The Lone Star State

Lesson 1: Texas Becomes a State

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How do governments change?

Terms to Know
acquire  to obtain; to get
Manifest Destiny  the belief popular in the United States in the 1800s that the country must expand its boundaries to the Pacific Ocean
joint resolution  a statement passed by both houses of a legislature that has the force of law
ratify  to approve formally

Where in the world?
The Lone Star State

Lesson 1: Texas Becomes a State, continued

Texas Requests Annexation

Guiding Question What was the United States’s official reaction to the Treaty of 1844?

In September 1836, Texans voted to join the United States. Sam Houston, who had just won the election for president of Texas, favored the idea and worked toward that goal. However, U.S. president Martin Van Buren, who took office in 1837, did not approve of annexation for several reasons. He was concerned that it would anger Mexico and start a war. Slavery was another reason. If the United States acquired, or obtained, Texas, it would increase the number of slave states. The antislavery movement made the annexing of Texas controversial. When Mirabeau Lamar followed Houston as Texas president, he did not work for annexation and he had no interest in it. He wanted Texas to be independent.

When Houston took office for his second term, he again pushed for annexation. U.S. president John Tyler favored it, too. In April 1844, the United States and Texas signed a treaty of annexation. Under the treaty, Texas would join the United States as a territory. The United States would pay off all the republic’s debts. In return, Texas would give up all claims to its public lands.

Some Texans were disappointed with the treaty’s terms. They argued that Texas should keep its public lands because land sales were an important source of revenue. Others were unhappy that Texas was entering the Union only as a territory and not as a state. However, most Texans favored the treaty.

The U.S. Senate needed to approve the treaty, however. The Senate rejected it by a vote of 35 to 16. Some senators opposed the treaty because Texas allowed slavery. At that time, the Senate was equally divided between slave and non-slave states. Bringing Texas into the Union as a slave state would give the slave states an advantage. Other senators worried that annexation would cause Mexico to declare war, as it had threatened to do in the past. At the same time, there was growing support for expansion of the United States. As a result, the annexation of Texas became a major issue in the upcoming presidential election.

Manifest Destiny and Texas

Guiding Question How did the American belief in Manifest Destiny influence policies related to Texas?

Many Americans in the mid-1800s believed that it was the destiny of the United States to expand from coast to coast. In 1845 newspaper editor John O’Sullivan called this belief “Manifest Destiny.”
Lesson 1: Texas Becomes a State, continued

In the U.S. presidential election of 1844, Henry Clay was the Whig Party candidate. Clay was against the annexation of Texas. He feared that it would cause the country to split over slavery. Many people expected the Democrats to choose former president Martin Van Buren to run against Clay. However, Van Buren also opposed Texas annexation. Most Democrats favored Manifest Destiny. As a result, the Democrats chose James K. Polk as their candidate. Polk and his supporters wanted the United States to acquire Texas. With Polk in favor of annexing Texas and Clay against it, the American people had a clear choice.

Annexation also concerned other nations. For example, British leaders were concerned about the growing power of the United States. They also thought they could get better trade terms with the Republic of Texas than they could if Texas became a U.S. state.

Mexico was also against annexation. Mexico had never recognized Texas's independence. The two countries argued over borders and land claims. Also, Mexico held a vast territory west of Texas. If the United States owned Texas, it would border these Mexican lands. That worried Mexican leaders.

Texas Annexed in 1845

Guiding Question How did the joint resolution of 1845 differ from the Treaty of 1844?

Polk won the 1844 election. Even before he took office, President Tyler asked Congress to reconsider annexation. Tyler suggested that congressional leaders introduce a joint resolution annexing Texas. A joint resolution is a statement passed by both houses of Congress that has the force of a law. A resolution needs only a majority of votes in each house to pass. A treaty must be ratified, or formally approved, by two-thirds of the Senate.

In February 1845, Congress passed the joint resolution. Its terms were more favorable to Texas than those of the 1844 treaty. Texas was admitted as a state and it was allowed to keep its public lands.

Alarmed by the resolution, the British convinced Mexico to offer to recognize Texas as a nation if Texas agreed not to join the United States. Anson Jones, the president of Texas, called a special session of the Texas congress to consider the offers from the United States and from Mexico. The congress voted for annexation. A special convention agreed with the congress's decision and wrote a state constitution. On October 13, Texans voted for annexation and ratified the state constitution. On February 19, 1846, Texas became the twenty-eighth U.S. state.
Lesson 1: Texas Becomes a State, continued

The state's Constitution of 1845 was very easy to understand. It built upon the Constitution of 1836 and was modeled on other state constitutions, in particular, Louisiana's. It provided for a governor to be elected for a two-year term. It limited the number of terms a person could serve in that office. It created a legislature with two houses, a House of Representatives and a Senate. The constitution also created a supreme court and district and county courts.

The Texas Constitution of 1845 had some provisions that were unusual for the time. It protected homesteads from forced sale to pay off debts. It required married men to get their wives' consent before selling or trading a homestead. It recognized married women's right to separate ownership of property they had before marriage or obtained afterward. The state constitution also stressed the importance of education by including provisions for the support and upkeep of public schools.

Writing

Check for Understanding

1. **Expository** Why did Britain and Mexico work against the annexation of Texas?

2. **Expository** How did the state constitution protect women's property rights?