracy theory, they marshalled not so much new evidence as a new perspective. In fact, Barker acknowledged the southern, proslavery origins of many Anglo-Texans and their resistance in the name of progress to Mexican efforts to limit, exclude, or abolish slavery. He not only recognized other facts—the proslavery features of the constitution of the Republic of Texas, the military support that came from the southern United States, and the ‘Texans’ desire for annexation—but published evidence that, if known to Lundy, would have made the conspiracy theory seem irrefutable. On his way from Mexico to Texas in the summer of 1835, Stephen F. Austin had written to his cousin, “The best interests of the United States require that Texas shall be effectually, and fully, *Americanized*. . . . *Texas must be a slave country. It is no longer a matter of doubt.*” But like other “scientific” historians, Barker doubted the existence of a “slaveocracy” or the prevalence of proslavery crusading zeal among Texas revolutionaries. He asserted that the number of slaves and the frequency of Texan-Mexican disagreements over the status of slavery had both declined after 1830. Subsequent scholars have followed this lead so faithfully that they allude to the issue mostly to deride Lundy’s theory. Barker’s conclusion “that anxiety concerning the status of slavery [does not appear to have] played any appreciable part in producing the Texas revolution” has gone virtually unchallenged.⁴

Whatever doubts they express about the significance of slavery as a causative factor in 1835–1836, historians have acknowledged that disputes over the institution served as a long-standing irritant in relations between Anglo settlers and Mexico. A sense of uncertainty had characterized the status of slavery from almost the beginning of North American colonization of Texas. Throughout the 1820s local authorities blunted repeated but indecisive antislavery measures enacted by the Mexican Congress. In 1822 and again in 1824 the Congress passed legislation to abolish the slave trade and gradually erode the institution. Anglo Texas leaders gained little legal relief by their arguments that these measures undermined economic progress, but they either muted the impact of these laws or simply ignored them. Even the state constitution, which recognized the legality of slavery, outlawed further im-

⁴S. F. Austin to Mary Austin Holley, Aug. 21, 1835, Eugene C. Barker (ed.), *The Austin Papers* (3 vols.; Vols. I, II, Washington, D.C., 1924–1928; Vol. III, Austin, 1927), III, 101 (1st quotation), 102; Eugene C. Barker, “The Influence of Slavery in the Colonization of Texas,” *SHQ*, XXVIII (July, 1924), 1, 2 (3rd quotation), 3–5, 28–32, 33 (4th quotation); Eugene C. Barker, *Mexico and Texas, 1821–1835* . . . (Dallas, 1928), 72–86; Samuel Harman Lowrie, *Culture Conflict in Texas: 1821–1835* (New York, 1932), 47–52, 125–131; William C. Binkley, *The Texas Revolution* (Baton Rouge, 1952), 3–5; Seymour V. Connor, *Texas: A History* (New York, 1971), 119.

portations and freed children born of slave parents. Texas memorials then persuaded the Coahuila legislature to sanction a bogus "contract" system allowing imports of bound labor. This apparently successful subterfuge evaporated suddenly on September 15, 1829, with the promulgation of a general emancipation decree by Mexican president Vicente Guerrero. An exemption for Texas was once again granted; however, the pattern of evasion by Texans created alarm regarding the governability of the province. On April 6 of the next year another decree ended all North American emigration to Texas, though it recognized the existence of slavery there.⁵

The 1830s brought something of a respite from the barrage of anti-slavery measures of the previous decade, partly because of political instability in Mexico. Yet the status of the institution remained in doubt. In April, 1832, the legislature of Coahuila y Texas set a ten-year limitation on the length of labor contracts, thus jeopardizing the evasions of Texas slaveholders and indicating that abolitionist sentiment still prevailed among Mexican authorities. Realization of this fact helped spur a movement in Texas for separate statehood that originated in that year. Texans had blunted some of the effects of governmental hostility to slavery, but defense of the institution ultimately rested on sympathetic and weak local governments that failed to enforce antislavery measures. When a more powerful (authoritarian from the Texas perspective) government arose in Mexico, rebellion broke out. The immediate target of the resistance was John Davis Bradburn, commander at Anahuac. The insurgents included in their Declaration of Grievances a charge that he had encouraged and protected runaway slaves.⁶

Clearly, critics like John Quincy Adams exaggerated in asserting that the Texas Revolution reestablished slavery "where it was abolished." Emigrants from the United States used the indenture system to bring forced labor into Texas, while masters bought, hired, and sold workers without regard for antislavery enactments. In no instance did bondsmen or women become free due to legal procedures. Mexican hostility

⁵Lester G. Bugbee, "Slavery in Early Texas," *Political Science Quarterly*, XIII (Sept., 1898), 394, 397, (Dec., 1898), 648; Constitution of the State of Coahuila y Texas, Art. 13, H. P. N. Gammel (comp.), *The Laws of Texas, 1822-1897* . . . (10 vols.; Austin, 1898), I, 424.

⁶Barker, "Influence of Slavery," 5, 8-11, 18-23, 25, 28-29; Bugbee, "Slavery in Early Texas" (Sept., 1898), 391, 393-395, 397-399, 403-404, 407, 409, 411 (quotation), (Dec., 1898), 648-649, 661; Ohland Morton, *Terán and Texas: A Chapter in Texas-Mexican Relations* (Austin, 1948), 115; Mattie Austin Hatcher, *Letters of an Early American Traveller: Mary Austin Holley, Her Life and Her Works, 1784-1846* (Dallas, 1933), 206; San Felipe de Austin *Texas Gazette*, Apr. 3, 1830; Harold Schoen, "The Free Negro in the Republic of Texas," *SHQ*, XL (Oct., 1936), 85; Alleine Howren, "Causes and Origin of the Decree of April 6, 1830," *SHQ*, XVI (Apr., 1913), 388.

toward slavery, however, did have some effect.⁷ Slaves in Texas had a measure of judicial privilege, such as the right of petition. A knowledgeable observer like Mary Austin Holley believed that blacks were “invested with more liberty and [were] less liable to abuse” in Texas than in the United States. Flurries of antislavery legislation had other effects as well. The laws slowed the pace of American immigration and possibly the importation of blacks. An estimate from 1834 suggests that the number of slaves had grown at a slower rate than had the white population. Also, continual labor shortages lengthened the period of frontier conditions and retarded the growth of plantations, except for a few instances along the coast.⁸

All things considered, however, Anglo immigrants seem not to have significantly modified their hopes or expectations of slavery, inhospitable laws and government disapprobation notwithstanding. Planters commonly considered their slaves “indispensable,” as one traveler noted, and leaders of the province believed that cotton held the key to progress. When Anglo lawmakers came into power in places like Nacogdoches in the mid-1830s, the legal privilege conferred on bondsmen by Mexican law was quickly eroded. And Mexican inattention to slavery after 1830 allowed the institution to grow in at least one area: statistics for the Nacogdoches region reveal a spurt in the slave population between 1831 and 1835.⁹

The persistence of this complex of attitudes toward slavery was reflected in the colonists’ ideology. Stephen F. Austin sounded the keynote when he argued that settlers in a raw land should not be deprived of laborers. From their first confrontations with Mexican antislavery law, Anglo-Texans had conceded the moral arguments while emphasizing the necessity of forced labor to develop the land. They also defended slavery on racial grounds, contending that emancipation would lead to black demoralization and that color differences naturally re-

⁷ Adams, quoted in Lundy, *War in Texas*, 34; indenture contract, County of Leon, Territory of Florida, Apr. 30, 1831, James Morgan Papers (Rosenberg Library, Galveston); *Texas Gazette* (San Felipe de Austin), Sept. 25, 1829; *A Visit to Texas . . .* (2nd ed.; New York, 1836), 187–188; Schoen, “Free Negro” (Oct., 1936), 86–94.

⁸ Mary Austin Holley, *Texas* (Lexington, Ky., 1836), 133 (quotations); David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821–1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (Albuquerque, 1982), 213; James Michael McReynolds, “Family Life in a Borderland Community: Nacogdoches, Texas, 1779–1861” (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1978), 188–190; Bugbee, “Slavery in Early Texas” (Sept., 1898), 390–397, 400–401; Barker, “Influence of Slavery,” 11, 32; W. L. Foleys to “Messrs. Austin or Milan [sic],” Oct. 28, 1834, Samuel May Williams Papers (Rosenberg Library); Lowrie, *Culture Conflict*, 31; Connor, *Texas*, 75, 85, 86.

⁹ *Visit to Texas*, 57 (quotation); Bugbee, “Slavery in Early Texas” (Dec., 1898), 662–664; Carlos E. Castañeda (trans.), “Statistical Report of Texas by Juan N. Almonte, 1835,” *SHQ*, XXVIII (Jan., 1925), 178; McReynolds, “Nacogdoches,” 288–290, 295.

sulted in some form of inequality. Neither the empresario nor many of his colonists seemed to share the Mexican sense of outrage at the institution nor their sympathy for the plight of the slaves. But while Austin defended slavery on grounds of necessity he also expressed apprehension about its effects, believing that it demoralized whites and fearing that society itself would be first Africanized and then “San Domingonized.” At the same time, the *Texas Gazette* condemned slavery as an injustice tolerated in Texas and through the ages only because it contributed to “prosperity,” but rightly condemned by international philanthropic opinion and Mexican law. Proponents of the peculiar institution had been placed in a defensive position in Mexican Texas.¹⁰

In a common retort to their moral critics Texas slaveholders also asserted that their laborers had not been imported from Africa or elsewhere for speculative purposes but were what Austin called “family servants.” Beginning in the early spring of 1833, however, the situation with regard to the African slave trade changed: one boatload after another of Africans (totaling four documented cases in the next eighteen months) arrived by way of Cuba at Galveston Bay for distribution to labor-hungry farmers. At least two ventures lured free blacks from the Caribbean into Texas and then treated them as slaves on their arrival. Leaders like David G. Burnet and John A. Wharton pushed through public condemnations of this “in human [*sic*] and unprincipled [African slave] traffic” and urged united “efforts to prevent the evil from polluting our shores.” Resolutions discountenanced this “odious . . . detestable” form of “treason” and “Piracy,” while claiming it “was perpetrated by transient foreign adventurers.” However strong these pronouncements, popular opinion seemed in fact rather tolerant. African slave traders included such future luminaries as Benjamin Fort Smith and James W. Fannin, and prominent planters like Monroe Edwards and Sterling McNeel purchased the human cargoes. These enterprises seemed ominous to Wharton, who concluded that their originators intended to “experiment” with the power of civil authority in Texas.¹¹

¹⁰ Barker, “Influence of Slavery,” 12 (1st quotation), 28 (2nd quotation); Bugbee, “Slavery in Early Texas” (Sept., 1898), 399–400; Hatcher, *Early American Traveller*, 41–42, 145; *Texas Gazette* (San Felipe de Austin), June 19, 1830.

¹¹ Bugbee, “Slavery in Early Texas” (Sept., 1898), 400; Austin quoted in Barker, “Influence of Slavery,” 10; San Felipe Resolutions, Apr. 4, 1833, *Texas Republican* (Brazoria), June 6, 1835 (2nd–7th quotations); Edward Hanrick to Samuel May Williams, Aug. 28, 1833, Williams Papers; Eugene C. Barker, “The African Slave Trade in Texas,” *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association*, VI (Oct., 1902), 147–152 (this journal is cited hereafter as *QTSHA*); “The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilue Harris,” *ibid.*, IV (July, 1900), 97–98; Ben C. Stuart, “The African Slave Trade in Texas,” 12 (typescript, Rosenberg Library); John A. Wharton to David G. Burnet, July 8, 1834, David Gouverneur Burnet Papers (Eugene C. Barker Texas History Cen-

Mexican officials disagreed about whether responsibility for the illicit introduction of Africans rested with dishonest Texans or an inadequate coastal navy.¹² In fact advisors for years had argued against concerted enforcement of slave-related laws. Some asserted bluntly that Anglo Texans would revolt rather than accept immediate abolition. Others warned darkly that the Guerrero decree might result in disturbances “prejudicial to the [public] tranquility” or “commotions” of a “violent and costly” nature. Since much of this advice appeared in print, pro-slavery Texans knew not to mistake restraint for actual sympathy with the institution. Even malleable local Mexican officials clearly regarded slavery as a temporary and shameful evil.¹³

As political tensions between Texas and the central government grew in the spring of 1835, Texans also began receiving warnings that traditional Mexican restraint with regard to slavery had come to an end. Francis W. Johnson sent a report from Monclova on May 6 concerning impending abolitionist legislation intended for application throughout the republic. “It does appear,” he concluded, “that they will stop at nothing short of the ruin of Texas. . . .” William Barrett Travis considered this law as one of a series of “alarming circumstances” produced by “a plundering, robbing, autocratical, aristocratical, jumbled up govt which is in fact no govt at all. . . . There is no security for life, liberty, or property.” News of Mexican military preparations created further fear that the expedition intended, in the words of Robert McAlpin Williamson, “to compel you to liberate your slaves” and accept other forms of dictatorial government. General Martín Perfecto de Cós hardly dispelled this anxiety when he warned that “the inevitable consequences of war will bear upon [the rebels] and their property.”¹⁴

The renewed threat of imposed emancipation in case of war led some Texans to feelings of desperation. Fannin authorized the Consultation to sell his slaves in order to purchase munitions because “this

ter, University of Texas, Austin, cited hereafter as BTHC); Mary Austin Holley, *The Texas Diary, 1835–1838*, ed. J. P. Bryan (Austin, 1965), 91. African slaves were imported by way of Cuba in February, March, and August, 1833, and in February and July, 1834.

¹²Eugene C. Barker (ed.), “Minutes of the Ayuntamiento of San Felipe de Austin, 1828–1832,” *SHQ*, XXII (Jan., 1919), 275; José María Tornel y Mendevil, *Relations between Texas, the United States of America and the Mexican Republic*, in Carlos E. Castañeda (trans.), *The Mexican Side of the Texan Revolution . . .* (Dallas, 1928), 328; Castañeda (trans.), “Statistical Report,” 198.

¹³*Texas Gazette* (San Felipe de Austin), Jan. 22, 30 (quotations), 1830. Barker, “Influence of Slavery,” 23–24, discounts the interpretation that the “menace of insurrection” resulted in exemption from the Guerrero decree.

¹⁴Francis W. Johnson to William Martin, May 6, 1835, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, I, 100; William B. Travis to Burnet, May 21, 1835, *ibid.*, I, 122; address of R. M. Williamson, June 22, 1835, *ibid.*, I, 199; Martín Perfecto de Cós to the Public, July 5, 1835, *ibid.*, 203.

property, and indeed any other, will not be worth owning, if we do not succeed.”¹⁵ Similarly the Matagorda Committee of Safety and Correspondence declared in October that, with a “merciless soldiery” advancing on Texas

to give liberty to our slaves, and to make slaves of ourselves; to let loose the blood hounds of savage war upon us, and deluge this beautiful country with the life blood of her adopted children, we should be blind indeed to continue any longer inactive.¹⁶

Others argued that these same considerations suggested the necessity of peace, or Texans might face an invasion by an army of liberation. This prospect seemed especially frightening if the United States enforced its prohibition of the international slave trade, preventing the transportation of bondsmen across the Sabine and leaving masters with no place to secure their property.¹⁷

The approach of war was attended by more complaints about Mexican abolitionism and by heightened racial invective. A correspondent of the *Telegraph and Texas Register* pleaded for separation “from a people one half of whom are the most depraved of the different races of Indians, different in color” and inferior in character. From this it took but a short leap of imagination to transform the struggle into one between “Texian freemen” and slaves. “Will you now,” John W. Hall asked the people of Texas, “suffer the *colored* hirelings of a cruel and faithless despot, to feast and revel, in your dearly purchased and cherished homes?” Lest any doubt remain about the racial and sexual nature of this reveling, Fannin called Texans to arms to prevent the prostitution of “the *Fair daughters* of chaste *white women*.”¹⁸ Given this view of the conflict as one between white and colored races, Anglo-Texans naturally feared slave insurrection. With “war now pending,” William H. Wharton compiled a list of evidence of Mexican hostility toward Texas:

1st With a sickly philanthropy worthy of the abolitionists of these United States, they have, contrary to justice, and to law, intermeddled with our slave population, and have even impotently threatened . . . to emancipate them, and induce them to turn their arms against their masters.¹⁹

¹⁵James W. Fannin to the president of the Convention of Texas, Nov. 6, 1835, *ibid.*, II, 337; S. F. Austin to Johnson et al., Dec. 22, 1835, *ibid.*, III, 282–283.

¹⁶*Telegraph and Texas Register* (San Felipe de Austin), Oct. 17, 1835.

¹⁷John J. Linn, *Reminiscences of Fifty Years in Texas* (1883; reprint, Austin, 1935), 114–115.

¹⁸*Texean and Emigrant's Guide* (Nacogdoches), Dec. 26, 1835; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (San Felipe de Austin), Feb. 27 (1st quotation), Mar. 5 (2nd–4th quotations), 1836; Fannin to Robinson and General Council, Feb. 7, 1836, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, IV, 280.

¹⁹[William H. Wharton], *Texas: A Brief Account . . .*, in Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, IX, 240.

The military events that soon transpired led many to fear that Mexican abolitionism was far from “impotent.”

As early as 1828 the Mexican government had considered the relation between slave revolt and Texas independence. General Manuel de Mier y Terán, who believed that bondsmen experienced severe maltreatment and that they knew of the pro-emancipation intent of Mexican law, viewed the slaves as ripe for an uprising. But he argued against abolition, suggesting that the potential for a slave insurrection would restrain both the secession of Texas and the threat of invasion by the United States. Some subsequent officials believed that Mier y Terán had miscalculated. The government of Mexico dispatched Juan N. Almonte to Texas in 1833–34 with secret instructions to inform the slaves of their liberty under Mexican law and to promise them land as freedmen.²⁰

By the summer of 1835 many Anglo-Texans concluded that Mexico had acquired the will and power to implement an antislavery strategy. Reports circulated that Thomas M. Thompson, commander of the Mexican schooner of war *Correo*, had intended to impress and subsequently liberate “all the negro slaves in the country that he could get in his possession” when he sailed into Galveston Bay in late July. Even James H. C. Miller, a defender of the Mexican centralists who had believed the government’s goals to be pacific, wrote to the people to warn of the Mexican invasion of Texas, which contemplated, among other evils, slave emancipation. More graphically, another Texan recently back from the interior of Mexico reported to the public that a large army had been dispatched. Its numerous oppressive policies included an intent to liberate the slaves and also to “let them loose upon their [the Anglo Texans’] families.”²¹

Benjamin R. Milam summarized the emerging consensus of opinion. He too warned that the troops headed for Texas to enforce the centralist constitution planned an unconventional warfare of recruiting Indians and attempting “if possible to get the slaves to revolt.” Altogether these forces would “make a wilderness of Texas, and beggars of its inhabitants”; thus the constitutional quarrel had far-reaching implications. “If the Federal system is lost in Texas, what will be our situa-

²⁰ Wendell G. Addington, “Slave Insurrections in Texas,” *Journal of Negro History*, XXXV (Oct., 1950), 411; Morton, *Terán and Texas*, 106, 117–119; David M. Vigness, *The Revolutionary Decades, 1810–1836* (Austin, 1965), 101–102, 139.

²¹ Andrew J. Yates, Isaac N. Moreland, and Augustus C. Allen [affadavit], Aug. 29, 1835, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, I, 378 (1st quotation); James H. C. Miller to the People of Texas [Sept., 1835?], *ibid.*, I, 517; Horatio Allsberry to the Public, Aug. 28, 1835, Barker (ed.), *Austin Papers*, III, 107, 108 (2nd quotation).

tion? worse than that of the most degraded slaves.”²² As Milam noted, the political and military crisis posed by the triumph of Santa Anna and centralism in 1835 challenged more than the governmental theories of the Anglo Texans. Over the previous decade unpopular policies emanating from Mexico—whether on immigration, taxation, troop strength, or slavery—had been blunted by sympathetic local officials who ruled with considerable autonomy under the federalist system. This arrangement tacitly protected slavery, an institution that the central government had repeatedly, and officially, condemned. Despite the shroud of uncertainty that hung over it, slavery began to expand aggressively in the two or three years prior to 1835, as evidenced by the invigorated though illegal slave trade. From the Anglo Texan perspective the constitutional changes of that year once again threatened liberty and interrupted economic progress, their version of which included a system of slave labor. Texans took up arms in 1835 against a regime that apparently intended to undermine their political ideals, their emerging prosperity, and their understanding of social and racial peace. Clearly the challenge to slavery contributed to the Texas decision to resist the new order in Mexico.

No doubt others agreed with the empresario, who welcomed the break with Mexico that also promised to end the period of disputation on the status of slavery. In Nashville, Tennessee, on October 6, 1835, Sterling C. Robertson wrote to “Capitalists” to alert them to the “profitable speculation” offered by Texas. The lands there he described as cheap and productive “and only want a settled government to give confidence to slave holders to make them rate with the highest lands in the United States.” “As the present state of things cannot last long,” he promised that such “confidence cannot be long withheld” by a new government, whether independent or under the United States.²³

While Robertson prophesied in Tennessee, those who remained in Texas began to confront the task of preserving slavery amidst an atmosphere of crisis. The possibility of a slave insurrection placed an impossible burden on the embryonic Texas army, so initial responsibility for monitoring slave behavior rested with the multipurpose committees of safety organized by most communities. In the fall of 1835, for the first of two times, the fear of slave restlessness reached crisis levels in the

²² Benjamin R. Milam to Johnson, July 5, 1835, Barker (ed.), *Austin Papers*, III, 82, 83 (quotations).

²³ Sterling C. Robertson to Capitalists, Oct. 6, 1835, Malcolm D. McLean (comp. and ed.), *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas* (vols. I–III, Fort Worth, Texas, 1974–1976; vols. IV–, Arlington, Texas, 1977–), XI, 576.

region of the lower Brazos. On September 22 a Brazoria committee announced the receipt of “information . . . clearly proving that much danger is to be apprehended from the slave population.” It responded in a manner that befitted the southern heritage of its members, recommending organization of “a vigilant patrol [*sic*] . . . to keep the slave population in due subjection” and punishment of blacks caught away from their masters’ premises. The following week a similar group in Matagorda echoed the call for “measures” to prevent “both alarm and danger.”²⁴ The alarm, at least, did not subside. On October 6 two residents of nearby Columbia wrote Stephen F. Austin for confirmation of a reputed ascent up the river by General Cós and 2,000 soldiers. Both feared “great danger from the Negroes should a large Mexican force come so near” and sought to detain area troops to guard against these eventualities. The amphibious assault by Cós fell under the category of “false rumors,” which one of the letters admitted were circulating; a few days later the *Telegraph* observed that people “have been alarmed at shadows.” The military authorities thought enough of this threat that they kept Texas troops in the area.²⁵ In mid-October residents of this region sought more substantial aid. Writing on October 17, B. J. White of Goliad informed Commander-in-Chief Austin of “unpleasant news” received from two individuals who had made the journey from Brazoria: “the negroes on Brazos made an attempt to rise.” These rebels had an elaborate plan of redistributing the land, shipping cotton to New Orleans, and then making “the white men serve them in turn.” The revolt had been vigorously suppressed, possibly with the aid of troops dispatched from Goliad under the command of a Major Sutherland. Of the nearly one hundred slaves “taken up,” some had been hung and others “whipd nearly to death.”²⁶

Slave-related disturbances receded until the spring of 1836. This relatively peaceful winter interval resulted from a series of circumstances: the brutal suppressions of October had perhaps quieted black unrest and reassured whites, and the military scene had shifted to the

²⁴ Resolutions of The Committee of Safety of the Jurisdiction of Columbia, Sept. 22, 1835, *Texas Republican* (Brazoria), Sept. 26, 1835 (1st and 2nd quotations); resolutions of the Committee of Safety for Matagorda, Sept. 30, 1835, Barker (ed.), *Austin Papers*, III, 143, 144 (3rd and 4th quotations).

²⁵ Thomas J. Pilgrim to S. F. Austin, Oct. 6, 1835, Barker (ed.), *Austin Papers*, III, 162 (1st and 2nd quotations); Josiah H. Bell to S. F. Austin or Peter W. Grayson, Oct. 6, 1835, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, II, 57; Richard R. Royall to S. F. Austin, Oct. 10, 1835, *ibid.*, II, 89; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (San Felipe de Austin), Oct. 10, 1835.

²⁶ B. J. White to S. F. Austin, Oct. 17, 1835, Barker (ed.), *Austin Papers*, III, 190 (quotations); [Harriet A. Ames], “The History of Harriett A. Ames during the Early Days of Texas . . .,” 12 (typescript, BTHC).

region around Béxar, where there were few slaves and where Texas arms temporarily prevailed. Nevertheless, patrols continued to function, and in December a proclamation warned the people of continued danger. In that document Sam Houston accused General Santa Anna of the unchivalric practice of distributing arms “to a portion of our population, for the purpose of creating in the midst of us a servile war.” Those who lived near the coastal rivers continued after the first of the year to suspect that Mexican strategy included a plan to “send in troops by sea to excite the negroes.”²⁷

Changing military fortunes once again heightened the danger of slave insurrection. On March 5, 1836, Henry Austin advised James F. Perry to take his family eastward for safety. Predicting accurately that the front would come to the Colorado and Brazos region, the correspondent stated that there was danger from soldiers, plundering Indians, or “a possible rising of the negroes.” Twelve days later a committee at Brazoria, alarmed by news of the fall of the Alamo, announced to the public that the advancing Mexican army sought “a general extermination” of the people, regardless of age or sex. The group claimed to have “been appraised” [*sic*] that the “treacherous and bloody enemy” intended to recruit Negroes “as instruments of his unholy and savage work, . . . thus lighting the torch of war, in the bosoms of our domestic circles.” It proposed that measures be taken “for securing in a proper manner all negroes” and that a black work force be assembled to establish fortifications on the river. The committee’s sensational rhetoric, plus this proposal of bringing together a large number of admittedly rebellion-prone slaves, may have contributed to the impending panic. Here as elsewhere in southwest Texas, most Anglos chose not to volunteer, organize, or fortify, but to flee.²⁸

This panic turned into the Runaway Scrape, and about this same time black unrest erupted to the east. From New Washington Colonel James Morgan wrote his superiors with recommendations for protecting that area. “The Negroes high upon the Trinity, have manifested a disposition to become troublesome and in some instances *daring*,” and he reported that they had sought a potentially dangerous alliance with the Coushatta Indians. The blacks apparently planned to “come down [to the south] and murder the inhabitants and join the Mexicans.” Once again a combination of white reprisals (unnamed parties chased off one

²⁷ Houston to Citizens, Dec. 12, 1835, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, III, 171; Williams to Don Carlos Barrett, Jan. 2, 1836, *ibid.*, III, 407 (2nd quotation).

²⁸ Henry Austin to James F. Perry, Mar. 5, 1836, Barker (ed.), *Austin Papers*, III, 318 (1st quotation), 319; Brazoria meeting, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, V, 98, 99 (2nd–6th quotations).

black rebel, whipped another, and killed a third) and an improved Texas military situation ended the threatened slave insurrection. These incidents weakened the Texans' military effort both by diverting attention from the enemy army and also by undermining recruitment. Even President Burnet acknowledged that some men had to be retained to protect their neighborhoods.²⁹

None of these instances of slave unrest resulted in the actual shedding of white blood, but the Anglos' concern was prudent. Evidence of the reality of black rebelliousness came from many sources; in October and again in December the Council took time to order the San Felipe patrol captain to arrest free Negroes, one for making "violent threats" and another on a charge of "high crimes and misdemeanors." Furthermore, virtually all the preconditions for rebellion existed in Texas in 1835–1836. As frontiersmen, the slaves of this region had of necessity acquired skills with weapons that in this crisis could be turned against their masters. The slave ranks had recently grown in numbers with the importation of Africans, an element that frequently led uprisings throughout the Americas. The intellectual climate had filled with revolutionary rhetoric emphasizing freedom, rights, and liberty in the struggle against tyranny, despotism, and even slavery. Blacks had apparently acquired some familiarity with the emancipationist leanings of Mexico, which would have prepared them to embrace the invading force as an army of liberation. The internal divisions of the ruling authorities presented a real opportunity; only the whites' continued numerical superiority and success on the battlefield obstructed the chance for a more powerful black revolt.³⁰

Mexico did not officially invite a slave rebellion. In fact its army marched northward without a clear policy regarding slavery. As late as February, 1836, Santa Anna queried government officials in Mexico: "Shall we permit those wretches to moan in chains any longer in a country whose kind laws protect the liberty of man without distinction of cast or color?" At the end of the month F. M. Díaz Noriega replied

²⁹James Morgan to [Sam P. Carson, acting secretary of state], Mar. 24, 1836 (quotations), Executive Record Book, Burnet Papers; Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York, 1971), 381–382; Burnet Proclamation, Mar. 29, 1836, Binkley (ed.), *Official Correspondence*, II, 557–558.

³⁰Schoen, "Free Negro" (Jan., 1937), 172 (quotations); Ralph W. Steen, "Analysis of the Work of the General Council, Provisional Government of Texas, 1835–1836," *SHQ*, XL (Apr., 1937), 327; Journal of the Proceedings of the General Council, Oct. 16, 1835, Secretary of State, Records of Legislative and Executive Bodies prior to the Republic, 1835–1836 (Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin); Bugbee, "Slavery in Early Texas" (Dec., 1898), 663; Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, 1979), 1–50.

that the contract system of Texas was an illegal pretext for slavery. In fact, those “unhappy people became free solely by the act of stepping into our territory,” and he advised recruiting blacks for the army so they could discover and claim their own freedom. Such a policy, according to Noriega, had the added merit of preempting Texas complaints against unconstitutional appropriation of property.³¹ Minister of war José María Tornel wrote Santa Anna on March 18, agreeing that the “philanthropy of the Mexican nation” had already freed Texas slaves. He advised Santa Anna to grant their “natural rights,” including “the liberty to go to any point on the globe that appeals to them” or to remain in Texas or another part of Mexico, but the minister betrayed a concern that their area of residence be chosen so as to discourage future “disorder or upheaval.” On April 9, 1836, Tornel published a congressional decree confiscating the property of those who promoted rebellion in Texas; however, it contained no specific reference to human chattels.³²

Whatever hesitation may have been shown in published Mexican policy, the Mexican army had an actual disposition toward black freedom. The ranks of the first troops to arrive in Bexar even included some black infantrymen and servants. Until March the location of the fighting limited contact between Mexican soldiers and slaves, but the army’s basic attitude became clear when Joe, a black servant of William B. Travis, survived the slaughter at the Alamo, the only male to do so.³³ During the six-week interval that followed this victory, the Mexican army moved east of the Colorado and then the Brazos River and thus into the region where most Texas bondsmen lived. General Houston attempted to secure the slave property of those who fled but did not always succeed in preventing blacks from “joining the enemy,” as one observer described it. Slaves often seized the opportunity of running away, frequently in group ventures, and gained refuge with the invaders. Fourteen slaves and their families became free by fleeing to the

³¹ Antonio López de Santa Anna, *Manifiesto Relative to His Operations in the Texas Campaign and His Capture*, in Castañeda (trans.), *Mexican Side*, 65 (1st quotation); F. M. Díaz Noriega to Antonio López de Santa Anna, Feb. 29, 1836, in *Guerra y Marina, Texas, 1835–1836* (Archivo General de México; typescript, Part I, 24–35, BTHC).

³² José María Tornel y Mendevíl to Santa Anna, Mar. 18, 1836, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, V, 136 (quotations); Tornel to the Public, n.d., in *Texas as Province and Republic, 1795–1845: As Based on the Bibliography by Thomas W. Streeter* (microfilm; Richardson Library, Hardin-Simmons University). Translations are by the author.

³³ John W. Smith to [Thomas J. Chambers], Sept. 2, 1835, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, I, 406; José Enrique de la Peña, *With Santa Anna in Texas: A Personal Narrative of the Revolution*, ed. and trans. Carmen Perry (College Station, Tex., 1975), 44; C[hester] Newell, *History of the Revolution in Texas . . .* (New York, 1838), 88–89.

command of General José de Urrea near Victoria on April 3, 1836. Even in retreat the Mexican forces attracted runaways: a Matagorda resident who returned to his home in early May discovered that at least thirteen blacks had “left my neighborhood” with the southbound army. He complained, too, that many cattle and eight wagons loaded with provisions, property that he valued at a total of \$100,000, had been taken by the enemy. According to General Vicente Filisola, at least some of the plundered goods were taken by slaves who robbed houses in their flights for liberty.³⁴ The Mexicans found these fugitives often ready to serve as well as to seek protection. Blacks aided river crossings, acted as messengers, and performed other chores for their liberators.³⁵

Enough slaves escaped to the Mexican army that the Texans provided for the return of these fugitives in the battlefield agreement that they forced on Santa Anna on April 22 (later confirmed in the Treaty of Velasco). The commanders left in charge of the Mexican army disagreed about whether and to what extent this provision should be implemented. General Filisola vacillated. Although he initially promised scrupulous conformity to the terms of the treaty, he put off Texas commissioners; eventually he negotiated an armistice that admitted them to his camp, where they recovered prisoners and a few runaways. His fellow officers criticized Filisola’s conduct as a violation of law, morality, and proper military procedure. Urrea refused to honor the Velasco agreements and later boasted that “all the slaves within my jurisdiction continued to enjoy their liberty. . . .” Captain José Enrique de la Peña intervened personally in the cause of freedom when he disguised a soon-to-be-reenslaved black as a Mexican soldier and whisked him away from the Texas representatives at Goliad to Matamoros. Both sides charged the other with perfidy on this issue; a Mexican officer reported that the Texans had sold some prisoners of war into slavery. Frustration over the unfulfilled slavery provision of the Velasco treaty helped contribute to delays in the release of Santa Anna, but the Texans never re-

³⁴ William Parker to Editor of the *Natchez Free Trader*, Apr. 29, 1836, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, VI, 123 (1st quotation); [José de Urrea], *Diary of the Military Operations of the Division . . . in Texas*, in Castañeda (trans.), *Mexican Side*, 238; Royall to Rusk, May 14, 1836 (2nd quotation), Thomas Jefferson Rusk Papers (BTHC); Vicente Filisola to Comandante de las fuersas de Texas, May 22, 1836, *ibid.*

³⁵ Barker, “Slave Trade,” 152–153; de la Peña, *With Santa Anna*, 104; Hervey Whiting to Morgan, May 3, 1836, Binkley (ed.), *Official Correspondence*, II, 654; Holley, *Diary*, 45; “Reminiscences of Ann Raney Thomas Coleman, 1810–1877?” Part 1, p. 160, Ann Raney Thomas Coleman Papers (typescript, BTHC); Samuel E. Asbury (ed.), “The Private Journal of Juan Nepomuceno Almonte, February 1–April 16, 1836,” *SHQ*, XLVIII (July, 1944), 32.

gained more than a handful of the fugitives who found freedom with the Mexican army.³⁶

Not all the slaves who escaped during the Texas Revolution sought or achieved protection from the Mexican forces, but the upheaval generated by the conflict increased the opportunities for running away. Mostly the slaves fled in groups, especially those who took advantage of the panic of the Runaway Scrape, and frequently they seized horses and weapons to ease and protect their journey. Some of the runaways had been previously conscripted to labor on military fortifications. The dislocation and breakdown of authority continued to protect escaped slaves long after the Texan-Mexican battles had ended: in November, 1836, a group of owners advertised for the return of “a number of African negroes” described as “wandering about the country” in the region of the Colorado River.³⁷

The effects of the Revolution on the security of slave property lasted even into the year 1837. Some blacks fled in groups through the sparsely settled region west of the Colorado toward the Rio Grande, perhaps to join the colony of blacks already established in Matamoros. Most escaped bondsmen—in fact eight out of ten advertised as having escaped or having been captured by authorities in 1837—were Africans. Slave traders had taken advantage of weakened authority in Texas since 1834 and continued their illegal imports even during the war for independence. These unacculturated bondsmen proved especially recalcitrant and sometimes influenced American-born slaves to flee with them. Though sheriffs occasionally took them into custody, runaway Africans gained such a reputation for fierce resistance that they roamed around wilderness areas virtually without interference. Edwin Waller advertised for the return of Gumby and Zow for a year after his initial June 1837 notice before he gave up the effort. Brothers Leander H. and Pleasant D. McNeel, who also speculated heavily in African slaves, waited three months before calling public attention to their two run-

³⁶ Urrea, *Diary*, 269–270 (quotation); de la Peña, *With Santa Anna*, 170, 179; Ramón Martínez Caro, *A True Account of the First Texas Campaign . . .*, in Castañeda (trans.), *Mexican Side*, 126; Treaty of Velasco, May 14, 1836, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, VI, 274; Rusk to Mirabeau B. Lamar, May 17, 1836, *ibid.*, VI, 315; Filisola to Santa Anna, May 25, 1836, *ibid.*, 371; William H. Jack to President and Cabinet, May 30, 1836, *ibid.*, VI, 419; William D. Redd Account, [May, 1836], *ibid.*, 456; Filisola to ———, June 3, 1836, *ibid.*, 508; A. Frederick Sawyer to Morgan, June 6, 1836, *ibid.*, VII, 46; Manuel de Michetorena to Tornel, June 8, 1836, *ibid.*, 67–69; Rusk to Sam Houston, July 6, 1836, *ibid.*, 371; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia), Nov. 19, 1836.

³⁷ *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia), Nov. 9, 1836 (quotations); *Texas Republican* (Brazoria), July 18, 1835; Barker, “Slave Trade,” 152–153; [William Fairfax Gray], *From Virginia to Texas, 1835 . . .* (Houston, 1909), 168; Thomas B. Bell to Robert Potter, Apr. 12, 1836, Binkley (ed.), *Official Correspondence*, II, 633.

aways. During that period the heavily scarred twenty-five year old Arch was “taken up five or six times . . . and made his escape every time,” twice even breaking out of irons. The owner considered Arch “a great rascal,” but admitted that both he and his companion were “smart, sensible negro[es].” The ranks of slave runaways changed abruptly in 1838, when only one of sixteen advertisements in the *Telegraph* sought the return of fugitives denoted as “Africans.”³⁸

While many blacks sought freedom through flight, others appear in the records as adherents on the Texas side. Though it is difficult to know how freely such service was given, some must have hoped to earn their liberty in this manner. Slaves provided aid to the cause in a variety of ways. Some contributed provisions, while others engaged in forms of military service. Captain Josiah H. Bell dispatched his slaves Peter and Sam to help guard families near the front in April, 1836. Another slave named Peter, having previously obtained the privilege of hiring his own time as a teamster, transported provisions to the army in the fall of 1835. An enterprising bondsman named Cary “was of much service in carrying expresses” during the Revolution, according to a subsequent certificate written by his owner. These activities placed slaves in positions where they saw or heard valuable military information, especially since the invading soldiers commonly assumed that all blacks held pro-Mexican views. During the campaign that led to the battle of San Jacinto, slaves seemed to form an unofficial spying network that relayed the size, location, and disposition of Mexican forces, including their vulnerability, on the afternoon of April 21. In spite of these efforts, the records reveal a total of only two emancipations recognized by Texas law.³⁹

That there was no guarantee of reward became harshly apparent to Joe, a twenty-three-year-old slave who remained with his owner, Travis, during the battle for the Alamo. By his own account, conveyed according to one hearer “with much modesty [and] apparent candor,” the servant fired at the attackers several times, escaped the initial massacre by

³⁸William B. DeWees, *Letters from an Early Settler of Texas* (Louisville, Ky., 1852), 211; Dillon, “Lundy,” 58; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia/Houston), Nov. 9, 1836, June 8, July 1, 29, Aug. 5 (quotations), Sept. 16, 1837; Matagorda *Bulletin*, Sept. 27, 1837; “Reminiscences of Dilue Harris,” 105–107; Clarke Beach to D. G. Burnet, May 9, 1836, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, VI, 190; Schoen, “Free Negro” (July, 1936), 33, (Jan., 1937), 173.

³⁹Certificate [addressed to Cary], Nov. 11, 1839 (quotation), Williams Papers; de la Peña, *With Santa Anna*, 131; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (San Felipe de Austin), Mar. 5, 1836; Wylly Martin to Houston, Apr. 7, 1836, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, V, 362; David Thomas to Houston, Apr. 14, 1836, *ibid.*, V, 475; Schoen, “Free Negro” (Oct., 1936), 113; Peter Bell and Sam Bell folders, Comptroller of Public Accounts, Republic Pension Applications (Archives Division, Texas State Library).

hiding in a building inside the fortress, narrowly avoided execution through an officer's intervention, and even spoke with Santa Anna concerning the Texas army. Evidently Joe possessed considerable persuasive ability because a Mexican version of this episode explained that he obtained mercy by convincing his captors "that only force" had made him stay at the battle scene. However, his eloquence did not bring him freedom—Joe remained a slave in the Travis estate, living near Columbia for over a year after his great adventure. He apparently retained a sense of history, for he created his own method of celebrating the first anniversary of the battle of San Jacinto. Accompanied by a Mexican and taking two fully equipped horses, Joe chose that day to run away in search of the freedom that had eluded him.⁴⁰

Some free blacks saw military action in the Texas ranks or, like William Goyens, carried out diplomatic missions for the Texans. A greater number of blacks, however, served the Texas cause involuntarily and with no prospect of reward. They labored as conscripts on the military fortifications at Galveston, prepared in late March and April of 1836 as a position from which to make a possible last stand. A few also helped cut steamboat wood or assisted on other smaller projects. Drafting slaves to work on fortifications obviously strengthened the Texas military position, but the idea also appealed to those who thought, in the words of the *Telegraph*, that removing bondsmen to army supervision "would leave greater security at home."

Black workers came under military authority in a variety of ways. Some had been impressed; many accompanied their refugee owners to the island; others found themselves entrusted or hired to the army—for wages in a few cases but often only for board—by masters who had fled the country or who had despaired of providing them sustenance. The woodcutters were delivered by owners motivated by a stated sense of patriotic zeal, but slaves and masters both objected to the military regimen established at Galveston. On April 8, Colonel James Morgan, in charge of preparing the island for defense, wrote to Secretary of War Thomas J. Rusk that he had arranged for approximately 140 bondsmen and women to work on the fort. Upon learning, however, that President David G. Burnet had authorized another officer "to hire hands . . . and to pay at the rate of \$8 pr mo. and board," he had abandoned his plans. Eight days later Rusk provided orders to Morgan permitting him to impress certain slaves. While inspecting the island on

⁴⁰[Gray], *Virginia to Texas*, 136 (1st quotation), 137; de la Peña, *With Santa Anna*, 44; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), May 26, 1837.

April 25, Burnet issued a more sweeping proclamation giving the Galveston commander clear authority to muster “all the colored persons on the island” over age fourteen and to supervise their “fatigue duty.” Efforts on the fort continued until toward the end of April, at which time the commanding officers went off in search of tools, leaving the project in charge of subordinates who neglected the duty. With the work unofficially at a halt, slaveowners began reclaiming their black workers. James F. Perry paid twenty dollars in steamboat fares for transporting back to his home the four Negroes who had been pressed into government service on Galveston Island.⁴¹

The war unsettled the normal routines of bondage. Emergency needs for labor arose; owners who went off to war sought special managerial arrangements for their work force; newspapers anticipated food crises and therefore urged corn rather than cotton production. The presence of hostile forces also disrupted work patterns. Masters attempted to shift their labor forces out of war zones and then back into their fields as the fortunes of war allowed, but they found this a difficult task of judgment and logistics. Some owners, with more concern for the security of their chattels than for the year’s farming, ran their slaves eastward past the Trinity and Neches rivers all the way to the U.S. border. A few planters removed their human property northward in rumored attempts to reach all the way to the Red River. All this human motion weakened the bonds of slavery and rendered the institution very unstable. It also of course increased the danger that slaves would somehow manage to slip from the grasp of their masters. Other slaves fell prey to Indian raids and physical perils in moving to and from the plantations.⁴²

⁴¹ Schoen, “Free Negro” (July, 1836), 33–34; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (San Felipe de Austin), Mar. 12, 1836 (1st quotation); Morgan to [Carson], Mar. 24, 1836, Executive Record Book, Burnet Papers; J. F. Perry to Emily Perry, Apr. 26, 1836, James Franklin and Stephen Samuel Perry Collection, Papers and Manuscripts, Series A: Correspondence, Vol. IV (BTHC); Rusk to Morgan, Apr. 16, 1836, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, V, 493; José de Urrea to Santa Anna, Apr. 22, 1836, *ibid.*, VI, 18–19; George P. Digges to Houston, Apr. 23, 1836, *ibid.*, VI, 27; Burnet Proclamation, Apr. 25, 1836, *ibid.*, VI, 52 (2nd and 3rd quotations); Morgan to Rusk, Apr. 8, 1836, Binkley (ed.), *Official Correspondence*, II, 611; Edward Harcourt to Morgan, May 9, 1836, *ibid.*, II, 662; James F. Perry folder, Republic Payments for Service, Audited Military Claims (Archives Division, Texas State Library). On William Goyens, see Victor H. Treat, “William Goyens: Free Negro Entrepreneur,” Alwyn Barr and Robert A. Calvert (eds.), *Black Leaders: Texans for Their Times* (Austin, 1981), 19–47.

⁴² [Gray], *Virginia to Texas*, 152, 166–167, 169–170; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (San Felipe de Austin), Mar. 12, 1836; John Damon to Morgan, [Sept. 13], 1836, Morgan Papers; Milam to Fannin, Nov. 15, 1835, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, II, 428; H. Austin to J. F. Perry, Mar. 5, 1836, *ibid.*, IV, 515; Houston to Ira Ingram, Apr. 5, 1836, *ibid.*, V, 331; Clarke Beach to Burnet, May 9, 1836, *ibid.*, VI, 190; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Columbia), Dec. 27, 1836; DeWees, *Letters*, 205.

Threats to slavery posed by political change in Mexico, military efforts to impose this new order, and the upheavals generated by war—these challenges dominated the thoughts of defenders of the institution during 1835 and 1836. Slaveowners also recognized the dangers represented by a growing international antislavery movement. Texas authorities acted quickly to discourage a northern “Abolition society” scheme to establish a free black colony in Texas in 1835, just as they had made their sentiments clear to Lundy on this matter two years earlier. Buoyed by this proslavery consensus, Texas law and constitution makers in 1835 and 1836 moved to the task of protecting property, including the ownership of human beings, while also emphasizing doctrines of freedom. Texas thus entered nationhood with a constitution that defined human rights in racial terms and also provided a long list of positive guarantees of slavery.⁴³ In deference to world opinion and diplomatic necessity the document prohibited importation of blacks from places other than the United States. The African slave traffic had accelerated in 1835 and 1836, when at least eight vessels, carrying about 600 slaves from the West Indies, disembarked their cargoes at Gulf ports or river plantations. Those who debated the foreign slave trade considered it only as a problem of state; not a delegate expressed a trace of genuine humanitarian feeling for the slaves. The other racial question that drew the attention of the convention, the fate of free blacks, also grew out of concern for the protection of slavery. Texas masters believed that the presence of this class disrupted slave discipline and discouraged slaveholder migration. The constitution, by providing that “no free person of African descent . . . shall be permitted to reside permanently in the republic, without the consent of Congress,” gave the government a free hand to discourage any of this group from tampering with bondsmen.⁴⁴

The events of 1835 and 1836 had shaken slavery considerably, but in the end the Texas victory confirmed the institution. Furthermore, the pattern of race relations that emerged in this period persisted in subsequent years. Blacks continued to identify with Mexico as a force of free-

⁴³Dillon, “Lundy,” 47–53, 60; Beaumont Committee to Henry Millard, Dec. 2, 1835, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, III, 73 (quotation); An Ordinance and Decree to Prevent the Importation of Free Negroes and Mulattoes into Texas,” Jan. 5, 1836, Gammel (comp.), *Laws of Texas*, I, 1,024.

⁴⁴Holley, *Diary*, 29; Barker, “Slave Trade,” 152; Ephraim Douglass Adams (ed.), “Correspondence from the British Archives Concerning Texas, 1837–1846,” *QTSHA*, XVII (Oct., 1913), 199–200; Fannin to Major Belton, Aug. 27, 1835, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, I, 373; William P. Harris to “Friend Hanks,” Jan. 19, 1836, *ibid.*, IV, 72; William S. Fisher to Henry Smith, Mar. 2, 1836, *ibid.*, IV, 490; Schoen, “Free Negro” (July, 1937), 104–105; Constitution of the Republic of Texas, General Provisions, Sec. 9, Jenkins (ed.), *Papers*, V, 113.

dom. Mexican military ventures in Texas and around the Rio Grande attracted the participation of former slaves. Runaways, especially those who fled in groups, still sought their liberty in Mexico in the years just after the Revolution. Troublesome as this outlet for freedom proved to be, white Texans also feared a far worse prospect—that abolitionists would provide financial support to Mexico for a renewal of the war along antislavery lines.⁴⁵

Even though British and American abolitionists continued to view Texas as a fair field for their work, their vision had virtually no support in the young Republic. The proslavery element in Texas, unlike its counterpart in other independence movements in the Americas, faced no antislavery crusade from within the new nation. With hardly any exaggeration the *Telegraph and Texas Register* in the fall of 1838 proclaimed that “our country enjoys a complete immunity” from abolitionism.⁴⁶

Texas governmental authorities rapidly added to the proslavery measures passed during the Revolution. As British consul William Kennedy reported from Galveston in 1843, “laws and regulations have become . . . less favourable to Slaves since Texas obtained the position of an independent State.” Both Congress and municipalities developed more definitive slave codes. Even though Texas lawmakers acceded to external pressure and provided punishments for the traders who imported slaves from Africa or the Caribbean, this illegal traffic remained difficult to repress.⁴⁷ The African slave trade remained an important source for labor in the Republic, but most of the traffic in human beings was of the legal variety from the United States. The rate of white immigration to East Texas in the first five years after the Revolution doubled that of previous years, with the bulk of these immigrants coming from states that had large slave populations. Slaves frequently accompanied or sometimes even preceded their owners to Texas. Altogether, these sources swelled the slave ranks rapidly. In the decade after 1834, the number of slaves rose from about 10 percent to over 16

⁴⁵ Porter, *Negro on the Frontier*, 382–383; A[ndrew] J. Sowell, *Rangers and Pioneers of Texas . . .* (1884; reprint, New York, 1964), 187–189; Joseph Milton Nance, *After San Jacinto: The Texas–Mexican Frontier, 1836–1841* (Austin, 1963), 308; *Civilian and Galveston Gazette*, June 11, 1843, June 8, 1844; Samuel Swartwout to Morgan, Dec. 27, 1841, Feris A. Bass, Jr., and B. R. Brunson (eds.), *Fragile Empires: The Texas Correspondence of Samuel Swartwout and James Morgan, 1836–1856* (Austin, 1978), 151.

⁴⁶ Adams (ed.), “Correspondence from the British Archives” (Oct., 1913), 204–205; *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), Oct. 13, 1838 (quotation).

⁴⁷ Adams (ed.), “Correspondence from the British Archives” (Jan., 1912), 213–215, (Oct., 1913), 200, 203 (quotation); *Telegraph and Texas Register* (Houston), Jan. 11, May 9, 1837, Nov. 21, 1838; John Clark to W. R. Lansing, Nov. 14, 1840, John Grant Tod Papers (Rosenberg Library, Galveston).

percent of the total population.⁴⁸ The Texas Revolution had thus completely reversed the fortunes of slavery, transforming it from an institution whose defenders sought merely to postpone the day of its demise to one supported by law and prevailing opinion and expanding by every measure.

The Texas movement for independence had a dual character in respect to slavery. Ideologically, the Texans displayed mostly reactionary impulses, despite their frequent and fervent identifications with the Spirit of '76. The practical-minded Anglo-Americans applied their version of liberty, equality, and democracy cautiously and only to themselves. This aspect of the Texas Revolution clearly owed a debt to the Great Reaction that swept the southern United States in the early 1830s. By then, radical worldwide abolitionism had also emerged, a development that fostered more reaction and thus reinforced the conservative emphasis on property, order, and white supremacy. However uncongenial in spirit toward black freedom, the Texas Revolution generated other forces—including armed conflict and internal dislocation—that temporarily challenged the slave-labor system and Anglo racial hegemony. Yet the brevity of the war and the sudden collapse of the Mexican invasion effort prevented the disintegration of slavery and allowed Texans three more decades to apply the doctrines of their southern heritage.

⁴⁸ Adams (ed.), "Correspondence from the British Archives" (Oct., 1913), 198–199; Barnes F. Lathrop, *Migration into East Texas, 1835–1860: A Study from the United States Census* (Austin, 1949), 39, 59, 60; George D. Blaikie to J. F. Perry, June 6, 1836, Series A, typescript, IV, Perry Papers.