Tensions Mount Between Mexico and Texas

**Why It Matters Now**
The issue of immigration continues to cause conflict today between the United States and Mexico.

**TERMS & NAMES**
- Constitution of 1824
- states’ rights
- nationalist
- Haden Edwards
- Fredonian Rebellion
- Manuel Mier y Terán
- Law of April 6, 1830
- provision
- customs duty

**OBJECTIVES**
1. Explain why tensions arose between the Mexican government and the Texas settlers.
2. Identify the events that led to the passage of the Law of April 6, 1830.
3. Describe the effect that the Law of April 6, 1830, had on Texas colonists.

**MAIN IDEA**
Not long after colonization began in Texas, conflicts erupted between the Mexican government and the colonists. Even though Mexican officials attempted to control the conflicts, their efforts served to anger and unify the colonists.

**Differences Arise**
The new colonists in Texas busied themselves building homes and starting their life in a new land. The settlers who came from the United States also had to adjust to living in a country with its own laws and government. Many cultural differences existed between the settlers and the government officials. Problems soon arose.

For the most part, the colonists accepted the conditions established by the original Spanish government and the new Mexican government. Some colonists did not make sincere efforts to become loyal citizens of Mexico. They kept many of their own customs. The settlers established their own schools and even started their own newspaper. Mexican government officials worried that the colonists were becoming too independent.

**A Question of States’ Rights**
Tensions also arose over the balance of power between the state and national governments. Like the United States, Mexico was organized into states. Mexico’s Constitution of 1824 established a states’ rights theory that a state could choose whether to obey or enforce federal laws.

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

*Imagine that you recently arrived in Texas from the United States. You have friends and family who hope to join you in Texas soon. You have sworn to adopt the Mexican culture and follow the rules required of all Mexican citizens. The Mexican government is considering closing the border to American settlers in order to preserve the Mexican way of life. Would you try to adapt to the Mexican culture? In what ways? What would you tell your family in the United States?*
government—one in which most powers are given to the state government. Before this time, the federal government in Mexico City had held most of the power. Most settlers in Texas supported the states’ rights government because it allowed more local control. The Constitution of 1824 placed the province of Texas in the Mexican state of Coahuila y Tejas, with its capital at the city of Saltillo.

Some leaders of the Mexican national government did not approve of the states’ having so much power under the Constitution of 1824. They felt that the power should belong to the national government. These Mexican nationalist also were concerned that too many settlers from the United States were moving to Texas. They believed that a growing population from the United States and a strong state government might encourage the colonists to seize Texas and join the United States. These fears led to increased hostilities.

**Competing Land Claims**

Problems with the Mexican government also arose over conflicting claims over land. In 1825 Haden Edwards received an empresarial grant covering a large portion of eastern Texas near Nacogdoches. The land granted to Edwards was close to the border with the United States and relatively far from Austin’s grant and from San Antonio. When Edwards surveyed the area, he found many people already living there. Among
them were descendants of Mexicans who had settled in the area many years before. There were also some Cherokee families who had come to Texas after being forced from their homes in the East. Edwards, like all the other empresarios, was required to honor any land grant previously given to a settler. Unfortunately for Edwards, he was the only empresario with a large number of such grants in his territory.

Edwards posted notices stating that people who held grants should come forward with proof of ownership. Many did not have this proof. Edwards said that settlers who could not prove legal ownership of their land would lose it. This angered many people. Reports of Edwards’s actions alarmed Stephen F. Austin, who wrote him a letter of warning.

> Your observations generally are in the highest degree imprudent and improper, and such as are calculated to ruin yourself and materially to injure all the American settlements; for example, you have publicly stated . . . that the Spaniards around Nacogdoches were a set of ‘Washenangos,’ and that you would put them all over the Sabine [River]; that you had the absolute right of disposing of the land within your colony as you pleased . . . ; that you despised the class of people who were now settlers in the country, and only wanted rich men, and would drive away all the poor devils who had been the first to settle, unless they paid you your price.... One moment’s sober reflection will show you the imprudence and impropriety of such declarations.

> Stephen F. Austin, letter, March 1826

Many people in the area wrote letters to the Mexican officials and complained of Edwards’s actions. The officials sided with the settlers. In response, Edwards’s brother Benjamin, who handled most of the local affairs, wrote angry letters to the Mexican governor, Víctor Blanco.

**The Edwards Brothers**

Another problem arose when Edwards overturned an election for alcalde of Nacogdoches. Most of the legal settlers voted for Samuel Norris, a resident since 1820. Edwards, however, decided that his son-in-law, Chichester Chaplin, had won. Chaplin was supported by settlers who were in the area illegally. Edward’s action produced even more complaints. Governor Blanco had enough of the Edwards brothers. He reversed the election decision and issued an order that took away Edwards’s land grant. He also ordered Edwards and his brother to leave Texas.

Haden Edwards claimed that he had spent $50,000 securing and developing his grant, and he did not intend to lose it. Instead, he negotiated a treaty with some of the Cherokees in the area. They also were unhappy with the Mexican government because officials would not give them titles to the land they occupied north of Nacogdoches.
The Fredonian Rebellion

The tensions in Texas finally resulted in a clash between the Texas colonists and the Mexican government. This conflict, known as the Fredonian Rebellion, occurred near Nacogdoches in 1826. To many Mexican nationalist leaders, this conflict confirmed their fears that Texas settlers were trying to take over Texas.

Edwards, Cherokee leaders John Hunter and Richard Fields, and a few others formed the Fredonian Republic and claimed that the area was no longer under Mexican control. On December 16, 1826, Benjamin Edwards led a small group into Nacogdoches, declaring independence and waving a red and white flag. Though reports vary, it is believed that the words Independence, Liberty, and Justice were written on the flag. The group took over a building known as the Old Stone Fort and removed the alcalde. They occupied the building for over a month, claiming it as the capitol of Fredonia.

When word of the Fredonian Rebellion reached Mexican authorities, it confirmed their fear that Texans intended to seize Texas. Soldiers commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Mateo Ahumada (ah•oo•MAH•dah) were sent to suppress the rebellion. Stephen F. Austin worried that Edwards’s disloyalty would reflect badly on all colonists in Texas. He sided with the Mexican government against Edwards. Austin’s militia joined the Mexican troops when they reached San Felipe. Together they marched to Nacogdoches.

The conflict ended quickly in January 1827. The Fredonians gave up even before Mexican military forces arrived in Nacogdoches. The Edwards brothers fled to safety in Louisiana, and the Cherokees executed Hunter and Fields for their involvement. In the end, the Fredonian Rebellion only caused the Mexican government to become more concerned about what was happening in Texas.

An Attempt to Purchase Texas

Because so many people had come to Texas from the United States, Mexican officials feared that the settlers had secret ties with the United States. These fears increased when the United States offered to purchase...
Texas in 1826. U.S. president John Quincy Adams sent Joel R. Poinsett to Mexico with an offer to pay up to $1 million in exchange for all or part of Texas. Adams was not enthusiastic about the offer. He wanted to win the support of people in the western United States by favoring westward expansion.

Poinsett believed strongly in bringing Texas into the United States. However, he blundered in his efforts and further raised the suspicions of the Mexican government. Poinsett’s mistake was to publicly announce his reasons for being in Mexico before he had officially presented the purchase offer to Mexican officials. When Poinsett did present Adams’s offer, the Mexican officials were offended that anyone would think they would consider selling part of their country.

The Mier y Terán Report

The increasing number of settlers from the United States in Texas, the Fredonian Rebellion, and the offer by the United States to purchase Texas fueled concerns of Mexican nationalists. In 1828 government leaders sent General Manuel Mier y Terán, a respected commander, to investigate the conditions in Texas. He spent almost a year touring the area and then wrote a report about his findings.

In his report Mier y Terán expressed concern about the Anglo American colonists. He claimed that they outnumbered Mexican settlers by 10 to 1. Though this figure may have been exaggerated, there were far more Anglos than Mexicans in Texas, especially in East Texas. Mier y Terán also noted that the influence of the United States was growing in Texas and that many settlers ignored laws against trading with the United States. In his report he made it clear that Mexico must gain control of Texas.

Mexican officials wanted to make Texas less attractive to current or future colonists from the United States. So in 1829 nationalists persuaded President Vicente Guerrero to abolish slavery in Mexico. Since Anglo Texans held most of the slaves in Mexico, the officials thought that this act would slow immigration from the United States.

The Law of April 6, 1830

In further efforts to control Texas colonists, especially Anglo Americans, Mexican officials passed the Law of April 6, 1830. It outlawed immigration from the United States to Texas and canceled all empresarial grants.
that had not been fulfilled. As a result, settlers from the United States would no longer be allowed to colonize any Mexican border state—including Texas. However, the government encouraged Mexican and European settlers to relocate to Texas. The Law of April 6, 1830, even provided land and money for these settlers.

The law also included other provisions designed to slow, if not stop, Anglo American immigration into Mexico. Slaves could no longer be brought into Mexico to work the fields for Anglo American colonists. New forts and presidios, guarded by convict-soldiers, were established to stop illegal immigration. The law also placed customs duties on all goods entering Texas from the United States. This meant that colonists would have to pay more for supplies from the United States.

The law alarmed Anglo Texans. Its ban on bringing slaves into Mexico would hurt their ability to develop the cotton industry. Texans felt that the new taxes would hurt Texas’s economy. They were also upset that their friends and relatives in the United States would not be able to join them. They felt that they had been wronged by the Mexican government.

The Law of April 6, 1830, also raised serious political questions within Mexico. Under the Constitution of 1824, the law’s provisions should have been a matter for the state, not the national government. Mexicans who believed in the states’ rights Constitution of 1824 felt that the national government had gone too far. Instead of resolving the crisis, the 1830 law increased tensions between Texas and the Mexican government.

Terms & Names
Identify:
- states’ rights
- nationalist
- provision
- customs duty

Organizing Information
Use a diagram like the one shown to list three events that led to the passage of the Law of April 6, 1830.

Critical Thinking
1. What did nationalist leaders in Mexico infer from the Fredonian Rebellion?
2. What developments in Texas alarmed the Mexican government? What actions by the Mexican government alarmed Texans?

Interact with History
Review your response to Interact with History in your Texas Notebook. How did Texas colonists fail to adapt to Mexico?

ACTIVITY
Citizenship
Analyze how the citizens of Mexico, Texas, the United States, and Europe viewed the Law of April 6, 1830, differently. Make a chart explaining each group’s point of view.

Schooners like this one built in the 1850s, frequently sailed into Texas ports. Some smuggled in goods and slaves. Although Mexico agreed to allow settlers to bring slaves with them, it was illegal to buy and sell slaves. This law was not strictly enforced, however, until 1830.

\[ \text{provision} \quad \text{a specific requirement set by a law} \]

\[ \text{customs duty} \quad \text{a tax that is collected on goods that are taken into or out of a country} \]