

## HISTORY INTERACTIVE #2: The Texas Convention of 1836

In early March 1836, a group of Texans – officially Mexican citizens – met in the small Texas town of Washington-on-the-Brazos and declared their independence from Mexico. They charged the Mexican government with oppression and failing to protect their life, liberty, and property. In their view, Mexico sought to enslave them, the true defenders of Texas liberty.

Fifty-nine people attended the convention, but the declaration was principally the product of George C. Childress, a Nashville lawyer who had been in Texas for a little over a year, and who had apparently shown up at the convention with the declaration already prepared. Of the 59 delegates representing the Mexican province of Coahuila y Tejas, only two, José Antonio Navarro and his uncle José Francisco Ruiz, were native Texans. Only 10 delegates had been in Texas for more than six years; 15 had arrived within the previous year. The man elected Secretary of State of the Texas Republic had been a citizen for about a week.

At the time of the Texas Revolution, Anglo Texans perceived themselves as culturally and intellectually superior to others. Childress summed up the prevailing Anglo attitude at the time when he wrote that Mexicans were “a semi-civilized set, unfit to be free and incapable of self-government.” Regarding Black people, there was a range of views:

- Some Anglos, such as Stephen F. Austin, conceded that slavery was a moral evil, but the only realistic option for developing the vast prairies of Texas, and that Black people were biologically and culturally inferior, needing White protection and guidance. This could be considered the moderate position of the time.
- The more extreme racist position held that slavery was a positive good, a civilizing school for “savage” African. Many famous Texans, such as James Bowie and his brothers, held these views, and hateful views of Texas Indigenous people as well. Some Anglo Texans not only considered mob violence against Indians justified, but created a self-defense mythology that reinforced the legitimacy of mob violence for future generations.
- On the other end of the spectrum were Texans with anti-slavery views. These included some Mexicans and Tejanos; many German immigrants in the Hill Country; and abolitionists. But these views were not represented at the Convention of 1836.

The resulting constitutional document codified slavery into the new nation’s basic law. It prohibited free Black people from staying in Texas or becoming citizens of the new republic without an act of the Texas congress. The only people who could become citizens of the new republic were Whites or Tejanos who were not Black or Indian. Slavery continued to grow after 1836, and skyrocketed after joined the United States in 1845. By 1860 slavery was firmly entrenched in Texas and formed the bedrock of society.

Discuss the convention in your group. How might the convention have turned out differently?