The Republic of Texas

TERMS & NAMES
Sam Houston, cabinet, John Allen, Augustus Allen, Houston, revenue, promissory note, Felix Huston, Mirabeau B. Lamar

OBJECTIVES
1. Identify the problems faced by the Republic of Texas.
2. Explain Sam Houston’s role in the early days of the Republic of Texas.
3. Analyze the reasons for Texas statehood.
4. Describe the issues surrounding the annexation of Texas.

MAIN IDEA
The new Republic of Texas faced many problems. Sam Houston, its first president, focused on restricting government spending and establishing good foreign relations. He also worked to avoid new conflicts with Native Texans.

Why It Matters Now
As Texas’s first president, Sam Houston has served as a model for Texas leaders for many generations.

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INTERACT WITH HISTORY
Imagine that you are a citizen of the Republic of Texas. You are no longer ruled by Mexico, but instead by the new Texas government. The Texas Constitution has set up the government for the new nation, and Sam Houston has been elected president. How do these changes directly affect you as a Texas citizen?

WHAT Would You Do?
Write your response to Interact with History in your Texas Notebook.

Problems in the New Republic

Texans had taken steps to make sure that their new nation would have a successful beginning. They had adopted a constitution and elected Sam Houston as their first permanent president and Mirabeau B. Lamar as their vice-president. In his inaugural address, Houston spoke of Texas’s future.

TEXAS VOICES
[We] modestly remonstrated against oppression, and, when invaded by a numerous host, we dared to proclaim our independence and to strike for freedom on the breast of the oppressor. As yet our course is onward. We are only in the outset of the campaign of liberty.

Sam Houston, inaugural address, 1836

However, the new Republic faced many problems. The Mexican government refused to recognize Texas’s independence, so the two nations were still at war. Houston also needed to persuade other nations to recognize Texas as being independent. The new president faced financial problems as well. The government had debts from the Texas Revolution and no money with which to repay them. Native Texans, who had remained peaceful during the Revolution, resented the growing number of settlers invading their territory. Now they threatened to declare war.
Given these problems, Houston was cautious in his policies. He did his best to prevent another war with Mexico or with Native Texans. He also limited government spending so Texas would not fall deeper in debt. Houston believed that the best solution to Texas’s problems was annexation to the United States. He pushed for annexation so the larger, more established U.S. government could help Texas solve its problems.

Houston appointed well-known Texans to his cabinet to help him deal with the problems of the new Republic. Stephen F. Austin served as secretary of state. Henry Smith was named secretary of the treasury. Thomas J. Rusk continued as secretary of war, a position he had held under Governor Smith during the ad interim government of Texas. Such experienced leaders provided stability for the new government.

**Death of Stephen F. Austin**

Stephen F. Austin served as secretary of state for only about three months before he died on December 27, 1836, at the age of 43. Austin, who was Texas’s first empresario under Spanish and Mexican governments, had served as a leader for all American colonists in Texas. He led the first major military conflict in the Revolution. Then he traveled to the United States to raise troops and money for the war. In memory of Austin, President Houston proclaimed a 30-day period of mourning, or grieving.
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A New Capital

Before Houston was elected, ad interim president David Burnet had declared Columbia the capital city. This small town in Brazoria County was where the first Texas Congress met on October 3, 1836. However, many people believed that the town was too small and isolated to serve as the capital city. A large number of Texans wanted to find a new location for the capital.

Two brothers, John and Augustus Allen, planned to build a new town near Harrisburg, which had been burned during the Revolution. The Allen brothers agreed to provide buildings in their town for the government and to name it in honor of Sam Houston. Congress and Houston accepted their offer. After the town was built, however, many people found conditions in Houston inadequate. The government buildings were just log structures and the streets were muddy. Government officials and visitors complained about the heat, humidity, diseases, and size of the mosquitoes. Although many people demanded that the capital be moved, the town of Houston remained the capital of Texas throughout Houston's first administration.

The First Attempt at Annexation

When Texans elected Sam Houston president, a majority also voted to seek annexation to the United States as soon as possible. The addition of Texas to the Union made sense to many people in the Republic of Texas and in the United States. Most Texans had immigrated from the United States. Texans' language, customs, and ideas about laws and government were similar to those of most Americans. The addition of Texas to the United States would allow for U.S. western expansion, so most Texans thought the United States would be eager to accept Texas as a new state. But Texas was not admitted to the Union for ten years, mainly because of the controversy over slavery.

Several Texans, including William H. Wharton, Memucan Hunt, and Anson Jones, worked in Washington to persuade the U.S. Congress to accept Texas into the Union. Members of the U.S. Congress who favored
promissory note

a written promise to pay a sum of money at a future time

revenue

the annual or current income of a government

annexation introduced a bill to admit Texas. John Quincy Adams, a former U.S. president and at the time a member of Congress, blocked its passage because Texas would have entered the Union as a slave state. Adams was determined not to admit more states that supported slavery into the Union. His views were shared by many other politicians and those who opposed slavery. The issue dragged on until Houston ordered Jones to withdraw the request. Houston did not want Texas to be embarrassed by having its request delayed any longer.

Financial Woes

One of the biggest problems in the new Republic was the lack of money. When Sam Houston began his presidency, Texas had a debt of over $1 million. Houston held government expenses to a minimum and tried to raise revenue only for items that were absolutely necessary. To raise money, the government began to collect customs duties and property taxes, but the debt continued to rise.

In 1837 the Texas Congress authorized Houston to issue about $600,000 in promissory notes. This paper money was used to pay government expenses. These notes represented a promise that the government would pay the specified sum of money to the holder of the note at a future date in exchange for its cash value at that moment. The notes were called “Star Money” because they displayed a star on the front. They circulated at or near face value, or their actual cost, for most of Houston's administration. However, when financial prospects did not improve, some feared that the promise of future payment might not be kept. As a result, people started refusing to accept the promissory notes.

Trouble in the Army

During his administration Houston also faced problems with the Texas army. Although Santa Anna had agreed to the independence of Texas in the Treaties of Velasco, the Mexican government refused to accept the treaties. Tensions still existed between the two countries. Also, thousands of U.S. citizens had arrived in Texas too late to fight in the Revolution, but they were ready for battle. Felix Huston, commander of the Texas army, was among those who wanted to renew the war with Mexico.

To prevent Huston from starting another war, President Houston tried to replace him with Albert Sidney Johnston, a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point. Johnston had resigned from the U.S. Army and moved to Texas. When Johnston tried to take command, Huston challenged him to a duel. The Texas army was made up of volunteers who would not have followed Johnston if he had refused the challenge. He accepted and was wounded.

Huston remained in command, so President Houston sent all but 600 of the soldiers home on leave and never called them back to duty. Because the soldiers were no longer in service, the government did not have to find the money to pay them.
Houston’s Native Texan Policy

In addition to tensions with Mexico, Texans faced growing conflicts with Native Texans. The Native Texans resented the large number of Anglo American settlers who were moving onto their lands. Also, the Texas Congress refused to ratify a treaty that Houston had negotiated with the Cherokees during the Texas Revolution. In return for keeping peace during the Revolution, the Cherokees were promised the title to the land they occupied in East Texas. The Cherokees had some of the richest farmland in the area, highly desired by settlers. Also, many settlers wanted to rid the Republic of all Native Texans.

The Native Texans fought back by conducting raids against the settlers. Houston enlisted the help of the Texas Rangers, a group of soldiers organized during the Revolution, to patrol the frontier. The Texas Rangers controlled the number of raiding parties and warned settlers of any dangers. Although Houston was sympathetic toward the Native Texans, many Texans did not share his views. Attacks on both sides continued.

The Election of 1838

The Texas Constitution limited the first president to a term of two years. Later presidents could serve for three years, and no president could be elected two times in a row. In 1838 Houston had to hand over the reins of the government.

President Houston and Vice-President Mirabeau B. Lamar had not seen things eye to eye. Lamar had remained popular and announced his bid for the presidency. Houston recruited Peter Grayson, and then James Collingsworth, as opponents for Lamar, but both Grayson and Collingsworth died before the election. Lamar most likely would have defeated either of them because he offered a new vision for the future of Texas, one that appealed to most Texans.

Terms & Names

Organizing Information

Critical Thinking

1. Why did the Republic of Texas face problems with Mexico?
2. Describe Sam Houston’s political policies.
3. Why did many Texans want to seek annexation?
4. Why were some Americans opposed to the annexation of Texas?

Interact with History

Review your response to Interact with History in your Texas Notebook. After reading about the problems within the new Republic, list two more ways that your life would be affected by the independence of Texas.

Activity

Culture

Research Sam Houston and his relationship with the Native Americans. Why did Houston have a strong connection to them?

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