LAND AND FREEDOM: THE IRISH IN THE TEXAS REVOLUTION

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(Resumen)

Los inmigrantes irlandeses jugaron un papel interesante en la Revolución tejana de 1836. Su experiencia puede sugerir que el énfasis que la retórica contemporánea otorga al conflicto cultural, que también se ha utilizado para justificar la guerra, no fuera el elemento decisivo en la revolución. Muchos irlandeses vinieron a Tejas entre 1829 y 1834 para aprovechar de una oportunidad única y atractiva: el gobierno mejicano ofreció extensas concesiones de terreno a empresarios, quienes, a su vez, alistaron a colonizadores irlandeses para poblar las nuevas comunidades rancheras. Los colonizadores vinieron en búsqueda de libertad y fortuna, pero fueron obligados a participar en una guerra para defenderlas. Los eventos dramáticos de la época anterior a la revolución forzaron a todos los vecinos de Tejas, los anglo-americanos, los tejanos y los irlandeses, a declarar su apoyo a favor de uno de los dos bandos del conflicto, los centralistas o los federalistas, y luego por la República de Tejas o Méjico.

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Many peoples assign themselves historic roles and not a few claim a historic mission as God's chosen people as the defenders of the true faith, members of a superior culture or beneficiaries of a manifest destiny. At the birth of a republic, fashioned by bitter struggle, massacre and military victory, a triumphalist rhetoric is to be expected. What is more unexpected and intriguing is the language and outlook of the participants in the Texas Revolution—a language of freedom that incorporated a variety of meanings and identities.

Traditionally, the story of the Texas Revolution in 1836 has been understood in terms of the freedom of Anglo-American settlers in a war of independence against a despotic Mexican government. Through its most famous incident, the siege of the Alamo, celebrated in numerous books and films, the Texas Revolution has become a symbol of courage and sacrifice in the cause of aspiring nationhood.[1] "Ever since Texas unfurled the banner of freedom and commenced a warfare for 'Liberty or Death' our hearts have been enlisted in her behalf," wrote Daniel W. Cloud, a young Kentucky lawyer who a few months later was to become one of the defenders of the Alamo.[2]

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1. See Don Graham, "Remembering the Alamo: The Story of the Texas Revolution in Popular Culture," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 89 (July 1985): 35-66, and Jeff Long, *Duel of Eagles: The Mexican and US Fight for the Alamo* (New York: Morrow 1990).
2. Cloud, letter to his brother in Kentucky, 26 December 1835, Library of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas at the Alamo, New Nachitoches, Louisiana

Cloud's high-flown language is representative of the spirit of idealism and heroism in which the events of 1836 have been mostly portrayed (Lord). Yet in truth the Revolution started as a civil war between centralists and federalists within Mexico and ended as a war of independence from Mexico by settlers in Texas (Weber, *Mexican Frontier* 242-72). The main participants in this struggle, Anglo-Americans, Tejanos (Mexican-Texans) and Irish settlers, all employed the language of freedom but their meanings varied according to circumstance and cultural values.[3]

The Anglo-American settlers wanted to preserve the freedom of virtual self-government that was allowed with the generous provision of land by the Mexican government. The Tejanos also wished to preserve freedom from interference by the central government of Mexico but were also concerned about the increasing Americanization of Texas that made them "foreigners in their own land" (Weber, *Myth* 146). The Irish who came on the promise of great tracts of land set in an earthly paradise, found to their consternation, that they were obligated to defend "their" property by force of arms. The young republic of Mexico that won its independence from Spain in 1821 was vulnerable to the threat of American expansion following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The neighbouring Mexican province of Coahuila y Texas was a large, fertile territory coveted by the United States. Indeed, several attempts had been made to purchase Texas but the Mexican government preferred to retain it and populate the country with settlers as a buffer against potential American expansion (Weber, *Mexican Frontier* 158-78). Inevitably this included Americans who were attracted by the prospect of large tracts of land and, in some cases, by the opportunity to escape from criminal charges in the United States. Thus one authority suggests a high proportion of debtors and malefactors among the adventurers who crossed the border during the heady atmosphere of "Texas fever" (Nackman 441-55).

Daniel W. Cloud was one such adventurer who revealed his motives in two remarkable letters:

> Our Brothers of Texas were invited by the Mexican government while republican in its form, to come and settle. They have endured all the privations and suffering incident to the settlement of the frontier country and have surrounded themselves with all the comforts and conveniences of life. Now the Mexicans with unblushing effrontery call on them to submit to

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(hereafter LDRT).

3. Anglo-Americans or Anglos may be generally defined as white, English-speaking people but there were a number of other Europeans (Irish, Germans and Poles, for instance) who fought on the Texan side. Mexicans may include people from Mexico or of Mexican descent, and Tejanos may be understood as Mexican residents of Texas. Mestizos may be known as people of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry. The Irish include those born in Ireland who arrived in Texas via the United States and those who came directly from Ireland.

> monarchial, tyrannical despotism at the bare mention of which every true hearted son of Kentucky feels an instinctive horror followed by firm and steady glow of virtuous indignation. The cause of philanthropy, of humanity, of liberty and human happiness throughout the world calls loudly on every man who can aid Texas.[4]

The legitimacy of rebellion by Anglo-American settlers against the Mexican government was sanctioned by the overthrow of the Republic and the liberal constitution of 1824 by Santa Anna, the President of Mexico. By invoking the precedent of earlier rebellions, Cloud gave credence to a sense of historic mission that explained the ultimate triumph of the Anglo-Americans in Texas.

> Inheriting the old Saxon spirit of 1640 in England [the Parliamentary revolt against King Charles I], 1776 in America [the Declaration of Independence from the Britain of George III], the inhabitants of Texas throw off the chains of Santa Anna, assert their independence, assume a national sovereignty, and send a corps of diplomatic agents to the parent state of Washington.[5]

Thus, the ultimate political goal of belonging to the United States instead of to Mexico was clearly stated. The ultimate personal goal of acquiring untold wealth was at least implicit beneath the following peroration:

> If we succeed the country is ours: it is immense in extent and fertile in its soil and will amply reward our toils. If we fail, death in the cause of liberty and humanity is not cause for shuddering. Our rifles are by our sides and choice guns they are, we know what awaits us and are prepared to meet it.[6]

When the guns were fired in earnest during the desperate defence of the Alamo, William Barret Travis, the commander, surrounded by the overwhelming number of Santa Anna's Mexican army and perhaps sensing his place in history sent a message to "the People of Texas and all Americans in the world": "I call on you in the name of liberty, of patriotism and of everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid with all despatch."[7]

Alongside the crusade for freedom and the quest for land (volunteers to the Texan army were promised entitlement to land upon enlistment) it has been commonly asserted there were key issues of cultural conflict between the Anglo-American settlers

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4. Cloud, letter to his brother, 26 December 1835, LDRT.
5. Cloud, letter to a yound friend in Kentucky, Jackson Mississipian, 6 May 1836, printed in the *Russellville Adviser*, Kentucky, LDRT.
6. Cloud, letter to his brother, 26 December 1835, LDRT.
7. William Barrett Travis, Bexar, 24 February 1836, LDRT.

and the Mexicans (Fehrenbach 152-73). It was an official requirement of settlement in Mexico that the Americans should become Catholics and even though Protestant services were not, in practice, prohibited, this was a source of irritation. Also, under Mexican legislation enacted in 1829, slavery was prohibited. This was interpreted by the Americans, who were mostly from the southern states, as an attack on their rights of private property (Lack, "Slavery" 181-202). Different traditions of justice were a further cause of division. Whilst the Mexicans gave their mayors (alcaldes) great discretion and authority in the exercise of justice, Americans were used to a system of trial by jury. Moreover, a major source of grievance was the lack of political autonomy in Texas since the province had been joined to Coahuila in 1824 and was administered by the capital from Saltillo (later Monclova) situated hundreds of miles from the Austin colony centred on Washington on the Brazos river. These grievances had largely been settled by legislation in 1834 but they became incorporated into a broader racial antipathy once hostilities began in the following year.

Historians sympathetic to the Mexican position have stressed that the deep hostility to the Mexican people was rooted in an historic suspicion of Catholics by the Protestant European migrants to America. What has been described as "the black legend" was a cocktail of prejudice composed of memories of the Spanish Inquisition, the Spanish Armada and the cruel oppression of the "conquistadores" in South America. The perceived negative traits of Spanish character were applied to the Mexicans as heirs of the Spanish empire. Furthermore, the racial mix of Spanish and Indian (mestizo) that applied to a substantial part of the Mexican population was regarded as the mark of an inferior people (Weber, *Myth* 153-67). Thus the Hispanic cultural legacy was deplored and the character of the Mexican people despised. Yet it seems that with the Anglo-American and Mexican settlements being geographically separated, the emphasis on cultural differences became as much a product of the heightened tensions of the war as its cause.

Understandably, the Tejanos were divided in their loyalties. Appalled by the destruction of the constitution and by Santa Anna's use of force, the empresario Lorenzo de Zavala spoke for a number of leading Mexican "traitors," such as José Antonio Navarro and Juan Seguin, who defended the right of Texans to rebel against the central government:

> The fundamental compact having been dissolved, and all the guarantees of the civil and political rights of citizens having been destroyed, it is incontestable that all the states of the confederation are left at liberty to net for themselves, and to provide for their security and preservation as circumstances may require.[8]

8. *Telegraph and Texas Register*, 26 October 1835.

Yet as they were outnumbered by the Anglo-Americans and increasingly segregated geographically within Texas, many Tejanos felt their way of life was threatened and certainly did not support the dismembering of their country by means of an independent Texas. By 1835, following the pioneering settlement by Stephen F. Austin, some 20,000 Anglo-Americans had arrived in Texas, exceeding the native Mexicans by a ratio of ten to one.

The mistake the Mexican government made was to allow an overwhelming American presence in Anglo-Texas between the Sabine and the San Antonio Rivers. The generous provision of land grants and a seven-year period free of taxes or customs duties represented a form of benign neglect of the Anglo-American colonists. When, in 1830, that period was up and tighter rules were introduced in an attempt to stop illegal immigration from the United States, the new policy provoked resistance from the colonists who feared the imposition of arbitrary controls on their way of life. In truth, the Anglo-American settlers were content to fly the Mexican flag and to become Mexican citizens provided they could retain the freedom of a self-governing commonwealth. But when Mexican politics dissolved into anarchy, only to be replaced in turn by military rule, the centralists gained the upper hand, and army garrisons were sent north from Mexico to hold the province of Texas.

From the Mexican standpoint, the policy of inviting Americans to settle as a buffer against the aggression of the United States and to prevent the depredations of marauding Indians had backfired. The colonists were dependent on trade with America to sustain their communities and on American markets to sell their cotton grown in a plantation economy. They also looked to the United States for moral support and for example in matters of political rights. The Mexican expectation of loyalty in return for land grants and exemption from taxation was misplaced.

The third distinctive people caught up in the conflict were the Irish settlers. Their experience may suggest that the emphasis on cultural conflict that is certainly present in the contemporary rhetoric, and has been picked up subsequently by historians to justify the war, may not have been the crucial dividing factor in the Texas Revolution.

How had the Irish come to be in Texas in the 1830s? It was primarily a matter of land and on such a scale that it almost represented a unique opportunity in the nineteenth-century. If ever there looked to be a crock of gold at the end of the rainbow it was the province of Texas in newly-independent Mexico. To small tenant farmers in Ireland, struggling to eke out an existence and fearful of being able to pass on leases to their families, the prospect of owning vast tracts of land in the New World must have seemed like the dream of El Dorado. Contemporary accounts depict Texas as a kind of paradise. The Scotsman, David Edward, was lyrical in its praise:

> The Province of Texas in general, for native beauty, and the lower division in particular for exuberant fecundity, is excelled by no other country I have known. Yea, its spontaneous productions meet the astonished traveller at

> every step in such abundance, as can scarcely be believed by anyone who has not had an opportunity of seeing and judging for himself (41).

Annie Fagan Teal, one of the Irish colonists, on seeing the location of her frontier home on the banks of the San Antonio River for the first time, described it in equally glowing terms: "O, it was Paradise! Such a beautiful country, green grass and trees in mid-winter, horses running and playing over the vast prairies, deer grazing quietly or peeping curiously through the bushes, while birds were so numerous, the very air seemed alive with them" (Allen 327). The Committee on Foreign Relations reported to the Mexican government on the province of Texas that it was "so fertile, of such benign climate, so rich in metals and natural resources that when descriptions of it by geographers were read, instantly one came to believe that they were talking of paradise" (Benson 225).

If it were a paradise, it was nevertheless short of people. After a bloody war of independence in 1821, the young republic of Mexico inherited an enormous territory from imperial Spain, stretching from Oregon to Guatemala, yet possessed only a population of 6.2 million. The hemorrhage of war had severely drained the Mexican workforce and the numbers of men capable of bearing arms. The recruitment of foreign migrants who could bring their skills, enterprise and capital would help to restore the country and populate the northern territories. The neighbouring United States of America, where the population had more than doubled from 4 to 9.6 million in the period 1790 to 1820, offered a successful model of immigration and economic growth (Weber, *Mexican Frontier* 159).

The most vulnerable of Mexico's northern states was Coahuila y Texas. Following the decline of the Spanish missions, defense was needed from the depredations of Lipan Apache and Comanche Indians, but anxiety also existed among Mexican officials about the potential expansion of the United States into Mexican territory. With the acquisition of Louisiana by America in 1803, Texas acted as a buffer against further United States aggression. Yet Anglo-Americans were an obvious source of local migrants who had indeed already been crossing into eastern Texas from Louisiana and were outnumbering the Mexican population. As a Spanish citizen, Moses Austin contracted the settlement of three hundred Catholic families from Louisiana into 200,000 acres of land near the Colorado River which his son, Stephen F. Austin, was able to inherit and complete.

While the Mexican government wanted to exercise control of land grants and settlement to strengthen defense and to further trade, local officials connived at illegal immigration from land squatters or worse. A reason for the American desire to acquire Texas was that it was fast becoming a place of escape for debtors, desperadoes, malefactors and runaway slaves from the southern states. A reason for the Mexican government to look to European migrants to populate Texas was to establish a safeguard against further Americanization of the province. From a Mexican perspective, the Irish, among all European peoples, were identified as the most desirable settlers. First they were loyal Catholics, having suffered cruel persecutions

in defense of their faith. Second, they were regarded as having outstanding moral virtues and were known to be highly industrious. Third, they were not friendly to England or to the United States, so that in the case of war, Mexico could rely on brave Irish soldiers, famous for their military valour in fighting for imperial Spain, to defend its borders (McGurk 36-62). Finally, the fact that Ireland was not a colonial power, and therefore unlikely to claim Mexican territory through the presence of Irish settlers, provided a further attraction.

In seeking to populate Texas, the Mexican government was anxious to control migration and settlement. The policy of providing land grants to "empresarios" or agents, who could attempt to colonise territory in return for their own land, enabled the government to lay down conditions designed to serve the national interest. Between 1825 and 1832 some twenty-four empresario contracts, potentially involving 8,000 families, were negotiated and most were signed by Anglo-Americans. The implementation of colonization was left to the Mexican states. A law of 1825 in Coahuila y Texas allowed each head of family to obtain a square league or "sitio" of grazing land (4,428 acres), and a "labo" of farming land (177 acres). This land was to be made available at small fees, with no payments due until the fourth year of a six-year period. Additional land could be obtained by foreigners marrying Mexican women. While acting as agents to the Mexican government, empresarios recruited colonists, allocated lands amongst them and enforced the conditions of the contract. In return, they could expect to receive up to five sitios of grazing land and five labores of farming land for each hundred families they settled.

Following the loss of life and disenchantment among the would-be colonists, about one hundred and fifty Irish families finally settled in the Mexican province of Coahuila y Texas in the period 1829 to 1834.[9] They were brought to Texas on the promise of large land grants from the Mexican government. In 1829 the Irish empresarios, John McMullen and James McGloin, recruited newly arrived Irish migrants from New York, Kentucky and New Orleans, and after experiencing some frustrating delays over their land grants, established a colony which they called San Patricio de Hibernia. It was an old Spanish settlement located in the Nueces river valley that had been destroyed by Indians. By 1835, with the arrival of 85 Irish and Mexican families and the settlement of Americans, who were originally intended for other colonies, San Patricio had grown into a prosperous settlement at the center of rich stock-grazing lands ideal for cattle ranching.[10] In 1834 fellow Irish empresarios, James Power and James Hewetson, met the terms of their contract of 1828 with the

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9. Sixty land grants were issued to Irish-born settlers under the McMullen and McGloin contract and eighty five were issued to Irish-born settlers under the Power-Hewetson contract. The corresponding figures for Mexican settlers were 23 and 51. General Land Office, Austin, Texas.

10. J. McMullen, letter to M. B. Lamar, 1836, Lamar Papers, vol. 1, no. 523, Texas State Archives, Austin.

Mexican government by recruiting most of their colonists directly from Ireland to settle in the old Spanish mission of Refugio, situated twelve miles inland from the port of El Copano on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The Irish migrants who settled in Refugio had experienced severe hardship and tragedy: many had died from cholera en route from New Orleans, and almost all had suffered from shipwreck and shortage of water on St Joseph's Island before they were able to land in Texas. Rosalie Hart Priour recalled a childhood memory of the family's plight after the death of her father on their arrival in Texas:

> Oh! The horror of our situation. My dear good mother must have been a woman of iron nerve to bear up against such trouble, as she had to go through. We were in a strange country, thousands of miles from our friends and relations, on a sand beach exposed to the burning heat of summer or drenched by rain through the day and at night surrounded by wild animals, not knowing the minute we would be drowned. Then there were thousands of naked savages even more to be dreaded than wild beasts, and a company of Mexican soldiers on guard for the purpose of preventing us from moving from that place under two weeks time, for fear we would spread the cholera (26).

A tough pioneering spirit was also essential in facing the hazards of building up a community from a few primitive huts that were built around the Spanish mission while threatened by Indians in what appeared to be decidedly hostile territory.

Having just acquired their land grants from the Mexican government and settled into pioneer communities alongside Mexican neighbours, the Irish colonists in 1835-36 were soon faced with the terrible dilemma of which side to support in the civil war between centralists and federalists which turned then into a war of independence for the province of Texas. The Irish enjoyed friendly relations with Mexican settlers in San Patricio. They cooperated in sharing the town government, worshipped at the same Catholic church, despite some differences of practice, and bonded by commonly enduring the hardships of pioneer life. Indeed, the Mexicans advised them about the planting of crops, how to predict the weather, and how to singe the cactus for cattle to eat. In the long run, the Mexicans passed on their local knowledge and skills to enable the Irish to become successful ranchers in south Texas (Hebert 359-61). So not surprisingly, the initial allegiance of the San Patricio Irish was to the Mexican government which had granted them their land and to which they had sworn an oath of loyalty as Mexican citizens. In October 1835, Philip Dimmitt, the commandant at Goliad, reported with dismay that "the people of St. Patricio have joined the military

at the Nueces."[11] In November 1835, the Mexican General Cos, described them as "los fieles Yrlandeses vecinos de San Patricio."[12]

All this was literally blown apart and the Irish forced into rebellion by the wanton destruction of lives at the Alamo and at Goliad by Santa Anna's and General Urrea's troops in March 1836. The property of the Irish settlers was burnt down and their communities at San Patricio and Refugio were destroyed. Uncomfortably situated in the war zone and close to the vital port of supply of El Copano, both communities suffered devastation in the fighting between the Texan and Mexican armies. The property of the Irish settlers was destroyed, their herds of cattle driven off the land, and their families were forced to evacuate their homes.

While the San Patricio Irish were more likely to fight alongside the Mexicans in the early stages of the war, the Refugio Irish enlisted in the Texan armies and suffered loss of life at the battle of Refugio and were among the massacred prisoners at Goliad (Lack 157-59). Other Irishmen fell at the famous siege of the Alamo in March 1836 and participated in the battle of San Jacinto in April 1836 which resulted in the Texan victory.

It was not until the summer of 1837 that many of the Irish colonists who had survived cholera, shipwreck, and the loss of homes and property in the Texas Revolution were able to return to their land and begin to re-build their communities. Yet they remained vulnerable to further attacks while the independence of Texas was not recognized by Mexico until the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The border between Texas and Mexico had continued to be a matter of dispute up to that time, which in turn made the people of San Patricio especially vulnerable as the Mexican government regarded the Nueces River, not the Rio Grande, as the boundary between Tamaulipas and the rebellious Texan republic. The families that held on to their land were able through inter-marriage and extensive purchases to establish substantial ranching empires. Some of these survive until the present day.

Later Irish migrants to Texas, who came in the 1850s to build the railways or to work in the docks in Houston, did not have either the opportunities or have to face the hazards of the pioneer settlers. The opportunity to found a ranching empire from free grants of land was consigned to the period 1829 to 1835. After that time it was only open to those with the capital to invest in buying land.

The personal loss suffered by the Power family during the war was recorded by Martin Power, nephew of James Power in 1837:

> I never have sold one dollars worth [of property] since but every article of them have been plundered and taken away by the Mexicans last spring when the[y] came on with the intension of exterminating us or compelling us to

11. P. Dimmitt, letter to Stephen F. Austin, 17 and 19 October 1835, in Jenkins 146.
12. Martín Perfecto de Cos, letter to José María Turnel, 2 November 1835, in Jenkins 165-67, 299.

> submit to their new formed despotic Government. We being compelled from the perimtory demand made to take one side or the other in case of not complying forfiture of our property; we being patriots we clung to the Republican Party and cleared the country of the desolation that threatened on every quarter around us. In so doing I was compeled to abandon every article that was movable [except] the most servicable of my clothes as they came on surprise. I will at a future period give you all a long verbal history of the present Revolution which I participated in some of the victories won on our side. Thomas O'Connor & Walter Lambert [original Irish colonists] have shared in one of the greatest victories we can read of in the annals of war both have proved themselves worthy the donation our infant Republican Government is generous enough to bestow on each individual that participated in the said Battle of San Jacynto which is half a league of land.[13]

The destruction of war made potential enemies of all Mexicans even though many of the Tejanos fought with distinction on the Texan side. After the fighting, "many lost their land grants, and all lost their ideal—The Republic of Texas" (de Léon 137-46). The loyalty of the Irish was transferred to the infant Republic of Texas and those who participated in the war were rewarded with more land from the new government.

The dramatic events of 1835-36 forced the Irish colonists to make a difficult choice and it is clear that they were divided in their loyalties. Some were eager to do battle in the cause of a Texas republic independent of Mexico, while others still clung to the notion of a federal Mexico. In January 1836, less than two months before the siege of the Alamo, General Sam Houston visited Refugio to address a group of troops who were on the point of leaving to attack Matamoros. Although Houston was a popular figure, it took him two speeches to persuade the volunteers at Refugio to delay their expedition south. In the first speech he contrasted the destruction threatened by Santa Anna with the prospect of a free Texas:

> Friends, I believe that soon our foes, headed by Santa Anna, will cross our peaceful prairie in the hope of destroying us. But the thoughts of liberty, justice, religion, the love of wife and child will rouse us once more to heroic deeds and carry us to victory in spite of the enemy's superior numbers. So great are my hopes that I firmly believe next summer I shall see the flag of Texas floating over all the harbors of our coast (Ehrenberg 126).

The mention of harbours was deliberate. The port of El Cópano was the key to the supply of both armies in the conflict and was essential to the survival of the two Irish colonies. Geographically they were located in the key war zone and the Irish settlers

13. M. Power, letter to his parents and brother in Ireland, 2 January 1837, Power Papers, Library of the Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio.

paid a heavy price in loss of life, and in the destruction of their property and livestock during the war. Many families had to flee the advancing Mexican armies to escape with their lives. Irish community leaders, James Power in Refugio and John J. Linn in Victoria, were able to supply vital intelligence of the Mexican movement of troops and offer crucial supplies to the Texan forces. And among the Irish who fought on the Texan side was Power's nephew Thomas O'Connor—at seventeen the youngest of the heroes of the final victory at San Jacinto.

In the period that followed the Texas Revolution the wishes of leading figures like W. H. Wharton and Sam Houston were met when the struggling new republic was annexed to the United States in 1846. The ownership of land became subject to a free market and disputes over legal entitlement continued to be a source of frustration and grievance to the Irish settlers of Refugio. At a public meeting held at Refugio in 1853 a declaration was made in defence of the rights of the original settlers who now felt their lands were threatened:

> Resolved that the colonists of Power and McGloin's colonies, have equal rights and privileges with other citizens of this State, that they are entitled in justice, to those lands which they have held by grants from the Government of Coahuila and Texas, for the last nineteen years, that they nobly and patriotically took up arms, in the glorious struggle for Independence, that they were amongst the foremost to meet the hostile foe, to sign the declaration of Independence, to hoist the flag of the Lone Star over the battlements of old Goliad, and unfurl the banner of freedom to the breeze and bid defiance to the despotic acts of an usurping Government; that they stood to Texas and for interests in the hour of peril; that from the capture of Goliad, by the gallant Collingsworth, to the defeat of the butcher Santa Anna, on the memorable plains of San Jacinto, by our veteran Chief Sam Houston, that the colonists of Power and McGloin, were well represented, by their sons who stood firm to the cause of that banner which they were among the first to unfurl to freedom's breeze.[14]

Thus the Irish colonists had adopted the language of freedom previously employed by the Anglo-American settlers in Texas. But it was a language directed against freebooting Americans who came to Texas after the Revolution and the successful war between the United States and Mexico in 1846, and challenged the rights of the original settlers who had acquired land under the terms of the empresario grants from the Mexican government.

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14. Public Meeting 10 October 1853, Refugio, Texas, held as a protest by the Power and McGloin colonists with reference to locating land certificates on Colonial titles, Memorial No. 164, 10 October 1852, File Box No. 101, Texas State Library, Archives Division, Austin.

In reviewing the position of the three groups of participants in the Texas Revolution, the Anglo-Americans, the Tejanos, and the Irish, the language of freedom reflected different interests but also had one common thread. The Anglo-Americans wanted freedom to govern their own affairs, freedom of worship as Protestants, a continuation of their freedom from paying taxes or customs dues, and the freedom to enjoy their own rights of property without interference from a despotic and unconstitutional regime. Tejanos also wanted the freedom to govern their own affairs without interference from Mexico City, preferring a federal system which included Texas within Coahuila y Texas in order to preserve the Mexican balance against American encroachment. In addition, some of the Mexicans wanted to preserve the liberal constitution of 1824 and the decree of 1829 which abolished slavery. The Irish came in search of land and wanted above all to protect their newly acquired property whether from Indians, Santa Anna's troops or from the claims of American freebooters buying up land after the Revolution. After the limited possibilities in Ireland, the freedom to live an independent life and the opportunity to make an independent fortune were their guiding principles. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that Anglo-Americans, Tejanos, and Irish were all divided over such issues as peace, a federal Mexico or an independent Texas, and whether or not to fight at some time during the war. Despite the heroic language that the victory of San Jacinto finally endorsed, the pronouncements of political and military leaders consistently carried a desperate call to arms in the face of the invading Mexican army. Only a week before Sam Houston's remarkable victory over Santa Anna, David G. Burnet, President of the Provisional Government, echoing the language of Houston's speech in Refugio, issued this proclamation:

> Fellow citizens, Your country demands your aid—the enemy is pressing upon us—the wives and children of your neighbours are driven from their firesides, and compelled to take shelter in woods and forests while the enemy gathers confidence and audacity from every disaster we encounter. Under these circumstances, equally reproachful to our national character and dangerous to our national existence, too many citizens are lingering in idleness and lethargy, at home, or ingloriously flying before an enemy who we have heretofore affected to despise. Is it possible that the free citizens of Texas, the descendants of the heroes of '76, can take panic at the approach of the paltry minions of a despot, who threatens to desolate our beautiful country?[15]

The consistent thread running through all the events of the Texas Revolution and among all those who took part, was the land. It was the prospect of land generously granted by the Mexican government that brought the settlers in the first place. What was called Texas fever was, in reality, land fever. Without colonists

15. *Texas Telegraph and Register*, 14 April 1826.

settling the land there was no real prospect of developing trade or a likelihood of building ports, as James Power planned, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Also, so many of the leading politicians and merchants were engaged in land speculation that was dependent for success on an independent Texas, linked to the United States, that a recent study identifies speculation in increased land values as the leading factor in causing the war with Mexico.[16] Beyond the hopes and dreams of individuals lay the realpolitick of United States expansion and the frailty of a newly-independent Mexico. Whilst America wanted to annex or buy Texas, the Mexican government desperately wanted to retain its rich, fertile province but lacked the means and sometimes the will to do so. Freedom, like the flag of the Lone Star over the battlements of old Goliad, could blow one way or another, but the land remained a fixture for all to contest. The Revolution and the subsequent war between the United States and Mexico in 1846 appeared to be the political embodiment of America's "manifest destiny." The accompanying rhetoric interpreted the events in terms of racial superiority: "The two races, the Americans distinctively so called, and the Spanish-Americans or Mexicans, are now brought by the war into inseparable contact. No treaties can henceforth dissever them; and the inferior must give way before the superior race" (Montejano 14). Yet, in the long run, the making of Texas was based not so much on the supplanting of one culture by another but rather by their integration. A fusion of American capitalist enterprise and markets with Mexican knowledge and experience of ranching paved the way to unprecedented prosperity within a generation for those settlers who survived the war. As David Montejano has shown in an important sociological study of Texas, the social structure at the time of independence in 1836 and annexation in 1845 consisted of:

> a landed Mexican elite, an ambitious Anglo-mercantile clique, a class of independent but impoverished Mexican rancheros, and an indebted working class of Mexican peones. The new Anglo elite was generally Mexicanized and frequently intermarried or became compadres, "god-relatives," with landowning Mexican families (8).

For the embodiment of the two traditions, there is no more remarkable example than the life of one of the original Power-Hewetson colonists, the Irishman Thomas O'Connor. Born in County Wexford, in 1819, nephew of the empresario James Power, he came with a "family" of domestic servants to Texas in 1834 and received a land

16. See also Andreas V. Reichstein, *Rise of the Lone Star: The Making of Texas*, trans. Jeanne R. Wilson (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1980). Speculation in land values was not confined to the wealthy. A soldier in the war of 1835-36 calculated he made a profit of $1,968.25 on the value of his land and this consideration, rather than patriotism, had been his motivation for fighting: "An Honest Man," *Texas Telegraph and Register*, 6 December 1836.

grant from the Mexican government of 4,428 acres in Willow Creek. He was taught by the Mexicans of the nearby Carlos Ranch to carve saddle trees from the native woods and from the proceeds of his stock he was able to invest in cattle to give him a start in ranching. In 1835 he volunteered in the Texas cause, was a signatory of the Goliad declaration of independence, led the evacuations of San Patricio, Refugio and Victoria and fought at San Jacinto for which he was rewarded with an additional land grant. In building up a substantial ranching empire, something of the "patrón" system was preserved with the mostly Mexican hands being looked after all their lives on the ranch from one generation to the next. At the time of his death in 1887, O'Connor had an estate valued at 4.5 million dollars and was reckoned the largest individual land and cattle owner in Texas: he had acquired more than 500,000 acres and 100,000 cattle.[17]

In a spectacular way, the career of Thomas O'Connor represented what his uncle had promised in Texas—the freedom to make an independent life and an independent fortune. Ranching in South Texas drew on a rich Hispanic culture which the Irish, among others, inherited and which contributed so powerfully to the making of Texas in the generation that followed the American Civil War.

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17. *The Handbook of Victoria County* 89-90; Rose 10. See also Louise O'Connor, *Cryin' for Daylight: Ranching Culture in the Texas Coastal Bend* (Austin: Wexford Publishing Texas, 1989).

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