MEXICAN NORTH OR AMERICAN SOUTHWEST: THE BORDERLAND IN U.S.-MEXICAN RELATIONS, 1821-1848

ABIGAIL BABCOCK

In the year 1821, after a decade of convoluted struggle, an independent Mexico took the place of New Spain after nearly three hundred years of Spanish rule. Only two years previously the Spanish government secured the Adams-Onís Treaty with the United States, wherein, in exchange for relinquishing Florida and its claims to the Pacific Northwest, the disputed boundary between Louisiana and New Spain was set at the Sabine River, reserving Texas for Mexico. This was the border when independent U.S.-Mexican relations began, and from the beginning these relations were greatly influenced by their shared border. Indeed, this was the beginning of a process that, in thirty years' time, would result in the loss of fifty-five percent of Mexico's national territory to the United States.[1] The U.S.-Mexican borderlands would be at the heart of this process.

In a hemispheric context, specifically that of U.S.-Latin American relations, the developments surrounding the Texas Revolution of 1835-1836 and the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-1848 represented the earliest and most dramatic onslaught of U.S. dominance that in the following years affected all of Latin America. Yet these events also show the unique nature of U.S.-Mexican relations, occurring because Mexico shares a border with the United States. "An accident of fate and European power politics had cast the United States and Mexico as neighbors," one scholar has noted, and "the United States' determination to increase its national territory set the two countries on a collision course."[2] The borderlands would be the point of this collision. Here was the area where international relations translated to personal, proximate relations--where national agendas were forced to contend with regional realities. The result was a unique world of inherent ambiguity. Historian David J. Weber has described the borderlands as what Richard White had for the 17th to 19th century Great Lakes region termed a "middle ground."[3] The people inhabiting this middle ground--*tejanos* and *nuevomexicanos*, Anglo-Americans and Indians, traders and local officials—played an active role in U.S.-Mexico relations, shaping how and when these two nations would collide.

While the nations of Mexico and the United States became neighbors only in 1821, the Anglo and Hispanic worlds of North America and the border(s) between them had by then a long and contentious history. U.S.-Mexican relations of 1821-1848 were influenced by the history that preceded them, but comparing them with pre-1821 border relations reveals some important distinctions that highlight the reason the post-1821 era was so special. The most obvious difference is that before Mexico there was New Spain; before the United States there were thirteen seaboard colonies; and the Anglo-Hispanic border originally belonged to the

1 Timothy J. Henderson, *A Glorious Defeat: Mexico and its War With the United States (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 177.*

2 *Ibid., 24.*

3 David J. Weber, "Conflicts and Accommodations: Hispanic and Anglo-American Borders in Historical Perspective, 1670-1853," *Journal of the Southwest, 39 (Spring, 1997): 1-32.*

British and Spanish empires. These two empires were based in European nations far, far away, and this would have implications for the place of the historic borderlands in their relations.

The first Anglo-Hispanic border in North America was in the modern southeastern United States between the British colony of Carolina and the much older Spanish colony of Florida. Though a 1670 treaty concluded in Madrid set a boundary, it went unheeded by the expanding population of Carolina. The British colonists allied themselves with the Creek and Yamasee Indians, and by the early eighteenth century, the Spanish of Florida in effect held only the area surrounding St. Augustine, and the British went ahead in the 1730s to settle the new colony of Georgia. The border between the British colonies and Spanish Florida remained contested until Florida was relinquished in the Treaty of Paris (1763). This treaty gave the British Empire not only Spanish Florida but also the French trans-Appalachian West, creating a new Anglo-Hispanic frontier, because France had ceded Louisiana west of the Mississippi to Spain.[4] Actual Anglo-American colonists were thin on the ground in either of these two areas (as were the Spanish). The terms of the treaty of 1763 had little to do with the actual situation in the North American borderlands. What it truly represented was the swapping of territories in an ongoing global game of empire in which all the important decisions were made half a world away.

The situation became somewhat more complicated with the recognition of the independent United States in 1783. The fact that Spain now shared a long border with an independent North American republic meant that the situation in the borderlands was of more immediate concern for U.S.-Spanish relations than it had been for Anglo-Spanish relations. Florida was once again in Spanish possession, but Anglo-Americans were moving in, despite the boundary. Spain could do little but set up military garrisons that kept up trade with the surrounding Indians, who in fact controlled most of the territory. Though relationships with Anglo traders were utilized to obtain these necessary goods, Spanish Florida found itself competing with the United States for the loyalty of Florida's native population.[5] Many Spanish officials "regarded the independent United States as a more immediate threat to Spanish hegemony" in North America than either its predecessor or France.[6]

Anglo-American settlers were troubling Spain in Louisiana as well. The French presence had always made Louisiana an ambiguous territory, but the Anglo-Americans pressing ever further west were quite different from the French who had preceded them: "They were not men of passage, as were the [French] traders; they were settlers, greedy for land and seemingly insatiable in their hunger for more and more territory."[7] This was dangerous, for even in 1800 Louisiana was Spain's most populous territory north of modern Mexico with only 50,000 inhabitants of whom Spaniards were a minority. Meanwhile, the United States was outpacing the Spanish territories demographically as well as economically.[8] As compared to North American British-Spanish relations, the borderlands were a central issue in bilateral U.S.-Spanish relations. And while Anglo-American settlers could threaten the territorial integrity of the Spanish Empire, so too could the Spanish Empire threaten the territorial integrity of the United States. In the 1780s, the Spanish broke with imperial tradition and began to

4 Weber, 3-4.

5 *Ibid., 5-6, 17-18.*

6 *Ibid., 6.*

7 *Ibid., 16-7; John Francis Bannon, The Spanish Borderlands Frontier, 1513-1821 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 203.*

8 Weber, 8.

allow Anglo immigrants to settle legally on cheap land in Florida and Louisiana. This was done in the hopes of controlling the immigration and assimilating the expatriates, thereby securing the vulnerable frontier by finally increasing its population. The hope of success for this plan appeared not too far-fetched to Spanish officials who noted the disdain many Anglo settlers held for their own government as well as the powerful lure of the Mississippi.[9] Spain controlled access to the mouth of the river, which was the only viable route through which western Anglo farmers could ship their produce, a situation that strained their ties to the federal government across the mountains.[10] Spain even attempted to take advantage of a Western secessionist movement, which, though it failed, drove home the reality that control of the borderlands was ambiguous for both of the central powers involved.[11]

Despite the real implications of border relations the U.S. and Spain, the fate of West Florida was ultimately decided not by the situation in North America but by that in Europe. In 1795 the Treaty of San Lorenzo, or the Pinckney Treaty, transferred West Florida to the United States as insurance of American neutrality in Spain's war with Britain. The border situation prompted Spain to offer Louisiana to France, hoping to shield New Spain from the Americans, but the French unilaterally decided to sell it to the United States, bringing the Americans "much too close for comfort."[12] The incoming stream of Anglo-American settlers grew steadily, exacerbated by the outbreak of independence movements within the Spanish Americas. In a last attempt to adapt to these border troubles, Spain relinquished all of Florida and the Pacific Northwest in 1819 so that the contested region of Texas might shield New Spain. Not long after, the Anglo-Hispanic border became Mexico's problem.[13]

After 1821, the borderlands became the meeting place of two independent national domains and two conflicting national projects. To understand early U.S.-Mexican relations, it is necessary to understand each nation's relationship with the borderlands. To Mexico that relationship was that of a political center attempting to exert authority and a sense of nationality over a heterogeneous periphery. To the United States, the borderlands were the target of a popular ideology and national project of empire. Even in the early days of the Republic, "Anglo-Americans boasted that divine providence had marked them to occupy the entire continent."[14] Although the actual frontiersmen who performed much of the United States' expansionist work-- settlers, traders, filibusterers, and colonists--did so for reasons of their own. On a national level, the whole enterprise was underwritten by a widely held "aggressive expansionist ideology" that coalesced over the years into the creed John O'Sullivan famously called "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent."[15] This creed assumed many things about Anglo-Americans, as well as the other peoples they encountered, that helped justify actions taken in pushing the Anglo-Hispanic border further south and west. Joel Roberts Poinsett saw in Mexico "an ignorant and immoral race" made all the more "ignorant and debauched" by the widespread miscegenation between whites and Indians.[16] It did not go

9 *Ibid., 9.*

10 Bannon, 204.

11 Weber, 9.

12 *Ibid., 9-10; Bannon, 208-9.*

13 Weber, 12-3.

14 *Ibid., 8.*

15 Henderson, 31; John O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review, 17 (July-August 1845): 5-10.*

16 Joel Poinsett to Henry Clay, 12 October 1825 in Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America, 19.*

unnoticed among the Mexicans that "the arrogance of these republicans does not permit them to see us as equals, but as inferiors."[17] Compared with the Anglo-Saxon population of North America, Mexicans were believed to be racially weak and effeminate and, because of their inherent faults, lived in darkness, corruption, and chaos. It was "the right and indeed the duty to spread the blessings of freedom and civilization to those who dwelled in darkness."[18] The link between Anglo-Saxon descent, freedom, and self-government can be viewed in the words of Mary P. A. Holley when she wrote of "the great cause of liberty, of science, and human happiness, by the introduction into this vast region, of the English language, and of those principles of republican and constitutional government, which always accompany that language."[19] Many were in fact doubtful of the possibility of redeeming Latin Americans, not in the least because "a free government and the Roman Catholick [sic] religion can never exist together in any nation or Country." However, the drive for land, perhaps for land to expand the institution of slavery, meant that the project of expansion continued into Spanish and later Mexican territory.[20]

Just as the energies behind Manifest Destiny had encouraged filibusterers in Florida, the trans-Mississippi had stirred up dreams of settlement or even of conquest since the Spanish Era. Texas, the contested land between the Sabine and Rio Grande Rivers, became prominent as a defensive zone in borderlands security after 1803 as well as the target of American expansionism. New Mexico too seemed threatened as Santa Fe began to lure in the Anglo traders of the Mississippi Valley.[21] Spain tried many of its old tactics, such as Indian diplomacy, in Texas and attempted to draw settlers from elsewhere in New Spain. Even so, the Anglo-Hispanic border continued to grow crowded. The area east of the Sabine "became a notorious home to fugitive slaves, outlaws, smugglers, and squatters from the United States and a staging ground for filibustering expeditions into Texas."[22] These campaigns continued from 1801 until 1819, and they illustrated the need for drastic measures to secure New Spain's northern frontier.[23] In 1819 the Adams-Onís treaty settled on a boundary at the Sabine River. Then in 1820, the Spanish government again attempted the strategy tried in both Florida and Louisiana; they would attract Anglo-American settlers with generous land grants in the hopes of assimilating them and thereby bolstering the region's demographic strength against the predations of the United States.[24] However, the next year Mexico's independence was recognized, and the new government in Mexico City had to decide if it would pursue such drastic measures or if it could combat American expansionism another way.

The expansionist attitude of the United States was glaringly obvious, but defending its claims to its northern territories was a formidable dilemma for Mexico. It had inherited the agreement of 1819, which should have legally secured Texas, but there was something of a "general agreement" among nations that claims to a territory were only valid if the lands in question were not significantly settled. Mexico had a population of seven million, but the

17 Zozaya to de Herrara, 7 December 1822 in Schoultz, 18-19.

18 Henderson, 31.

19 Mary Phelps Austin Holley, *Texas, Observations, Historical, Geographical and Descriptive, in a Series of Letters (Baltimore: Armstrong & Plaskitt, 1833), 113.*

20 Henderson, 32-3; John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 3 February 1821, quoted in Schoultz, 5.

21 Bannon, 205, 209, 215, 218.

22 Weber, 12

23 Henderson, 34-5.

24 Bannon, 213.

majority were peasants tied to the land with little incentive to move to an unsettled region. The logical solution would be to entice foreign immigration, but the option of encouraging immigration from the U.S. was worrisome, especially since "Americans were fairly open in viewing their migrants as the advance guard of empire."[25] This unofficial policy was articulated by no less an authority than the eminent John C. Calhoun, who wrote in 1844, "it is our policy to increase by growing and spreading out into unoccupied regions, assimilating all we incorporate. In a word, to increase by accretion, and not through conquest by the addition of masses."[26] Even so, the Mexican government ultimately decided to take up the policy adopted in the twilight of Spanish rule and passed a colonization law in 1823, which was replaced by a similar one the next year. *Empresarios* were authorized to distribute lands to two hundred families, and colonists would be given tax exemptions and civil rights. The hope was that after the region developed, immigrants could be attracted from elsewhere and balance out the American presence. As time went by Mexican, however, authorities saw more cause for alarm. American newspapers and statesmen made it clear that many in the United States coveted Texas. This impression was easily cemented by the actions of Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first appointed U.S. ambassador to Mexico City, who was instructed to make repeated overtures for the purchase of Texas that so irritated his hosts that even he, who had a reputation for unwanted meddling, often found it best to ignore the promptings from Washington.[27] President Jackson warned his successor to "guard every advance which you make on the subject of Texas," reminding him that, "the acquisition of that territory is become [sic] every day an object of more importance to us."[28]

While the national project of the United States revolved around expanding its national territory, that of newly independent Mexico was the extension of central authority and national identity over its vast and vastly diverse national territory. In this Mexico faced many considerable difficulties arising from its colonial past and long and complicated struggle for independence. At first Mexican central elites displayed considerable optimism about Mexico's chances for prosperity and greatness, but the young nation struggled to overcome its intrinsic divisiveness on social, political, and geographic levels.[29] Socially the population of Mexico was divided into racial castes. The white Spanish elite stood at the pinnacle of this social order, and the wealth and power of the nation was concentrated in the hands of this exclusive minority. In sharp contrast, at the bottom were Mexico's Indians, representing about sixty percent of the population. Beginning with Cortes' conquest of the Aztec empire, the Indians had been subjected to epidemics and genocide, social engineering and racial oppression. At the time of independence the Indians remained largely unassimilated into the culture or the economy. They remained illiterate, non-Spanish speaking, and impoverished. In between these extremes were the many *castas*, or mixed-race peoples, who represented about twenty-two percent of Mexico's population of *mestizos*, *zambos*, and *mulattos*. The *castas* filled the large number of menial occupations and, despite their growing numbers, were continuously marginalized by the Spanish elite, and poverty was common among them as well as the Indians.[30]

25 Henderson, 31, 25.

26 Calhoun to King, 12 August 1844, quoted in Schoultz, 28.

27 *Ibid., 36, 38, 39-43.*

28 Jackson to Butler, 10 October 1829, quoted in Schoultz.

29 *Ibid, 3.*

30 *Ibid., 7-11.*

These racial differences were exacerbated by the differentiation in wealth and power, notable in the high concentration of urban poverty in Mexico City and the widespread rural poverty beyond the center.[31] Deeply afraid of the lower classes, the Mexican elite feared that any "breakdown of order ... might well land them at the mercy of angry mobs bent on vengeance."[32] Because of this fear, they balked at rebelling against Spain for many years, and when Miguel Hidalgo started off a decade-long independence struggle, the violent backlash against elites convinced them that their monopoly of power had to be maintained. When independence finally came, orchestrated by conservative forces, Brigadier General Iturbide's Junta consisted of men who had been unsympathetic with the rebel cause. The poor, including most of those who had fought for Mexico's independence, were shut out of political participation.[33] This was hardly a recipe for a strong, uniting nationalism. Furthermore, even the elite was divided between Liberals and Conservatives, whose feud resulted in great instability in the political center as coups and civil wars continued to rock the nation and stunted growth.[34]

Mexico also faced formidable geographic obstacles. It was a large country and very diverse. To the north and south, the land became inhospitable and lacked navigable rivers, stunting trade and agricultural development.[35] At the time of independence, one quarter of Mexico's territory was uninhabited, mostly in the north, which spelled trouble for national security.[36] The scattering of Mexico's population across such a vast country, the difficulty of transportation and communication, and the political and social destabilization of preexisting ties during the war of independence, resulted in strong regional loyalties to *las patrias chicas* that took precedence over loyalty to the vague notion of a Mexican nation.[37] Therefore, not only were the borderlands at risk because of their scant population and proximity to the United States, but because the people of the northern states held their regional identities dear and lived far removed from the events and nationalism of Mexico City. Mexico's national project extended to the borderlands as attempts to assimilate these peoples into the greater Mexican nation and, as Anglo-American colonization increased, to draw them away from the influence of the U.S.

Andrés Reséndez has examined the nation building of central officials, and he questions the widespread assumption that Mexico's northern states were unequivocally a part of Mexico, "as if national identity had emerged full-blown right after Mexico gained independence." It is tempered instead by evidence showing considerable conflict between the center and periphery.[38] Local officials "attempted to impose uniformity and nationalist devotion" in the North through several means.[39] One route to nationalism was through education. The early republic adopted a drive to establish schools in Texas and New Mexico to teach Catholic and nationalistic values. Trader Josiah Gregg, who bemoaned the ignorance of northern Mexicans, remembered that "its operations had to be suspended ... for want of the necessary funds" in

31 *Ibid., 11.*
32 *Ibid., 19.*
33 *Ibid., 19-22.*
34 *Ibid., 47-8.*
35 *Ibid., 11, 17-8.*
36 *Ibid., 30-1.*
37 *Ibid., 11-2.*
38 Andrés Reséndez, "National Identity on a Shifting Border: Texas and New Mexico in the Age of Transition, 1821-1848," *The Journal of American History, 86 (September 1999): 670.*
39 *Ibid., 674.*

1834.[40] The money was needed for more pressing security concerns.[41] The most potent means of instilling a national identity among a distant and largely illiterate population was the proliferation of symbols and rituals. Symbols could be recognized on flags or coins, and the national emblem became known "even in the smallest and most remote villages" of the North. The use of rituals to instill nationalism had been in use since the beginning of independence in civic ceremonies and celebrations commemorating Independence Day, the births and deaths of independence heroes, and the implementation of constitutions. Even the everyday practice of Catholicism helped to promote a national identity by distinguishing the Mexican from both the pagan nomadic Indian and the Protestant Anglo-American.[42] Catholicism was also one of the few ties that bound the various parts and peoples of Mexico together, which was why the anti-clerical liberal elite still tolerated the church's influence.[43] Yet also, to ensure command of the territory and loyalty of the northern provinces, Mexico City officials had not only to promote a sense of connection with the center but also to ward off foreign influences. The main threat in this case was the Anglo colonists and their continued connections with the United States.

The states of northern Mexico were the meeting site of these two national projects, and they became the focal point of U.S.-Mexican relations. "Here two frontiers collided, sometimes violently," one scholar notes. "Here a fusion began, which is still in process." It was a unique world shaped by the interactions of tejanos, *nuevomexicanos*, Anglo-Americans, and Indian peoples.[44] The personal, proximate relations between them would shape the manner in which U.S.-Mexican relations unfolded. Despite the violent legacies of the Texan Revolution and the U.S.-Mexican War, a considerable amount of accommodation characterized cross-cultural borderland relations, centering especially on economic opportunity.[45] As Reséndez has argued, "Economic expansion provided the medium in which cross cultural alliances were forged."[46]

Even in the days of Spanish rule, economic relationships had existed across the Anglo-Hispanic border, such as with Anglo-American traders for obtaining the commodities necessary for Indian relations.[47] When Mexico gained its independence and Spanish trade restrictions vanished, the international economic exchange increased dramatically. This can be seen in the story of the Santa Fe Trail. Apart from nomadic Indian peoples, 30,000 Hispanics and 10,000 Pueblos lived in New Mexico, a population stifled by a dry climate and a terrain suited primarily for sheep herding.[48] The exports of wool and livestock sent to the inner states, however, did not provide for a healthy balance of trade. In 1821, trade opened to favor American traders; the demand for American commodities grew rapidly, and the Santa Fe Trail was born.[49] Josiah Gregg, who filled two volumes with his experiences on the Santa Fe Trail, described how "the arrival of a caravan at Santa Fé changes the aspect of the place at once

40 Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies, or, The Journal of a Santa Fé Trader*, vol. 1 (New York, 1844), 198.
41 Reséndez, 674-5.
42 *Ibid., 675-7.*
43 Henderson, 15.
44 Bannon, 3.
45 Weber, 15.
46 Reséndez, 669.
47 Weber, 17-8.
48 Reséndez, 672; Gregg, 150.
49 Reséndez, 678; Bannon, 218-9.

... one now sees everywhere the bustle, noise and activity of a lively market town."[50] Within a few years, the way into New Mexico became the most important regional trade route.[51] Texas also saw an economic transformation. Even before the Mexican war for independence, Texas had been a remote destination for missionaries, and during the violence of the next ten years, the region's Spanish-speaking population of 4,000 was halved.[52] Upon independence, Texas's representative was instructed to procure freedom of commerce with the United States, which resulted in a cross-border trade boom.[53] Overall, independent Mexico had opened trade with the wider world, but the pull of the booming United States economy was particularly strong on the northern border, especially compared to the stagnant economy of Mexico.[54] This trend was strengthened in Texas by an influx of Anglo-American colonists, whose trade, the Mexican Boundary Commission of 1827-29 noted with dismay, was almost entirely with the U.S.[55]

Every economic exchange was also a chance for social exchange, an alignment of interests for "Anglos and Hispanics to see one another as peaceable and reasonable."[56] When the Anglo-American and Hispanic frontiers met in the Mexican north, the Americans were often "anything but sympathetic" toward the many ethnic, religious, aesthetic, and economic differences they encountered.[57] Among the colonists streaming into Texas, those who lived in isolated communities where they constituted the majority found it much easier to maintain their prejudices. Those in the minority were more likely to accommodate the dominant culture and to judge their Mexican neighbors as individuals.[58] By his own words, Gregg appears to have been somewhere in between. "Systematically cringing and subservient while out of power, as soon as the august mantle of authority falls upon their shoulders," he writes, "there are but little bounds to their arrogance and vindictiveness of spirit." Yet he attempts to qualify this prejudice, claiming that whatever the general character of northern Mexicans, "I am fain to believe and acknowledge, that there are to be found among them numerous instances of uncompromising virtue, good faith and religious forbearance."[59] Meanwhile, other Anglo immigrants even assimilated, becoming Mexican citizens, Catholics, and marrying Mexican women. It was pragmatism over prejudice, something Mexican elites practiced too when they made alliances with American merchants.[60] Elites in New Mexico as well as Texas seized upon the opportunities offered by trade with the United States. In New Mexico they moved from sheep herding to commerce, and by 1843, accounted for 45 percent of the state's exports. And though Anglo-Americans dominated Texas economically as well as demographically, a formidable group of tejano merchants arose by the 1830s with wide trading networks. Anglo-American and northern Mexican merchants usually got along and formed long-term, profitable relationships because Anglo-Americans could open the way to U.S. suppliers while Hispanics could aid with Mexican customs officials. Furthermore, both groups opposed all

50 Gregg, 113.
51 Reséndez, 678.
52 Henderson, 36-7.
53 Reséndez, 678.
54 Reséndez, 678; Henderson, 56.
55 Henderson, 55-6.
56 Weber, 19-20.
57 Bannon, 231.
58 Weber, 18-9.
59 Gregg, 219.
60 Weber, 19-20.

who attempted to interfere with the flow of their profits. Indeed, centralists in Mexico City became deeply troubled by these trends.[61] Mexico City had long fretted over how to bring the far-off northern provinces into the national fold, particularly Texas. The strong regional identity of *tejanos* was born of the need not to rely upon the distant capital. They had learned to expect very little of Mexico City and distrusted it. Elite *tejanos* tended to prefer Anglo-American liberalism rather than the domineering stratification of the center.[62] Yet there were also those in the borderlands who had been disadvantaged by the new economic trends, and began to apply nationalist rhetoric to their local disputes. This rhetoric helped to unite diverse groups with diverse concerns, whether national, regional, or local, into a single cause.[63]

Beyond direct economic interactions, many shared features in the cultural landscape fused the two frontiers. Both *tejanos* and Anglo colonists depended greatly on maize, a hardy and versatile crop, whether for cornbread, *tortillas*, or *tamales*. The livestock trade, most especially of cattle, a long tradition among tejanos, was widely practiced by both groups, and they shared a form of entertainment, the frontier horse race--"a kind of proto-rodeo." Both enjoyed the theatre, many Anglo-Americans adopted the ritual of the siesta despite its supposed symbolism of Mexican indolence, and gambling was a ubiquitous obsession. "It prevails in the lowly hut, as well in the glittering saloon," Gregg says, "nor is the sanctity of the gown nor the dignity of station sufficient proof against the fascinations of this exciting vice."[64] Both also lived in a society of considerable violence often difficult to remedy.[65] Texas was attached to the state of Coahuila, and it was in the distant town of Saltillo that Texans had to go to reach a court of appeals. Furthermore, Anglo-Americans resented the absence of the jury trial in Mexico.[66] Perhaps as a consequence, De la Teja observes, "the law in Texas was often taken into private hands," and in this atmosphere, Anglo-Americans readily bullied tejanos.[67] But the common threat came from Native Americans from throughout the Mexican north who lived in independent non-state polities in large numbers. "Indian hostilities," writes De la Teja, "constituted the single most important factor in the development of Texas until the 1870s."[68]

In the Spanish era, two fundamental institutions of the northern frontier were the *presidio*, or frontier garrison, and the mission. The *presidios* were similar to other forts, but they were habitually undersupplied and undermanned. Even so, their presence, combined with a diplomacy based on trade, meant that relations between the northern Mexicans and independent tribes were "relatively peaceful."[69] Meanwhile, the conversion and assimilation of these Indian nations was a primary aim of the Spanish in the Americas, and the nationalists of independent Mexico City inherited this dream.[70] While Indians were not viewed as Mexican citizens, it was believed that their adoption into the national family would follow their adoption of

61 Reséndez, 678-9.

62 Henderson, 53-4.

63 Reséndez, 681-2.

64 Jesús F. de la Teja, "Discovering the Tejano Community in 'Early' Texas," *Journal of the Early Republic, 18 (Spring, 1998): 77-93; Gregg, 239.*

65 De la Teja, 86-8.

66 Henderson, 57-8.

67 De la Teja, 86-8.

68 *Ibid., 87.*

69 Bannon, 5, 237; Brian Delay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexican War," *The American Historical Review, 112 February 2007): 37.*

70 Bannon, 5.

Catholicism and civilization.[71] The natives showed no signs of such willingness, however, and in the 1830s the "peace" of the North broke down entirely and raids on settlements increased dramatically in frequency and severity. There were several reasons for this sudden change. Independent Mexico was not only cash-strapped, but continuing instability at its political center meant little support for *presidios* or Indian diplomacy, and this allowed young warriors to raid unabated and without consequences. They sought horses and human captives, valuable commodities among both Indians and Mexicans. Other native peoples, such as the Cherokees and the Creeks pushed west from their homelands, provided an additional incentive by offering guns and ammunition in exchange for stolen livestock. Each raid involved an unusual level of deadly violence.[72] As Mary P. A. Holley wrote, the Indians "hate the Mexicans, and murder them without mercy."[73] The reason for this, Delay believes, lay in a system of reprisal built into the social structure of these tribes. Appeals to prominent men for aid in avenging a dead loved one could set off a powerful process of recruitment out of which came raids of vengeance, more death, and then more appeals for reprisal. This system combined with individual economic incentive resulted in a cycle of violence, especially when Mexicans responded in kind, that cost the Indian nations hundreds of their own warriors.[74] Even Nicholas Mill, writing in England, heard of the "state of perpetual hostility with the Indians" that seemed to exist in New Mexico.[75] The widespread destruction of these raids would have considerable effects on U.S.-Mexican relations in the 1830s and 1840s.

What was occurring in the borderlands gradually began to transform the region, particularly Texas, into a national obsession for Mexico, a symbol of honor as well as of what threatened the Mexican nation. By 1830, Anglo-American colonists outnumbered *tejanos* 20,000 to 3,000. The Mexican government's fears were aggravated by several factors, including an attempt by Haden Edward, an Anglo empresario, to rebel against Mexico and create a "Republic of Fredonia." With the end of Edward's debacle in 1827, the Mexican government funded a boundary commission. Headed by General Manuel Mier y Terán, the Commission headed north in the fall to mark out the U.S.-Mexico boundary as defined by the treaty of 1819. They reported that *tejanos* were few in number, besieged by Indians, and their defenses were in tatters. They found Anglo-Americans concentrated in the fertile plains of eastern Texas, their trade virtually monopolized by the U.S., and with many grievances against the central government. Among these was the reinstatement of tariffs after a seven-year suspension, their continued attachment to the state of Coahuila, Mexico City's failure to encourage a cotton export economy, and the prohibition of slave labor. The Commission's resulting report noted that Anglo-Americans should never have been allowed to settle in Texas, that settlers could be drawn from elsewhere, and that in the meantime the northern military presence ought to be strengthened. Terán wrote that "if the colonization contracts in Texas by North Americans were not suspended, and if conditions of their establishment were not watched," Texas would be lost.[76] The Law of April 6, 1830, fulfilled the majority of the Commission's suggestions, but it was largely impotent because state governors, jealous of their sovereignty, balked at compliance, and because the Anglo-Americans were used to bypassing the ban on slave importation,

71 Delay, 53-4; Reséndez, 672-4.

72 Delay, 40-4.

73 Holley, 90.

74 Delay, 45-8.

75 Nicholas Mill, *The History of Mexico, from the Spanish Conquest to the Present Era* (London, 1824) 199.

76 Mier y Terán to Móctezuma, 29 December 1829, in Nettie Lee Benson, "Texas Viewed from Mexico, 1820-1834," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly, 90 (January 1987): 269.*

legal immigration, and the customs houses.[77]

Throughout all of this, Reséndez notes, the Anglo and Mexican societies of the borderlands were caught between local and regional interests that drew them closer to the U.S., and the Mexican government's attempts to engender a national identity among them. The Texas Revolution arose from this intra-national tension. Reséndez argues that the Revolution was not simply an Anglo-American vs. Mexican conflict, but one in which an assortment of American colonists, tejanos, and Indians fought the Mexican state and their regional allies.[78] Indeed, not even all colonists were revolutionaries. In his 1836 history of Texas, David B. Edward, a settler of Scottish origin, effectively decried action against "the Mexican Republic, whose liberality to them in lands and otherwise, has been without its parallel in modern days."[79] The key division was that many within the rebelling region were dissatisfied with the current economic trends as well as the Americanization of Texas. Meanwhile the revolutionaries' fight for "freedom" was connected to self-interest and their ties to the established socio-economic arrangements.[80]

For a decade after the Texas Revolution, Mexico and the United States grew steadily closer to the outbreak of war, and once again the borderlands region was the issue at hand. Once again the forces of Manifest Destiny and the quest for united nationhood would collide along a contested border. And, once again, the situation within the borderlands themselves would shape just how this occurred. In his article, Delay shows how the regional situation, namely of widespread, unstoppable Indian raids, served as a kind of lens through which Mexico and the United States peered at each other. Americans heard and read reports of Indians raiding and killing "within a mile of the city of Chihuahua in open day … without the slightest opposition," and formed a narrative of Indians, who were savages, simply attacking "an enemy more cowardly than themselves."[81] If Mexicans could be reduced by unorganized savages, they must be weak.[82] Of course, anyone acquainted with the situation knew that the Indians were indeed more threatening--even to Anglo-Americans--than readers in the East might have admitted.[83] Sam Houston, as the president of Texas in November 1838, reminded the Texan congress of the severe danger and called for their swift action. "It requires little forecast to predict," he stated, "if some prompt and decisive measures are not adopted by the Honorable Congress, that in sixty days from the present, there will not be a family residing between the Naches and the Attoyae."[84] Yet as far as the general population of the United States was concerned, the Mexicans were "too lazy to cultivate the soil, and too cowardly to resist the aggressions of the northern Indians."[85] The Americans had a right to the land, and it was they, so the story went, who had transformed Texas from a desert into a thriving civilization.[86] This idea is echoed in Mary P. A. Holley's diary: "They redeemed it from the wilderness,--they developed

77 Henderson, 49-72.

78 Reséndez, 669-83.

79 David B. Edward, *The History of Texas, or, The Emigrant's, Farmer's, and Politician's Guide to the Character, Climate, Soil and Productions of That Country* (Cincinnati, 1836), xi-xii.

80 Reséndez, 683-4.

81 Gregg, *Commerce, 203, in Delay, 50; Francis Moore, Map and Description of Texas, Containing Sketches of History, Geology… (Philadelphia, Pa., 1848), 31-3, in Delay, 52.*

82 Delay, 48-52.

83 *Ibid., 66.*

84 President of Texas, *A Message from the President Relative to Indian Affairs: With Accompanying Documents* (Houston, 1838), 4.

85 Joseph Emerson Field, *Thee Years in Texas: Including a View of the Texan Revolution, and an Account of the Principle Battles, Together With Descriptions of the Soil, Commercial and Agricultural Advantages, &c (Boston, 1836), 6-7, in Delay, 53.*

86 Delay, 49-52.

its resources,--they have explored it, in its length and breadth, and made known its geography. All has been done by them, without the cost of a single cent to the Mexicans."[87] As war approached, Piero Gleijeses argues in "A Brush With Mexico," opposition to President James K. Polk's Mexican policy was virtually nonexistent. He concluded that this was not because of a lack of information, but because the American people largely assumed that a war with Mexico would be easily won. Mexico was weak! Even those who opposed a war and territorial expansion assumed that Mexico would never dare declare war.[88]

Northern and central Mexicans were originally divided on what the Indian raids meant. Yet as the international crisis worsened, especially when Texas was annexed by the United States, a single narrative began to emerge. Texas had captured the central government's imagination like the North's Indian crisis never had. The neglected Northerners seized upon this opportunity to frame their dilemma in a context of national security. The Mexican government became more and more certain that the Americans were behind the attacks, supplying the natives with arms and ammunition, teaching them how to organize themselves, and inciting them.[89]

When war did begin and the U.S. army invaded northern Mexico, it found a scarred land, its countryside largely abandoned, its villages crowded with refugees, and its dead scattered about. Northern Mexico had suffered through fifteen years of intensive Indian raiding and was therefore unable to muster a proper defense or to form a worthwhile guerilla insurgency to fight the invaders. Polk's army was free to march into central Mexico.[90] In New Mexico, U.S. General Stephen W. Kearny and a small army entered Santa Fe in August, 1846, without a shot fired, because the governor had decided, after much vacillation, not to confront the invaders. Five months later, however, an anti-American uprising, the Taos Rebellion, took place. Reséndez remarks that, while there is a tendency to view the U.S.-Mexican War as a war between two nation-states, the events in New Mexico were the result of local and regional forces negotiating with an invading army. After all, though the "the privileged few whose interests depended upon the Santa Fe Trail" might have been willing to accept the American takeover, "displaced elites and commoners thought otherwise."[91]

In 1821, the national projects of the United States and Mexico met along their shared border. In the cross-cultural societies along this border, U.S.-Mexican relations were translated into proximate, personal relationships of common interest or contention, from business partners to married couples. The two nation-states and their agents were forced to reckon with regional realities in order to exert their own national vision upon the territory. In this manner the border itself constituted a force that could shape bilateral international relations. Today the border remains a focal point of U.S.-Mexican relations. NAFTA, drug trafficking, and immigration all represent central international issues that are based in the cross-border interactions of so many individuals.

87 Holley, 114-5.

88 Piero Gleijeses, "A Brush With Mexico," *Diplomatic History, 29 (April, 2005): 224-54.*

89 Delay, 53-8.

90 Ibid., 58-62.

91 Reséndez, 684-86.