E Pluribus, Texas

A CURRICULUM FOR THE FUTURE OF TEXAS

"History never repeats itself, but the Kaleidoscopic combinations of the pictured-present often seem to be constructed out of the broken fragments of antique legends."

-Mark Twain

Guiding Statement

If Mark Twain is correct, then the knowledge and appreciation of history is vital to students' understanding of the world around them because, if for no other reason, they need to understand what those "broken fragments of antique legends" are all about. Texas students should have at least a basic understanding of their state's history, so they can make their own mind up about their place in it. There is practical consideration as well: the study of Texas history gives students an advantage when examining other histories because the story of the Lone Star State is so diverse and so connected to the rest of the world. If you know Texas better, you will know your nation and world better.

E Pluribus Texas Approach to grades K-12:

History does not have to be a student's least favorite subject. Teachers can create enthusiasm by how they choose to approach the education process. Teachers are encouraged to master their subjects as part of their professional development. Prepared teachers are better at organizing their materials, and organization is key to successful teaching.

Imagine if we taught kindergartners the alphabet, but never taught them that these letters can form words, and words can form sentences, and sentences can convey thought. We might be educating them at some level, just not completely. Simply making history a litany of names and dates robs our students of the rich complexity of their own humanity. History is about people—most of whom were pretty much like you and me—who faced many of the same challenges we face today. If educating children is supposed to prepare them for lives well-lived, then the discipline of history is one of the most power tools at hand.

Traditionally, the Seventh Grade is where Texas History is taught. However, this is about more than just Texas History. <u>This is about Texas cultural sustainability</u>.

As such, we should take a K-12 approach.

Seventh Grade Texas History, a rite of passage for generations of students in the Lone Star State, has helped to create a common language for discussing a usable past. Building upon a groundwork laid in fourth grade and elsewhere—it has helped build a shared culture that builds civic engagement and promotes social capital in the state's citizenry.

To this end, a shared conversation about lives lived in community ultimately builds trust. Not only between individuals, but also trust in the broad fabric of social institutions. When fully mature, this trust manifests itself as shared values, virtues, and expectations within the people. If this social capital—this trust—is not crafted and nourished within each educational cohort, within each wave of students, it decays. Eventually, this decay begins to manifest itself in strife, conflict, pessimism, and catastrophic social problems. What we are doing with ***E Pluribus, Texas*** is critically important.

There is more to Texas than just Seventh Grade Texas History. It is an across the curriculum, K-12 endeavor. Texas is not just a one semester, or even a one year, curiosity. It is as much an idea, a people, and a shared endeavor, as a place.

E Pluribus, Texas (out of many, Texas), is designed to nurture and build Texas's social capital for generations and to seek the common good in the process.

History will be front and center. It is the master key that provides the context for everything. Still, other disciplines in the humanities including modern languages, art, literature, politics, anthropology, archaeology, political geography, and religion, will play their parts as well. It will be a process of ramping up toward the middle grades, and then a reinforcement of those lessons in high school classes.

Objective

The objective of this program is to present a curriculum to teach Texas that encompasses the following elements:

- Introduction of basic chronology of events
- Introduction of key historical figures
- Introduction of key historical concepts
- Integration with local, regional, and world history
- Context and relevance to the time and place in which the students live
- Give students a solid understanding of citizenship and republican government
- Explore the evolution of Texas culture and its relation to Texas history

"Texas will again lift its head and stand among the nations. It ought to do so, for no country upon the globe can compare with it in natural advantages." – Sam Houston

Sam should see us now. Texas is the tenth largest economy in the world; it is the second largest state in the Union but heading toward being number one. It exerts profound influence upon national and international affairs. A comprehensive knowledge of the culture and context of Texas will position our students to work in, or with, Texas people, products, and partnerships.

Why Even Study history?

While history involves the knowledge of basic chronology and accepted facts, it provides a framework for understanding the world and society in which we live. Counter to the common

notion, history does not repeat itself; however, certain concepts have been revisited by people throughout the past. Understanding and apply these concepts enables students to more beyond rote memorization onto higher learning domains. This broader view of the field gives history a relevance that outlast the time a student spends in the classroom.

Who Invented History?

The Greeks. In their pantheon of gods, they include the nine muses. They were the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (pronounced Nee-mos-sine-E), the goddess of memory. These female offspring represented and acknowledged the human spirit that resides in all of us. The place where the muses spoke were referred to as *mouseion*, or museums.

All the muses involved some aspect of memory. While most dealt with literature, music, or the performing arts, there was one, Clio, that represented the *idea* of history. The past, these Greeks argued, help us to live our present lives. How? Good history, for that fact any excellent education, starts with great questions. The answers we find lead us to another Greek concept—philosophy—or the process of following an answer back to its origins and obtaining truth, or true knowledge. When this journey of questions and answers flourishes, education achieves its purpose.

Why Texas History?

Most states required their students to study their state's history at one time. With various fields competing for instructional time, states began to view the field as unnecessary and reduced or even eliminated state history. Texas public schools, however, still choose to insist that its students be exposed to the history of the state because it is seen as vital to producing productive citizens. Moreover, Texas' rich past offers an opportunity to introduce students to history on a broad scale since many events involve reginal and even international influences. In essence, Texas History is a microcosm of the history of North America and the world.

Why is Texas so diverse?

Diversity is the hallmark of Texas when it comes to geography, people, and culture. A drive across the state will take the traveler through woodlands, prairies, high plains, deserts and even mountains. Texas' location as a passageway for the continent of North American ensured that people of different races and cultures would meet and interact. Their descendants are still here today as modern Texans. *E Pluribus, Texas.*

What can be learned from studying Texas History?

Most historians will agree that the history of North America is taught with an emphasis on settlement of the continent from the direction of east to west. The result is that students learn an Anglo-centric interpretation that highlights the founding of the English colonies along the east coast. Although this has been a valid and useful approach, the study of Texas as a borderland introduced students view in which movement comes from other directions and places, giving the state its unique character.

Additionally, Texas History presents the opportunity to learn about the nature of government, especially a republic. As the founders of the American nation foresaw, the continued existence and well-being of the United States relies on instilling the values associated with good citizenship in its population. The story of Texas is that of American values and world views—applied. The framing generation in this country formed the concept of the United States, but it was in Texas where these ideals were, and continue to be, tested, and proved.

Why Study Texas Culture?

History alone doesn't tell the whole story. It may tell us how we are, who we are, but not necessarily why we are, the way we are, and why we do the things we do!

First, studying how Texas culture formed, and the influences it formed, help build vibrant communities. The study of cultural values is a source of delight and wonder for students and it encourages creativity and enhances a community's sense of place. The study of culture also enhances the lessons of diversity and builds empathy among groups that might identify differently from each other.

Above, all, though, the study of culture encourages curiosity. Why do people put peanuts in their coke? Where did nachos come from? What is the difference between schnitzel in Fredericksburg and chicken fried steak in Stephenville? Why are their accordions in Tejano music? You get the idea.

From a purely practical standpoint, understanding culture helps inform how we see ourselves, how we want others to see us, who we want to be, and how we see the wider world. Being aware of these aspects of life is powerful, and ends up yielding personal, and economic benefits, well into the future.

Examples of Embedding of Texas History in US History Content

The proposition of eliminating the traditional seventh grade year-long (in theory) course on Texas History for a series of embedded Texas related topics spread across many grades may be seen as a significant change to the current way of including this material in lessons. In addition, it would require that Texas topics appear on the eighth grade STAAR exam and be part of teaching US History I as well as courses offered in the elementary grades and into high school.

This new approach would help students make connections between World, US, and Texas history and put the Lone Star State in a more usable and understandable context. Texas, after all, did not develop in a vacuum. Instead, it is a great expression of the Indigenous, Mexican, African American, and American experience. As a result, we have an opportunity with our students to tell the stories of all these groups a process of encounter, conflict, assimilation, and perhaps reconciliation through time. These tales and processes are not always pleasant or comfortable, but they are crucial to understanding the human experience that has led us to the present day.

Examples of putting Texas into more traditional American History I topics, 1540-1830

I. Tejas in the Continental Contest between Spain, France, and Great Britain

A. Although the area was partially explored by Spanish castaways—notably Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca—and even the sanctioned expeditions of Hernando de Soto and Francisco Coronado in the middle 1500s, none of the reports on the region were promising. The indigenous peoples there were few, scattered across a wide region, and living a substance lives in a harsh and unforgiving geography and climate. The Spanish, concerned with developing more lucrative regions of their empire in México and South America, largely ignored Tejas, instead turning Nuevo México, its Pueblo peoples, and a few settlements of Spanish colonists and missions along the upper Rio Grande into its only outpost. There were also scattered missions in the region now called the Big Bend—La Junta de los Rios at the time—near the present-day town of Presidio, Texas.

B. The Spanish crafted an empire that was founded largely on racial control. European born *Peninsulares*, although a tiny fraction of the overall population, dominated the political and commercial scene. *Criollos*, or those born in the Americas to European parents, came next, but also constituted a small part of the overall peopling of the Spanish Empire. The vast majority—people of mixed-race ancestry, the enslaved, and the indigenous—constituted the laboring classes of places like Mexico and were kept controlled, uneducated, and docile through legal and social controls.

C. In 1680, the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico overthrew the Spanish and drove them from their territory in the only successful indigenous revolt in North America. Surviving Spaniards and assimilated indigenous as well as residents of the missions fled to the vicinity of present-day El Paso to reestablish their communities there.

D. A French expedition commanded by René Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, arrived on the coast of Tejas either by accident or design in 1684, and found Spanish control in this vast domain non-existent and the way into the interior of Mexico open. The French in Canada had already important connections with the indigenous peoples of the Great Plains and the Mississippi Valley and saw a lodgment in Tejas as an important next step to dominating North America. La Salle's efforts, however, fell apart in the face of the rugged terrain, vast distances, hostile native peoples in the region, and the unforgiving climate. By 1687 the French settlement had been annihilated and its few survivors scattered among the indigenous tribes.

E. Indigenous traders in Mexico reported the presence of the French in Tejas to the Spanish, who feared losing the vast and undeveloped northern *frontera* to their European rivals. Authorities responded by sending expeditions to Tejas in the following years to establish missions and presidios (military outposts) from the Red River near the French trading post of Natchitoches to the Rio Grande and Gulf Coast. Both European nations began putting more effort into expanding their trade and influence among the indigenous peoples of Tejas in the coming decades culminating in the reconquest of New Mexico and the competing settlements of French New Orleans and San Antonio de Béxar, both founded in 1718. Realignments in Europe at nearly the same time dampened this rivalry.

II. Texas and The French and Indian War (Seven Years War)

A. In North America, the British defeated the coalition of France and Spain and dominated the continent as a result, controlling the territory from the Mississippi River east to the Atlantic. This included the former French colony of Canada and the Illinois country, and the Spanish colony of the Floridas (East Florida ran from Pensacola Bay and included all present-day Florida, while West Florida included Mobile Bay to the Mississippi including the present day "Florida Parishes" of Louisiana as well as the Mississippi and Alabama Gulf Coast but did not include the settlement of New Orleans.

B. France ceded its western territories, which it called "La Louisian" to Spain.

C. Texas, which had been created as a buffer to curb potential French expansion into the region and to blunt that nation's influence with the indigenous peoples of the Southern Great Plains, no longer needed to serve that defensive role for the Spanish Empire. The new border was the Mississippi River, and French citizens west of that line now became Spanish citizens.

D. Spanish Texas did, however, face a growing challenge from well-armed, well-supplied, and well mounted indigenous groups that flourished from their connections to French trading networks. The Spanish attempted to push their influence north and west from San Antonio de Béxar and in 1757 established a mission and presidio on the San Saba River near present day Menard but natives dubbed merely as "Los Norteños" wiped out the mission and restricted the effectiveness of the presidio until it was abandoned a decade later.

E. Given these new realities, the Spanish sent a military officer, The Marqués de Rubí, Cayetano María Pignatelli Rubí Corbera y Saint Climent, Barón de Llinas to the northern stretches of Mexico—including Texas—to investigate the region and make recommendations on how to realign the Spanish settlements given the now non-existent threat from France but addressing the new threat of indigenous peoples that were realigning themselves under the changed political and commercial climate on the continent.

F. From 1766-1769, Rubí explored the region from near the Red River in Louisian to the Gulf of California and issued recommendations in what came to be known as the Rubí report. In short, he recommended that Spanish settlements—including missions and presidios—be consolidated around San Antonio and Santa Fe, largely abandoning the region of eastern, northern, and western Texas. San Antonio de Béxar became the key to Spanish control and included five missions and a presidio. This outpost occupied strategic ground between Presidio of La Bahia (close to present-day Goliad) and its missions near the Gulf of Mexico, and Presidio del Rio Grande and the mission San Juan Bautista just across the river from present-day Eagle Pass.

III. Texas in the American Revolution

A. When the British north American colonists declared their independence, the French seized the opportunity to strike back at their rivals and support the rebels. Spanish authorities in Louisiana realized they would have a role to play, and Governor Bernardo de Galvez (for whom the later town of Galveston, Texas, would be named) gathered an army to attack British outposts at Baton Rouge and Pensacola. His forces would include troops drawn from the presidios in Texas as

be fed by cattle raised by the assimilated indigenous peoples at the Texas missions near the coast. Over the course of several years, Vaqueros drove more than 15,000 head of livestock (beef cattle and horses) to Louisiana.

B. The Comanches, a powerful indigenous nation, emerged at this same time as the dominant peoples in the southern Great Plains and began to challenge Spanish authority in Texas. The region northwest of San Antonio de Béxar all the way to Santa Fe and the upper Arkansas River became known simply as "Comancheria." This nation, the Comanche Empire, began to exert a profound influence over trade, politics, and settlement in Texas and eliminated Spanish control of Texas in the region between Santa Fe and San Antonio de Béxar.

C. At the same time, additional threats emerged. The success of the American colonies in establishing their independence now placed a radical new nation near the eastern border of Texas—The United States. In 1787, this breakaway republic crafted a national constitution which promised to upend the old modes of government that had ruled European and other powers for centuries. Equal parts political and commercial charter, The Constitution created a scaffolding of laws and government that encouraged aggressive economic enterprise protected by equal treatment for its citizens under the law, regardless of class—revolutionary concepts at the time. Before long, Americans were exploring Texas and learning about its resources despite Spanish efforts to keep them out.

D. Spanish Louisiana would need more people if it were to serve as a buffer between the US and Spain, and authorities scrambled to entice settlers to lands along the west bank of the Mississippi to populate it with acceptable people—meaning people who would do well under Spanish rule and assimilate into Spanish culture—and keep out the wild and unpredictable Americans. These defensive colonization efforts included recruiting French, Irish, and German settlers as well as Americans who, because of their Catholic faith, were persecuted minorities in the United States.

IV. Texas in the Louisiana Purchase and the Napoleonic Wars

A. In 1789, the French Revolution ignited a series of wars in Europe that culminated with the rise of Napoleon Buonaparte and French domination of Europe. This led to global events that would splash across Texas. By 1803, the French dominated Spain and convinced that nation to return Louisiana to its previous owners. That accomplished, Napoleon sold this vast and ill-defined regions to the United States to raise cash for its wars in Europe.

B. The United States claimed that much of eastern Texas was included in that purchase since La Salle's French settlement had made a short lodgment on the coast in the 1680s. The Spanish refused these claims and prepared to resist this interpretation of the new boundaries. After all, the first Spanish capital of Tejas had been the presidio and mission at Los Adeas, near the Louisiana town of Natchitoches. The two nations nearly came to blows, but other events redirected their attentions. By 1810, the United States and the Spanish Empire decided on a compromise where the region between the Calcasieu River in Louisiana and the Sabine River would be a Neutral Zone—controlled by the laws of no nation—until the border could be more firmly established.

C. That same year, 1810, American adventurers threw out Spanish authorities in West Florida, occupied Baton Rouge, and declared the Republic of West Florida, sporting a blue flag with a single—or lone—star in the middle. The United States annexed this so-called nation within months, adding the Gulf Coast from the Mississippi to Pensacola Bay to the national territory, despite any understandings with Spain.
D. Staring in 1807, French troops occupied Spain resulting in two rival governments in the nation—one in support of the French and one opposing them. The British intervened on behalf of the anti-French forces and in support of neighboring Portugal which the French had also invaded. For the next seven years, the Iberian Peninsula was wracked by bloody war.
E. Spanish authorities in the Americas, unsure as to which government to back, often charted their own course independent of Spain until the political situation clarified.
F. On September 16, 1810, Father Manuel Hidalgo issued his *Grito de Dolores* declaring Mexican Independence and the creation of a republic. Soon an insurgent army of disenfranchised peoples from the heretofore powerless people of Mexico marched on the capital of Mexico City, determined to overthrow not only the old political order, but the oppressive social order as well. It soon devolved into a race war. The Spanish Army, still answering to the Spanish king, turned back Hidalgo's army, scattering them across the country and capturing, and executing, its leadership.
G. The United States, meanwhile, picked a fight with Great Britain which resulted in the War of 1812. This worked to the Spanish advantage by keeping the American government from meddling in the Mexican War for Independence.
H. Meanwhile, some of the republican survivors of Hidalgo's disaster took refuge in the US city of New Orleans where they found ready allies among adventurers in the city. By 1813, a mixed Mexican and American army invaded Texas and declared a republic in opposition to the Spanish authority. The effort was short lived, however, and a Spanish army routed and destroyed the insurgent force at the Battle of the Medina, the largest engagement ever fought on Texas soil.
I. Spain responded to the rebel use of Texas as a staging ground for fanning the flames of independence by killed one out of two of its residence including most of its better educated, literate, and politically savvy people. Never heavily settled to begin with, the population of Texas fell to about 2,000 Spanish citizens by 1814. This crippled, Spanish authorities believed they had neutralized the threat of Texas becoming a rebel stronghold and turned their attention to destroying rebel resistance elsewhere.
J. American adventurers filled the void left in Texas by once again spilling over the border into Texas, although not in support of Mexican independence. There was also a settlement of part-time privateers and full times pirates on Galveston Island. These filibusters and freebooters whittled away at the remaining vestiges of Spanish control while introducing a new generation of American adventurers to Texas and its potential. These included such people as Kentuckians James Bowie, Ben Milam and Marylander Jane Wilkinson Long and her husband, Virginian James Long.

K. In 1819, The Adams-Onís Treaty (of, the Trans-Continental Treaty) establishes a permanent border between the US and the Spanish Empire in North America, which includes ceding the rest of Florida to the United States. The eastern border of Texas is now fixed at the Sabine and points north to the great bend of the Red River.

V. Texas in the Era of Good Feelings

A. In 1820, James Monroe crafted the Monroe Doctrine. This non-binding foreign policy statement is directed at European Powers such as Spain and Great Britain who might attempt to manipulate wars for independence among emerging nations in the Western Hemisphere to their advantage. The US is saying, in effect, that this part of globe no longer pertains to them. Clearly, this is now intended to be solely the area of interest for the United States.

B. In Mexico, the strident resistance to independence among Spanish authorities abruptly changes. Once aggressive Spanish officers now join forces with the insurgents to form the independent Mexican Empire. What they inherit is a new nation under authoritarian rule that has massive infrastructure destruction, an economy in shambles, a slaughtered population, and other disadvantages and existential threats. Its northern *frontera*, too, faced constant turmoil from Comanche domination and raids, and from American adventurers and ambitions.

C. Like Spain before them, independent Mexico needed people to settle its frontier to serve as a buffer against bad characters from the US and from the Comanches.

D. Moses Austin, a former citizen of the Spanish Empire from Missouri, offered a plan for settling the "right kind" of Americans in Texas to serve that purpose. People of good character and willing to be good Mexicans (politically, religiously, and culturally) would be recruited to take their chances in the dangerous province of Texas. When he died, his son Stephen F. Austin took up the cause. Before long, he had recruited 300 families from the US to settle Mexico's troublesome region, ushering in the empresario period of Texas history.

E. Meanwhile, people from the US continued moving west to exploit the resources of the continent. This includes everything from the Mountain Men to the expansion of slave-labor cash crop agriculture in the old Southwest Territory, and free-labor agriculture in the old Northwest Territory. The differences between the emerging enslaved labor versus free labor divide led to the 1820 Missouri Compromise as settlement expanded west of the Mississippi.

F. The line between free and slave labor in the United States at 36°30' north latitude meant that territory south of the region must be acquired for slavery to expand.

G. Slavery and Texas. A discussion of the economics, political, and commercial viability of slavery in the United States must include a treatment of Texas and its position as potential slave territory among slave owners.

H. Texas, the great American opportunity. Not only were slave owners interested in potential opportunities in Texas, but so were yeoman farmers using free labor, ranchers, traders, merchants, investors, and land speculators. Texas would serve the traditional "safety valve" function that had always been part of the American experience.

VI. A Tale of Two Republics

A. The United States from 1776 to 1824 experienced a half century of development largely free from European meddling and equipped with well-developed political and societal institutions that fostered creativity, enterprise, and liberty. Its eight year-long revolution was bloody, but not terribly destructive to the infrastructure of the nation. British colonial rule, too, had been benign and crowned by a policy of "salutary neglect" where the locals were empowered to create societies, politics, and economies to their liking without the close management of their overseas government. When the United States declared Independence, it was not based on tribal identity, class, or race, but rather on shared ideals—perhaps poorly implemented but still aspirational. It was a revolution about ideas predicated on the belief that responsible citizens were capable of self-rule and self-regulation. Once on its own, two visions of the nation emerged, one that followed the ideas of Alexander Hamilton and his followers that the US should become a commercial nation with extensive global trade networks that fostered bustling cities full of energetic workers and a shrewd business class. Government was seen as a tool to encouraging economic enterprises and might be manipulated to bring about greater good across the nation even if it ran contrary to the popular will of the people. A different vision, often ascribed to Thomas Jefferson and his followers, believed the strength of the nation lay in the hearty agricultural class who stood to gain, or lose, the most depending on how government protected property. Government was less malleable, in this view, but rather something that should be caged as much as possible in a crate of laws and limitations. Leaders navigating these treacherous waters in the early years of the United States included George Washington, James Madison, and John Adams.

B. Mexico developed differently. Spain created an empire that was heavily regulated and full of bureaucracies that often found themselves at odds or cross purposes with overlapping jurisdictions. The economy, too, was considered the exclusive domain of authorities in Spain. As a result, the locals developed few local social, political, or economic institutions that were not heavy overshadowed by the hard hand of Spanish authority aggravated by the inefficiency of this all powerful and authoritative control. The Mexican War for Independence, launched in 1810, ground on for more than a decade. In the end, independence occurred not because of shared aspirations, but because of exhaustion and a consensus that three guarantees should be advanced: Mexico would be a Constitutional Monarchy, that the Roman Catholicism would be the state religion, and that *Peninsulares* and *Criollos* would have equal status. It was not particularly aspiration, but rather defensive with a coalition that institutionalized the class and power structure that had been inherited from Spain. The war, too, had destroyed much of the already weak and cumbersome economy, killed millions of people, and kept most of its population in subservient role in the nation, limited in large part by their lack of education and lack of opportunity. Leaders navigating these dangerous waters in the early years of independence included Augustín Iturbide, Guadalupe Victoria, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, and Vicente Guerrero. This independent and reactionary Mexico had many options in 1821, few of them good. The attempt at autocratic rule expressed at

the Mexican Empire collapsed after two years, replaced by two competing visions, much like the United States had experienced. One, a conservative vision, remained skeptical of the ability of the Mexican people to be capable of self-rule and believed national authority should be centralized in the nation's capital. A competing liberal vision took inspiration from various political theories emerging globally that decentralized political and attending economic power to various region hubs—a federal approach of semi-autonomous regions that all pulled toward national goals, but perhaps by different methods. When the Mexican Empire crumbled, a euphoria of Federalist enthusiasm drove the national politics but sowed the seeds of future conflict with Centralist. In addition, European powers now free from continental conflicts began looking for ways to advance their interests overseas, including in Mexico.

VII. Mexican Texas, 1821-1830.

A. Texas became the ring in which these two competing national experiences encountered each other.

B. Mexican Federalists believed that the dynamic economy and vibrant political atmosphere of the United States might be the cure for the ills plaguing the northern *frontera*. Americans who were Catholic, bearing a letter of recommendation concerning their good character, and their willingness to follow the traditions of Mexico, should bring their energy and vision to Texas and make it an important engine for national growth and prosperity. That was the justification for encouraging American immigration to Texas. The fact that some of this *Norteamericano* entrepreneurial spirit included the used of enslaved persons to make money bothered many Mexican authorities less than hopes that the prosperity it engendered might spread wealth to the nation.

C. The Tejano population of Texas was small and drawn largely from the uneducated and unsophisticated working class that had survived the Spanish purge during the War for Independence, according to General Manuel Míer y Téran, a visiting dignitary from Mexico City traveling on a fact-finding tour for the government. He also recognized another issue: there were ten times as many American immigrants to Texas than there were native Tejanos. Many of these immigrants had also come illegally to Mexico, having ignored most if not all the legal requirements required.

D. In his 1828 report, Míer y Téran observed, "Texas could throw the whole nation into revolution. The whole population here is a mixture of strange and incoherent parts without parallel in our federation: numerous tribes of Indians . . . armed and at any moment ready for war; colonists of another people, more progressive and better informed than the Mexican inhabitants, but also more shrewd and unruly; among these foreigners are fugitives from justice, honest laborers, vagabonds and criminals . . ."

E. These Americans may have been Mexicans by law, but intellectually they remained attached to the ideals of the American Revolution. "Honorable and dishonorable alike travel with their political constitution in their pockets," Mier y Terán, wrote, "demanding the privileges, authority and officers which such a constitution guarantees."

F. Overwhelmed by the flood of Americans that had come to Texas, and increasingly hardline and conservative Mexican government moved to forbid future American immigration to Texas, and issued the Law of April 6, 1830, to make it national policy.
G. When Centralists and Federalists struggled for control and tumbled into cycles of civil war in the 1830s, chaos followed. American settlers in Texas began to fear the Mexico was beyond hope and was becoming a failed state. Families and investors who had taken a chance on Texas in the previous decade now believed they would lose it all over issues more important to politicians in Mexico City than to the farmer or rancher worker their homestead on the *frontera*.

VIII. The Comanche Empire: Texas, Mexico, and the United States

A. The Comanche Empire also took advantage of the chaos in Mexico to extend their raids deep into Mexico, largely ignoring the poverty-stricken Tejanos and the armed and dangerous American settlements. Texans, they recognized as a separate species of American, they dubbed "the ones who always follow us home." The pickings were easier farther south. As a result, Northern Mexico suffered what authorities described as a "war of a thousand deserts" that saw many once prosperous villages, haciendas, and ranchos laid waste. Mexican captives, enslaved on these raids, disappeared into the Comanche Empire. By 1870 and estimated 40% of the Comanche people had Mexican origins.
B. With plundered livestock, captives, and trade goods in hand, the Comanches prospered by trading these goods to American merchants in Santa Fe, at Bent's Fort on the Arkansas, and through agents to Fort Smith, Arkansas, and points beyond. Horses born in Chihuahua ended up pulling carriages in Chicago as adults during this period through a booming Comanche, New Mexican, and American trade network.

The entangled stories of the United States, Mexico, and Texas are an example of how embedded Texas content might make for a more stirring, and dynamic approach to US History I in the eighth grade. The previous outline demonstrates one way to present this material that should connect nicely with traditional approaches to teaching American history. In addition, it introduces Texans who may have ancestry in Mexico to where their story might fit into the larger story of the state and nation. The following topics also allow for easy Texas content imbedding:

I. The Independence and Annexation of Texas as part of the US story of expansion, sectionalism, and continental ambitions.
II. The US Mexican War was sparked in large part over the annexation of Texas to the United States. The state's proximity to Mexico made it a battleground, and staging ground, in the conflict. Texan claims to territory now part of New Mexico is also an interesting story of competing state and national interest and speaks to the desire to contain slavery.
III. US Indian Policy in the 1850s presented new challenged. Historically the United States had settled on a policy expressed as The Permanent Indian Frontier located on the edge of the Great Plains with the US Army playing the role of "peacekeeper" and frontier constabulary. Military campaigns against natives west of this line were rare and conflict minimal. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo created new complications.

The more aggressive Texas Indian policy had to be folded into the national priority and the line of posts delineating the Permanent Indian Frontier had to be extended into the state and the tensions between settlers and the Indigenous curbed. New forts also had to cross the continent to support overland routes to California, making western Texas relevant and a transit point. In addition, Article Eleven of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo made the United State responsible for controlling the natives within their territorial control. This included the raid and trade traditions of the Comanche Empire and its allies.

IV. The expansion of slavery in the 1850s: Texas far surpassed the other states in the growth of slavery in value and importance. For enslaved people to maintain their value as commodities, new markets needed to open to absorb surplus supplies of this form of labor. Texas was seen by slave brokers and aspiring planters as a nearly inexhaustible arena where fortunes could be made off enslaved labor both as property and as production amplifiers.

V. The American Civil War, Reconstruction, and the creation of modern Texas. In many ways, Texas won the Civil War. Other southern states paid a high price for their opposition to the election of Abraham Lincoln, with burned cities, ruined farms, and a mangled generation. Texas, however, received the perceived benefit of having joined in the cause in solidarity with the rest of the South, but suffered little material damage. While thousands of Texans died in the war, the percentage of its young men sacrificed in the effort was significantly smaller—although still impressive—than other states. As a result, Texas emerged bloodied with its honor intact and positioned to recover quickly. This set the stage for Texas to become a magnet for interstate immigration from the ravaged South and as cattle droving to northern markets and massive amounts of quality farmland provided a way for former Confederates to start over. In many ways, Texas became more southern as a result of this influx of new talent and old ideas.

VI. The collapse of the Comanche Empire. By this point, students will have watched the rise of the Comanche Empire in earlier grades and learned to appreciate its role in shaping Texas and US History. With the 1867 Treaty of Medicine Lodge Creek introducing the reservation system in the southern Great Plains, a new era of US Indian Policy arrived in Texas. The Comanches negotiated the right to hunt on their traditional lands in the Texas Panhandle but agreed to reorganize their society around the realities of life in proximity to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Young men, however, still wanted to prove their worth in traditional ways, and the reservation served as a haven for raiders to rest and refit after making forays into Texas and Mexico. The United States posted troops to Texas—including the African American 9th and 10th cavalries, and 24th and 25th infantries—but did little to respond to Texans clamoring for a more aggressive approach to what they considered an "Indian problem." In 1871, Comanches and Kiowas came close to ambushing General of the Army William T. Sherman on the Salt Creek Prairie in Young County while he inspected the Texas frontier investigating these claims. As a result of this near catastrophe, the national policy changed launching a series of campaigns that culminated in the Red River War of 1875 which effectively ended the Comanche Empire.

VII. The Great Buffalo Slaughter of the 1870s played a significant role in the settlement of western Texas. Starting in 1874 and peaking in the winter of 1876-1877, it eliminated

the vast herds of these animals from the Texas landscape. Remarkably, many Texans took an active interest in preserving the American Bison and argued aggressively for their protection but US national interest—both military and commercial--outmaneuvered these early environmental movements. As a result, cattle invaded the old Buffalo range and cattlemen replaced cycles of migration which kept the vast sea of grass healthy and intact with ranching and overgrazing. Water tables plummeted, invasive species including Ash Juniper (Mountain Cedar) and Mesquite expanded into regions that had never known them, and animals adapted to their new reality. Gray Wolves, fattened on the slain carcasses, were next hunted to extinction, as were black bears and panthers. Texas provides a useful setting to tell the environmental history of the US in the 19th Century. Then, of course, oil . . .

VIII. Post-Civil War race relations in Texas mirrored those elsewhere in the country. Texas experienced a major population boom in the 1860s and 1870s as southerners headed west to start over. They brought their attitudes regarding race with them, now amplified by a sense of resentment over the Federal government's use of emancipated slaves as military and political tools during and after the war. This national story can be localized to Texas with examples such as the race-related burning of Brenham, the gunslinging careers of notables like John Wesley Hardin which started as violence against African Americans, and the resistance to the presence of Black troops in Texas. Reconstruction in Texas is a fascinating way to illustrate some of the larger issues involved with this national event.

IX. Cattle drives and the expansion of livestock empires is a national story that is firmly rooted in Texas. The Fred Gipson book (and later Disney adaptation) *Ol' Yeller* is a great telling of how Texans regrouped after the Civil War and found new ways to prosper using old techniques of driving cattle to market but modified to embrace the bold adventure of pushing these animals halfway across and wild and untamed continent. While Gipson's book (set in Mason County) is about a dog and young man coming of age, and a young wife left to manage on a rugged frontier, in many ways it is as much about the absent father away on a cattle drive—taking major risk to help secure a brighter future for his family. Cowboys are fascinating subjects, but the stories of frontier families may also resonate with young Texans.

What About the Alamo?

In recent years, the Alamo has become a new battleground in the culture wars sweeping the nation. Attempts to "reframe" American history as a sordid tale of exploitation and oppression—as opposed to an aspirational story of the quest for human flourishing—have accelerated in the past few years. Historic monuments have been removed both with and without public processes, and other symbols of the shared history of the nation have come under new scrutiny. Often this reexamination is healthy, overdue, and important as we, the people, evolve into the future. At other times, however, this process has been marred by intellectual dishonesty, hidden agendas, and covert radicalism.

Here is my recommendation for telling the Alamo (and the Texas Revolution) story that incorporates the latest scholarship but avoids the sweeping generalizations and polemics that shape the current debate.

The Alamo Matters

Many world cultures have a center post to their identities, a piece of geography rather real, imagined, or embellished, that gives form and meaning to their sense of themselves. For Jews, Jerusalem is the center of their experience. For Catholics, Rome is home. Muslims pray toward Mecca and making a pilgrimage there at least once in a lifetime a crucial tenant of their beliefs. The ancient Irish had the Hill of Tara, and the ancient Greeks cherished Delphi—what they considered the "navel of the universe"—as the sacred umbilicus that nourished their civilization.

Sacred places and spaces may have nothing to do with the divine, but they have everything to do with how people see themselves and they are anchor points around which society constructs its important stories.

It is so with The Alamo.

At first glance, this oddly shaped stone structure in downtown San Antonio seems a curiosity—an artifact of a bygone era or, at best, a relic of some noble but ill-conceived stand by a small band of dreamers. Surrounded as it is by the sprawl and heights of a major American city it seems small by comparison and poorly located considering the hum and buzz of daily metropolitan life. "Is this all there is to it?" remains a constant question of visitors. They thought it would be bigger somehow.

Bigger indeed.

On March 6, 1836, the Battle of the Alamo created one of the most enduring tales in the American experience. The story that has passed down over the nearly two centuries is that of a heroic band of men, along with a few women, who were determined to defend their principles of liberty and the rule of law in the face of a despotic threat. Their decision to stay on its walls although outnumbered more than ten-to-one gave rise to a shorthand of sorts for any heroic stand in American history from that day forward. Wake Island, a small atoll between Midway and Guam, became the "Pacific Alamo" as a band of Marines, sailors, and civilians defied the empire of Japan in the early days of World War II. Likewise, the Norman village of Graignes became likened to the Alamo when about 180 American paratroopers, dropped way off target and well behind enemy lines and beyond friendly support, defended the town against more than 2,000 German attackers. To this day, across the planet, the citadel of fighting positions defended by American troops is often dubbed The Alamo.

For a small compound in the heart of downtown, the Alamo has assumed an importance far outsized from its brief time as a forlorn defensive stand. General Antonio López de Santa Anna, who besieged and then stormed that fortified mission, dismissed the episode as but "a small affair." In terms of numbers involved, casualties, and its effect on the Centralist campaign in Texas, he was correct. In terms of the real estate, it holds in the collective conscience of humanity, he was well wide of the mark.

The reason the battle happened at all—when it did, where it did—bears telling. In 1724, the Spanish and their neophyte natives began building mission of San Antonio de Valero at its present location. Through the decades the collection of village huts and rock dormitories for Franciscan padres changed and evolved, but the church, which was to be as grand as those that rose farther south and deep into Mexico, never quite flourished to become the centerpiece the fathers has hoped. The first edifice collapsed, and successor architectural and structural solutions eluded its creators. As threats from external Indigenous peoples multiplied, the inhabitants walled the compound, anchored as it was by the roofless sanctuary. By 1793, the Catholic church gave up on The Alamo and allowed the three-acre complex to be used for secular purposes.

People continued to live it its stone and adobe apartments and the place took on the function of a village all its own, a suburb of San Antonio de Béxar less than a mile to the west. In 1803, Spanish presidial troops occupied the Alamo as a frontier outpost to answer the dangers of the wild and vast province of Tejas. During the tumult of the Mexican War for Independence from 1810–1821, the Alamo served as military base, political prison, and hospital. Texas served as a base for revolutionaries and American adventurers, and the population withered from Spanish reprisals. When Mexico gained its independence after a long and remarkably destructive war, the military presence remained. Throughout these important decades, San Antonio de Béxar had remined a strategic salient, a redout of civilization on the edge of the wilderness. The Alamo had emerged as an important part of that defensive line but located just a bit too far to be integral to the defenses of the town. Even so, it provided useful quarters and facilities for its garrison.

Part of Mexico's solution to guarding its northern *frontera* from native attacks and from the growing power of the Comanche Empire was to populate the province with settlers who could transform it into a productive land while helping Mexico achieve its national ambitions of peace and prosperity. Eventually the solution seemed to be something of a Faustian bargain: recruit settlers from the restless population of the United States. Officials did what they could that the *Norteamericanos* who came would have letters of reference as to their good character and that they would become Mexican, follow its laws, and its religion. The newcomers in turn believed they were joining a liberal and enlightened new nation that believed, as did they, in constitutional rule of law. Under these circumstances, Mexico took a chance by inviting in citizens from an unruly neighbor, the United States, while the American settlers took a chance that the Republic of Mexico could be trusted, and its leaders were as good as their word.

The prospects for a mutually beneficial relationship looked promising. The United States from 1776 to 1824 experienced a half century of development largely free from European meddling and equipped with well-developed political and societal institutions that fostered creativity, enterprise, and liberty. Its eight year-long revolution was bloody, but not terribly destructive to the infrastructure of the nation. British colonial rule, too, had been benign and crowned by a policy of "salutary neglect" where the locals were empowered to create societies, politics, and economies to their liking without the close management of their overseas government. When the United States declared Independence, it was not based on tribal identity, class, or race, but rather on shared ideals—perhaps poorly implemented but still aspirational. It was a revolution about ideas predicated on the belief that responsible citizens were capable of self-rule and self-regulation.

Once on its own, two visions of the nation emerged, one that followed the ideas of Alexander Hamilton and his followers that the US should become a commercial nation with extensive global trade networks that fostered bustling cities full of energetic workers and a shrewd business class. Government was seen as a tool to encouraging economic enterprises and might be manipulated to bring about greater good across the nation even if it ran contrary to the popular will of the people. A different vision, often ascribed to Thomas Jefferson and his followers, believed the strength of the nation lay in the hearty agricultural class who stood to gain, or lose, the most depending on how government protected property. Government was less malleable, in this view, but rather something that should be caged as much as possible in a crate of laws and limitations. Leaders navigating these treacherous waters in the early years of the United States included George Washington, James Madison, and John Adams.

Mexico developed differently. Spain created an empire that was heavily regulated and full of bureaucracies that often found themselves at odds or cross purposes as they navigated overlapping jurisdictions. The economy, too, was considered the exclusive domain of authorities in Spain. As a result, the locals developed few local social, political, or economic institutions that were not heavy overshadowed by the hard hand of Spanish authority aggravated by the inefficiency of this all powerful and authoritative control. The Mexican War for Independence, launched in 1810, ground on for more than a decade. In the end, independence occurred not because of shared aspirations, but because of exhaustion and a consensus that three guarantees should be advanced: Mexico would be a Constitutional Monarchy, that Roman Catholicism would be the state religion, and that *Peninsulares* and *Criollos* would have equal status. It was not particularly aspiration, but rather defensive with a coalition that institutionalized the class and power structure that had been inherited from Spain. The war, too, had destroyed much of the already weak and cumbersome economy, killed millions of people, and kept most of its population in subservient role in the nation, limited in large part by their lack of education and lack of opportunity. Leaders navigating these dangerous waters in the early years of independence included Augustín Iturbide, Guadalupe Victoria, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, and Vicente Guerrero.

This independent and reactionary Mexico had many options in 1821, but few of them good. The attempt at autocratic rule expressed at the Mexican Empire collapsed after two years, replaced by two competing visions, much like the United States had experienced. One, a conservative vision, remained skeptical of the ability of the Mexican people to be capable of self-rule and believed national authority should be centralized in the nation's capital. A competing liberal vision took inspiration from various political theories emerging globally that decentralized political and attending economic power to various region hubs—a federal approach of semi-autonomous regions that all pulled toward national goals, but perhaps by different methods. When the Mexican Empire crumbled, a euphoria of Federalist enthusiasm drove the national politics but sowed the seeds of future conflict with Centralist. In addition, European powers now free from continental conflicts began looking for ways to advance their interests overseas, including in Mexico.

Both parties to the scheme to settle Texas were doomed to disappointment.

Americans, pursuing a variety of agricultural pursuits and lured by liberal offers of vast acreage for little immediate costs, came to Texas in numbers far exceeding Mexican expectations. Even the most pro-American among them worried about this flood of immigration.

The government dispatched General Manuel Míer y Téran on a fact-finding tour for the Mexican government to report on conditions in Texas. What he discovered alarmed him. He reported there were ten times as many American immigrants to Texas than there were native Tejanos. Many of these immigrants had also come illegally to Mexico, having ignored most if not all the legal requirements required. In his 1828 report, Míer y Téran observed, "Texas could throw the whole nation into revolution. The whole population here is a mixture of strange and incoherent parts without parallel in our federation: numerous tribes of Indians . . . armed and at any moment ready for war; colonists of another people, more progressive and better informed than the Mexican inhabitants, but also more shrewd and unruly; among these foreigners are fugitives from justice, honest laborers, vagabonds and criminals . . ."

The American settlers the Mexican officer encountered may have been Mexicans by law, but intellectually they remained attached to the ideals of the American Revolution. "Honorable and dishonorable alike travel with their political constitution in their pockets," Mier y Terán observed, "demanding the privileges, authority and officers which such a constitution guarantees." These settlers, he believed, would secede from Mexico if given the chance. Separate statehood within the nation would satisfy their craving for effective representation. Míer y Téran suspected motives more sinister. New national laws changed the rules and conditions under which these Americans had come to Texas and to get a handle on the illegal immigration problem. One of the areas of contention was slavery. In an 1829 spasm of national turmoil, President Vicente Guerrero, of mixed race himself, abolished the institution to signal a return to the nation's democratic principles while serving the dual purpose of discouraging American immigration to Mexican Texas where some ambitious planters had hope to make a cotton fortune on the backs of their chattel property. On April 6, 1830, a new regime outlawed most American immigration to Texas while Mexicans interested in cashing in on the cotton boom maneuvered ways around the laws restricting slavery.

Mexico was betraying its own liberal revolutionary ideals and even the lofty tenets of its 1824 constitution. Since declaring itself a republic, only a single Mexican president had served out his term without complications. Foreign invasion and contested national elections plunged the country into a series of civil wars, coups, and countercoups. The political instability and national chaos were exacerbated by Comanche raids and Federalist resistance to the trend toward Centralist despotism. Texas, once again, became a magnet for Mexican revolutionaries and American adventurers as Mexican leaders discarded constitutional rule in favor of authoritarianism.

Texans, as well as Zacatecans, Yucatecans, and other Mexicans across the nation prepared an armed response in the name of Federalism. In response, the Centralist government moved to suppress resistance which included sending troops to its farthest northern frontier. In 1835 the country plunged once again into a spiral of political violence.

The American settlers in Texas moved against the Centralist garrisons posted there. Their campaign reached a crescendo in December 1835 when Federalist insurgents, dubbing themselves Texians, besieged and captured the recently fortified Centralist positions at Béxar. The Centralists abandoned the town and fell back to the beefed-up defenses of the Alamo. What emerged was a stalemate, with the rebels holding the most important town in Texas, but with the enemy garrison holding a strong position at the walled Alamo compound a mile away. The two parties agreed to an armistice, with the Centralist forces allowed to return to Mexico unmolested. Over the next few weeks, the Texian forces dissipated, with a little more than 100 remaining in Béxar to hold that important point while awaiting developments in Mexico amid hopes of a wide-spread Federalist uprising. Instead, the government of President Santa Anna declared all foreigners intervening in Mexican affairs to be pirates and unprotected by the laws of civilized warfare. This meant, of course, Americans. Centralist forces swiftly organized a counter offensive to reverse the military verdict in Texas

They had to. Santa Anna understood that his hold on power depended upon making a strong and decisive showing against any defiance. Any weakness might be seen as a signal of weakness by his opponents. In a show of strength and send a signal of his own, his Centralist troops had destroyed the opposing Federalist army at Zacatecas and his troops ravaged the city. Now Texas emerged as his next greatest threat, with dissident politicians like Lorenzo de Zavala establishing something of a government in exile in proximity to the United States and its territorial ambitions. Santa Anna had to act swiftly—decisively—to smother this infant political threat in its crib. There must be blood. There must be glory. There must be victory to drive his enemies to exile or oblivion.

The Texian leaders had little experience in such bloody politics. Believing their cause to be ascendent and perhaps backed by divine fortune, they believe the game to have been half won already, providing them the luxury of confidence and ambition. Factions agitated for cooperation with other Federalist movements, but the majority—influenced by newcomers from the United States—swung toward the idea of independence. At this decisive moment, the Texians presented a lack of unity and a disorganized understanding of events.

Santa Anna had no such disadvantage. Instead, he moved with alacrity to take advantage of his enemy's confusion. When his army arrived at the Rio Grande, Tejano scouts brought word of its presence to the small garrison of Tejanos and Americans in Béxar. Given the winter weather and recent military events, the Texian leadership dismissed these reports as describing a Centralist defensive maneuver, irrelevant to the local situation. These men believed that the insurgency in Texas—and elsewhere in Mexico—still held the strategic initiative and they made plans for an invasion of Mexico to succor fellow Federalists. Many believed Béxar might even become a secondary theater in this evolving Mexican civil war.

They were wrong. Santa Anna understood that San Antonio de Béxar remained the center of gravity in Texas, and the key to controlling the province, and he drove his forces into the heart of this rebellious territory. Centralist cavalry surprised Texian pickets west of Béxar who tumbled back into the town spreading the alarm. Critically outnumbered, the Texian garrison abandoned the town and fled for the only position they believed they had a chance of holding until rescue could arrive—the Alamo.

Circumstances had decided the place. The actions of the men involved—Texians, Tejanos, Mexican, and Americans—would determine its meaning in the coming days. What emerged was a national origin story in which the ideas, and ideals, of 1776, were applied in an alien setting against the threat of despotism more sinister than the British had posed in the founding days of the United States. The American experiment would be tested in Texas and would be proofed in the fire of its battles.