

American History

Voices of the Alamo

Standards Addressed: GLE: 1. A 2a. D, E, F
DOK: Levels 1-4
SS: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7

Learning Target: Over the course of this unit, students will learn to synthesize primary and secondary accounts of the Battle of the Alamo. These documents will vary and feature both the Texan perspective, as well as the Mexican perspective of the battle. Students will then discuss source validity and how time factors into the equation when taking down a first hand account of any event.

Activate Prior Knowledge: At this point, the class has been thoroughly involved in discussion and research in regards to Texan independence. We will draw on that previous knowledge and discuss why the Mexicans felt as if they were right in the conflict. Then, we will ask ourselves the very same question from the Texan side. We will also watch segments of the 2004 film so that we have a visual frame of reference as to what happened inside the walls of The Alamo.

Class Activity: Students will participate in a cooperative learning activity. In this activity, students will have one partner. One person in the group will read first hand accounts of the Battle of the Alamo from the Texan perspective, and the other partner will read about the very same event from the Mexican perspective. They will compare and contrast the stories that they read, compiling them into a chart. After they find all similarities and differences, they will join another group of two and the process will repeat itself until the class comes to a clear consensus of the way the two sides saw the events. Then they will be given a series of secondary documents featuring the same topic. They will rejoin their partners and begin synthesizing similarities and differences in the secondary document before finally comparing their findings of the secondary document to their findings of the primary document.

After the class has had the opportunity to debrief that information, we will then focus particularly on the accounts left by Juana Navarro Alsbury, who was the cousin of James Bowie, and Susanna Dickinson, whose husband was killed in the battle, although she survived. We will focus on these accounts in particular because they were both given later in life. In fact, Dickinson's account was given some 30 years following the battle to a reporter who had to write it for her because she was illiterate. This creates a problem for source accuracy because the reporter could have embellished the account without her knowledge. Alsbury's account could be altered purely because of memory lapse.

We will then compare these to Santa Anna's personal diary. Although he is writing from the Mexican perspective, it is a first hand account written as the events were unfolding.

Practice/Reinforce: Students will attend a class trip at Southeast Missouri State University's Kent Library to do their own research on primary and secondary accounts of the battle for Texan independence. They will then report their findings via class presentation.

Closure: This unit will be brought to a close following post-assessments including all elements leading up to and resulting from the battle for Texan independence. The source exercise will carry over into future research projects.

Note: GLE=Grade Level Expectations
DOK=Depths of Knowledge
SS=Show-Me Standards (Missouri State Standards)

Crockett, Davy. "Remember the Alamo!" 1836. Exploits and Adventures in Texas. Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Co., 1951. *World Book Advanced*. Web. 13 Sept. 2009.

Remember the Alamo!

Colonel Crockett 1836

[1836]

I write this on the nineteenth of February, 1836, at San Antonio. We are all in high spirits, though we are rather short of provisions for men who have appetites that could digest anything but oppression; but no matter, we have a prospect of soon getting our bellies full of fighting, and that is victuals and drink to a true patriot any day. We had a little sort of convivial party last evening; just about a dozen of us set to work most patriotically to see whether we could not get rid of that Curse of the land, whisky, and we made considerable progress.

February 22: The Mexicans, about sixteen hundred strong, with their president, Santa Anna, at their head, aided by Generals Almonte, Cos, Sesma, and Castrillon, are within two leagues of Bexar. Some of the Scouts came in and bring reports that Santa Anna has been endeavoring to excite the Indians to hostilities against the Texans, but so far without effect. The Comanches in particular entertain such hatred for the Mexicans and at the same time hold them in such contempt that they would rather turn their tomahawks against them and drive them from the land than lend a helping hand. We are up and doing and as lively as Dutch cheese in the dog days. Two hunters left the town this afternoon for the purpose of reconnoitering.

February 23: Early this morning the enemy came in sight, marching in regular order and displaying their strength to the greatest advantage in order to strike us with terror. But that was no go; they'll find that they have to do with men who will never lay down their arms as long as they can stand on their legs. We held a short council of war, and, finding that we should be completely surrounded and overwhelmed by numbers if we remained in the town, we concluded to withdraw to the fortress of Alamo and defend it to the last extremity. We accordingly filed off in good order, having some days before placed all the surplus provisions, arms, and ammunition in the fortress.

We have had a large national flag made; it is composed of thirteen stripes, red and white alternately, on a blue ground with a large white star of five points in the center, and between the points the letters Texas. As soon as our little band, about one hundred and fifty in number, had entered and secured the fortress in the best possible manner, we set about raising our flag on the battlements.

The enemy marched into Bexar and took possession of the town, a blood-red flag flying at their head, to indicate that we need not expect quarter if we should fall into their clutches. In the afternoon a messenger was sent from the enemy to Colonel Travis, demanding an unconditional and absolute surrender of the garrison, threatening to put every man to the sword in case of refusal. The only answer he received was a cannon shot; so the messenger left us with a flea in his ear, and the Mexicans commenced firing grenades at us, but without doing any mischief. At night Colonel Travis sent an express to Colonel Fanning at Goliad, about three or four days' march from this place, to let him know that we are besieged. The old pirate volunteered to go on this expedition and accordingly left the fort after nightfall.

February 24: Very early this morning the enemy commenced a new battery on the banks of the river about three hundred and fifty yards from the fort, and by afternoon they amused themselves by firing at us from that quarter. Our Indian scout came in this evening, and with him a reinforcement of thirty men from Gonzales, who are just in the nick of time to reap a harvest of glory; but there is some prospect of sweating blood before we gather it in.

February 25: The firing commenced early this morning, but the Mexicans are poor engineers, for we haven't lost a single man, and our outworks have sustained no injury. Our sharpshooters have brought down a considerable number of stragglers at a long shot. I got up before the peep of day, heating an occasional

discharge of a rifle just over the place where I was sleeping, and I was somewhat amazed to see Thimblebrig mounted alone on the battlement, no one being on duty at the time but sentries.

"What are you doing them?" says I.

"Paying my debts," says he, "interest and all."

"And how do you make out?" says I.

"I've nearly got through," says he. "Stop a moment, Colonel, and I'll close the account."

He clapped his rifle to his shoulder and blazed away, then jumped down from his perch and said:

"That account's settled; them chaps will let me play out my game in quiet next time."

I looked over the wall and saw four Mexicans lying dead on the plain. I asked him to explain what he meant by paying his debts, and he told me that he had run the grapeshot into four rifle balls and that he had taken an early stand to have a chance of picking off stragglers.

"Now, Colonel, let's go take our bitters," said he; and so we did.

The enemy have been busy during the night and have thrown up two batteries on the opposite side of the river. The battalion of Matamoras is posted there, and cavalry occupy the hills to the east and on the road to Gonzales. They are determined to surround us and cut us off from reinforcement or the possibility of escape by a sortie. Well, there's one thing they cannot prevent: we'll still go ahead, and sell our lives at a high price.

February 27: The cannonading began early this morning, and ten bombs were thrown into the fort, but fortunately exploded without doing any mischief. So far it has been a sort of tempest in a teapot, not unlike a pitched battle in the Hall of Congress, where the parties array their forces, make fearful demonstrations on both sides, then fire away with loud-sounding speeches, which contain about as much meaning as the report of a howitzer charged with a blank cartridge. Provisions are becoming scarce, and the enemy are endeavoring to cut off our water. If they attempt to stop our grog in that manner, let them look out, for we shall become too wrathful for our shirts to hold us.

February 28: Last night our hunters brought in some corn and hogs and had a brush with a scout from the enemy beyond gunshot of the fort. They bring accounts that the settlers are flying in all quarters, in dismay, leaving their possessions to the mercy of the ruthless invader, who is literally engaged in a war of extermination more brutal than the untutored savage of the desert could be guilty of. Slaughter is indiscriminate, sparing neither sex, age, nor condition. Buildings have been burnt down, farms laid waste, and Santa Anna appears determined to verify his threat and convert the blooming paradise into a howling wilderness. For just one crack at that rascal oven at a hundred yards distance I would bargain to break my Betsey and never pull trigger again. My name's not Crockett if I wouldn't get glory enough to appease my stomach for the remainder of my life.

February 29: Before daybreak we saw General Sesma leave his camp with a large body of cavalry and infantry and move off in the direction of Goliad. We think that he must have received news of Colonel Fanning's coming to our relief. We are all in high spirits at the prospect of being able to give the rascals a fair shake on the plain. This business of being shut up makes a man wolfish.

I had a little sport this morning before breakfast. The enemy had planted a piece of ordnance within gunshot of the fort during the night, and the first thing in the morning they commenced a brisk cannonade point-blank against the spot where I was snoring. I turned out pretty smart and mounted the rampart. The gun was charged again, a fellow stepped forth to touch her off, but before he could apply the match I let him have it, and he keeled over. A second stepped up, snatched the match from the hand of the dying man, but Thimblebrig, who had followed me, handed me his rifle, and the next instant the Mexican was stretched on the earth beside the first. A third came up to the cannon, my companion handed me another gun, and I fixed him off in like manner. A fourth, then a fifth, seized the match, who both met with the same fate, and

then the whole party gave it up as a bad job and hurried off to the camp, leaving the cannon ready charged where they had planted it. I came down, took my bitters, and went to breakfast. Thimberig told me that the place from which I had been firing was one of the snuggest stands in the whole fort, for he never failed picking off two or three stragglers before breakfast when perched up there. And I recollect now having seen him there, ever since he was wounded, the first thing in the morning and the last at night—and at times thoughtlessly playing at his eternal game.

March 1: The enemy's forces have been increasing in numbers daily, notwithstanding they have already lost about three hundred men in the several assaults they have made upon us. I neglected to mention in the proper place that when the enemy came in sight we had but three bushels of corn in the garrison but have since found eighty bushels in a deserted house.

March 2: This day the delegates meet in general convention at the town of Washington to frame our Declaration of Independence. That the sacred instrument may never be trampled on by the children of those who have freely shed their blood to establish it is the sincere wish of David Crockett.

March 3: We have given over all hopes of receiving assistance from Goliad or Refugio. Colonel Travis harangued the garrison and concluded by exhorting them, in case the enemy should carry the fort, to fight to the last gasp and render their victory even more serious to them than to us. This was followed by three cheers.

March 4: Shells have been falling into the fort like hail during the day, but without effect. About dusk in the evening, we observed a man running toward the fort pursued by about half a dozen Mexican cavalry. The bee hunter immediately knew him to be the old pirate who had gone to Goliad, and calling to the two hunters, he sallied out of the fort to the relief of the old man, who was hard pressed. I followed close after. Before we reached the spot the Mexicans were close on the heel of the old man, who stopped suddenly, turned short upon his pursuers, discharged his rifle, and one of the enemy fell from his horse.

The chase was renewed, but finding that he would be overtaken and cut to pieces, he now turned again and, to the amazement of the enemy, became the assailant in his turn. He clubbed his gun and dashed among them like a wounded tiger, and they fled like sparrows. By this time we reached the spot and in the ardor of the moment followed some distance before we saw that our retreat to the fort was cut off by another detachment of cavalry. Nothing was to be done but to fight our way through. We were all of the same mind.

"Go ahead!" cried I, and they shouted, "Go ahead, Colonel!" We dashed among them, and a bloody conflict ensued. They were about twenty in number, and they stood their ground. After the fight had continued about five minutes, a detachment was seen issuing from the fort to our relief; and the Mexicans scampered off, leaving eight of their comrades upon the field. But we did not escape unscathed, for both the pirate and the bee hunter were mortally wounded, and I received a saber cut across the forehead. The old man died, without speaking, as soon as we entered the fort. We bore my young friend to his bed, dressed his wounds, and I watched beside him. He lay without complaint or manifesting pain until about midnight, when he spoke, and I asked him if he wanted anything.

"Nothing," he replied, but drew a sigh that seemed to rend his heart as he added, "Poor Kate of Nacogdoches!" His eyes were filled with tears as he continued, "Her words were prophetic, Colonel," and then he sang in a low voice that resembled the sweet notes of his own devoted Kate:

But room cam' the saddle, all bluidyto see,
And hame cam' the steed, but hamenever cam' he.

He spoke no more and, a few minutes after, died. Poor Kate, who will tell this to thee!

March 5: Pop, pop, pop! Bom, bom, bom! throughout the day. No time for memorandums now. Go ahead! Liberty and independence forever!

Travis' Appeal for Aid at the Alamo (24 February 1836)

William Barret Travis and almost two hundred other defenders found themselves surrounded at the Alamo Mission in San Antonio in late February of 1836. Refusing to surrender, they held off the invading armies of Mexican Dictator Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna for almost two weeks.

On March 6, the courageous Texans were overrun and slaughtered by well over 2000 Mexicans. The resulting delay of Santa Anna's eastward movement gave other Texans more time to organize, both politically and militarily, and to ultimately defeat and capture Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto, fought April 21, 1836.

The letter below was written by Travis soon after the Mexicans first appeared in the area around San Antonio. It is often referenced as a supreme example of the virtues of courage and self-sacrifice.

Commandancy of the Alamo -
Bexar, Feb. 24th, 1836 -
To the People of Texas &
all Americans in the world -
Fellow Citizens & Compatriots -
I am besieged, by a thousand
or more of the Mexicans under
Santa Anna - I have sustained
a continual bombardment &
cannonade for 24 hours & have
not lost a man - The enemy
has demanded a surrender at
discretion, otherwise the garrison
are to be put to the sword if
the fort is taken - I have answered
the demand with a cannon
shot, & our flag still waves
proudly from the walls - I
shall never surrender or retreat.
Then, I call on you in the
name of Liberty, of patriotism &
of everything dear to the American
Character, to come to our aid

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Then, I call on you in the
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of everything dear to the American
character, to come to our aid

with all dispatch - The enemy is
receiving reinforcements daily &
with no doubt increase to three or
four thousand in four or five days.
If this call is neglected, I am deter-
mined to sustain myself as long as
possible & die like a soldier
who never forgets what is due to
his own honor & that of his
country -

Victory or Death

William Barret Travis
Lt. Col. Comdt.

P. S. The Lord is on our side.
When the enemy appeared in sight
we had not three bushels of corn.
We have since found in deserted
houses 80 or 90 bushels & got into
the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves.

Travis

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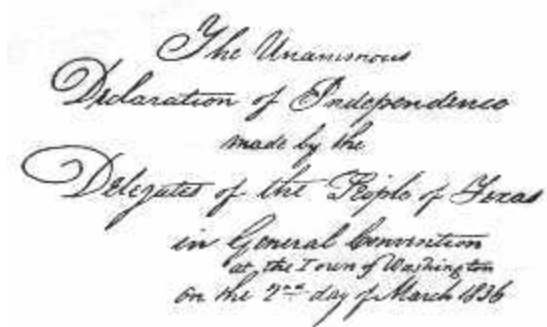
The Texas Declaration of Independence (March 2, 1836)

The Texas Declaration of Independence was produced, literally, overnight. Its urgency was paramount, because while it was being prepared, the Alamo in San Antonio was under seige by Santa Anna's army of Mexico.

Immediately upon the assemblage of the Convention of 1836 on March 1, a committee of five of its delegates were appointed to draft the document. The committee, consisting of George C. Childress, Edward Conrad, James Gaines, Bailey Hardeman, and Collin McKinney, prepared the declaration in record time. It was briefly reviewed, then adopted by the delegates of the convention the following day.

As seen from the transcription below, the document parallels somewhat that of the United States, signed almost sixty years earlier. It contains statements on the function and responsibility of government, followed by a list of grievances. Finally, it concludes by declaring Texas a free and independent republic.

The full text of the document is as follows:



*The Unanimous
Declaration of Independence
made by the
Delegates of the People of Texas
in General Convention
at the Town of Washington
on the 2^d day of March 1836*

*The Unanimous
Declaration of Independence
made by the
Delegates of the People of Texas
in General Convention
at the town of Washington
on the 2nd day of March 1836.*

When a government has ceased to protect the lives, liberty and property of the people, from whom its legitimate powers are derived, and for the advancement of whose happiness it was instituted, and so far from being a guarantee for the enjoyment of those inestimable and inalienable rights, becomes an instrument in the hands of evil rulers for their oppression.

When the Federal Republican Constitution of their country, which they have sworn to support, no longer has a substantial existence, and the whole nature of their government has been forcibly changed, without their consent, from a restricted

federative republic, composed of sovereign states, to a consolidated central military despotism, in which every interest is disregarded but that of the army and the priesthood, both the eternal enemies of civil liberty, the everready minions of power, and the usual instruments of tyrants.

When, long after the spirit of the constitution has departed, moderation is at length so far lost by those in power, that even the semblance of freedom is removed, and the forms themselves of the constitution discontinued, and so far from their petitions and remonstrances being regarded, the agents who bear them are thrown into dungeons, and mercenary armies sent forth to force a new government upon them at the point of the bayonet.

When, in consequence of such acts of malfeasance and abdication on the part of the government, anarchy prevails, and civil society is dissolved into its original elements. In such a crisis, the first law of nature, the right of self-preservation, the inherent and inalienable rights of the people to appeal to first principles, and take their political affairs into their own hands in extreme cases, enjoins it as a right towards themselves, and a sacred obligation to their posterity, to abolish such government, and create another in its stead, calculated to rescue them from impending dangers, and to secure their future welfare and happiness.

Nations, as well as individuals, are amenable for their acts to the public opinion of mankind. A statement of a part of our grievances is therefore submitted to an impartial world, in justification of the hazardous but unavoidable step now taken, of severing our political connection with the Mexican people, and assuming an independent attitude among the nations of the earth.

The Mexican government, by its colonization laws, invited and induced the Anglo-American population of Texas to colonize its wilderness under the pledged faith of a written constitution, that they should continue to enjoy that constitutional liberty and republican government to which they had been habituated in the land of their birth, the United States of America.

In this expectation they have been cruelly disappointed, inasmuch as the Mexican nation has acquiesced in the late changes made in the government by General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, who having overturned the constitution of his country, now offers us the cruel alternative, either to abandon our homes, acquired by so many privations, or submit to the most intolerable of all tyranny, the combined despotism of the sword and the priesthood.

It has sacrificed our welfare to the state of Coahuila, by which our interests have been continually depressed through a jealous and partial course of legislation, carried on

at a far distant seat of government, by a hostile majority, in an unknown tongue, and this too, notwithstanding we have petitioned in the humblest terms for the establishment of a separate state government, and have, in accordance with the provisions of the national constitution, presented to the general Congress a republican constitution, which was, without just cause, contemptuously rejected.

It incarcerated in a dungeon, for a long time, one of our citizens, for no other cause but a zealous endeavor to procure the acceptance of our constitution, and the establishment of a state government.

It has failed and refused to secure, on a firm basis, the right of trial by jury, that palladium of civil liberty, and only safe guarantee for the life, liberty, and property of the citizen.

It has failed to establish any public system of education, although possessed of almost boundless resources, (the public domain,) and although it is an axiom in political science, that unless a people are educated and enlightened, it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty, or the capacity for self government.

It has suffered the military commandants, stationed among us, to exercise arbitrary acts of oppression and tyranny, thus trampling upon the most sacred rights of the citizens, and rendering the military superior to the civil power.

It has dissolved, by force of arms, the state Congress of Coahuila and Texas, and obliged our representatives to fly for their lives from the seat of government, thus depriving us of the fundamental political right of representation.

It has demanded the surrender of a number of our citizens, and ordered military detachments to seize and carry them into the Interior for trial, in contempt of the civil authorities, and in defiance of the laws and the constitution.

It has made piratical attacks upon our commerce, by commissioning foreign desperadoes, and authorizing them to seize our vessels, and convey the property of our citizens to far distant ports for confiscation.

It denies us the right of worshipping the Almighty according to the dictates of our own conscience, by the support of a national religion, calculated to promote the temporal interest of its human functionaries, rather than the glory of the true and living God.

It has demanded us to deliver up our arms, which are essential to our defence, the rightful property of freemen, and formidable only to tyrannical governments.

It has invaded our country both by sea and by land, with intent to lay waste our territory, and drive us from our homes; and has now a large mercenary army advancing, to carry on against us a war of extermination.

It has, through its emissaries, incited the merciless savage, with the tomahawk and scalping knife, to massacre the inhabitants of our defenseless frontiers.

It hath been, during the whole time of our connection with it, the contemptible sport and victim of successive military revolutions, and hath continually exhibited every characteristic of a weak, corrupt, and tyrannical government.

These, and other grievances, were patiently borne by the people of Texas, untill they reached that point at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue. We then took up arms in defence of the national constitution. We appealed to our Mexican brethren for assistance. Our appeal has been made in vain. Though months have elapsed, no sympathetic response has yet been heard from the Interior. We are, therefore, forced to the melancholy conclusion, that the Mexican people have acquiesced in the destruction of their liberty, and the substitution therfor of a military government; that they are unfit to be free, and incapable of self government.

The necessity of self-preservation, therefore, now decrees our eternal political separation.

We, therefore, the delegates with plenary powers of the people of Texas, in solemn convention assembled, appealing to a candid world for the necessities of our condition, do hereby resolve and declare, that our political connection with the Mexican nation has forever ended, and that the people of Texas do now constitute a free, Sovereign, and independent republic, and are fully invested with all the rights and attributes which properly belong to independent nations; and, conscious of the rectitude of our intentions, we fearlessly and confidently commit the issue to the decision of the Supreme arbiter of the destinies of nations.

Richard Ellis, President
of the Convention & Delegate
from Red River

Charles B. Stewart
Tho. Barnett

Odessa Waller
Asa Brigham

Richard Ellis, President
of the Convention and Delegate
from Red River.

Charles B. Stewart
Tho. Barnett

James Collinsworth
Edwin Waller
Asa Brigham

John S. D. Byrom
Francis Ruis
J. Antonio Navarro

Geo. C. Childress
Bailey Hardeman
Rob. Potter

John S. D. Byrom
Francis Ruis
J. Antonio Navarro

Geo. C. Childress
Bailey Hardeman
Rob. Potter

<i>Jesse B. Badgett</i>	<i>Thomas Jefferson Rusk</i>
<i>Wm D. Lacy</i>	<i>Chas. S. Taylor</i>
<i>William Meniffee</i>	<i>John S. Roberts</i>
<i>Jn. Fisher</i>	<i>Robert Hamilton</i>
<i>Matthew Caldwell</i>	<i>Collin McKinney</i>
<i>William Motley</i>	<i>Albert H. Latimer</i>
<i>Lorenzo de Zavala</i>	<i>James Power</i>
<i>Stephen H. Everett</i>	<i>Sam Houston</i>
<i>George W. Smyth</i>	<i>David Thomas</i>
<i>Elijah Stapp</i>	<i>Edwd. Conrad</i>
<i>Claiborne West</i>	<i>Martin Parmer</i>
<i>Wm. B. Scates</i>	<i>Edwin O. Legrand</i>
<i>M. B. Menard</i>	<i>Stephen W. Blount</i>
<i>A. B. Hardin</i>	<i>Jms. Gaines</i>
<i>J. W. Burton</i>	<i>Wm. Clark, Jr.</i>
<i>Thos. J. Gazley</i>	<i>Sydney O. Pennington</i>
<i>R. M. Coleman</i>	<i>Wm. Carrol Crawford</i>
<i>Sterling C. Robertson</i>	<i>Jno. Turner</i>

Benj. Briggs Goodrich
G. W. Barnett
James G. Swisher
Jesse Grimes
S. Rhoads Fisher
John W. Moore
John W. Bower
Saml. A. Maverick (from Bejar)
Sam P. Carson
A. Briscoe
J. B. Woods
H. S. Kimble, Secretary