

Mexican Independence and Anglo-American Expansion Historical Analysis

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Introduction

The political transformation of nineteenth-century North America involved national independence, racial hierarchy, migration, slavery, land speculation, and the displacement of Indigenous peoples. In [New Spain](#), colonial social classifications linked ancestry, birthplace, occupation, and perceived race with access to authority and privilege. Indigenous communities, Afro-Mexicans, mixed-race populations, American-born Spaniards, and European-born Spaniards occupied unequal positions, although status was never determined by one rigid formula in every place. These inequalities contributed to dissatisfaction before Mexican independence, but they interacted with the political crisis of the Spanish monarchy, taxation, local land disputes, economic pressure, and conflicts among elites (Vinson, 2018; Van Young, 2001). After independence in 1821, formal caste distinctions declined and a common Mexican citizenship became more important, yet legal equality did not erase inherited poverty, racial discrimination, or unequal landownership. At the same time, Mexican authorities encouraged settlement in Texas, where Anglo-American migration eventually altered the demographic, economic, and political balance of the northern borderlands.

Independence and the Transformation of Colonial Hierarchy

The Mexican War of Independence began in 1810 and drew support from people whose reasons for rebellion were not identical. Miguel Hidalgo's movement attracted large numbers of rural workers, Indigenous people, mestizos, and other marginalized communities, while some criollo elites opposed Spanish political control but feared social revolution. José María Morelos later articulated a more explicit egalitarian program in *Sentiments of the Nation*, calling for independence, abolition of slavery, and an end to legal distinctions based on caste. These principles challenged the colonial order, but the coalition that finally secured independence through the Plan of Iguala in 1821 was more conservative than the earlier popular insurgency. Independence therefore dismantled important legal features of colonial rule without automatically redistributing land or eliminating social hierarchy (Van Young, 2001). National identity increasingly emphasized common Mexican citizenship and mestizaje, while symbols such as the Virgin of Guadalupe helped distinguish the new nation from Spain. Yet

celebrating Indigenous ancestry did not guarantee equal treatment for living Indigenous communities, and formal rejection of caste terminology could coexist with continuing racialized economic and political inequality.

Anglo-American Migration into Mexican Texas

Mexico's northern frontier presented a different challenge after independence. Authorities wanted settlement, agricultural production, tax revenue, and a stronger population presence in Texas, so they used the empresario system to recruit families and organize land grants. Stephen F. Austin became the most prominent empresario, bringing settlers from the United States under Mexican authority. Migrants were attracted by relatively inexpensive fertile land, family networks, commercial opportunity, cotton cultivation, and the prospect of social advancement. Some also sought distance from debts or legal problems in the United States, although debt refuge should not be treated as the universal motive for migration (Henson, 2021). Settlers were expected to comply with Mexican law and become incorporated into the country, but many retained English language, Protestant cultural ties, commercial relationships, and political assumptions rooted in the United States. Land could function both as a productive asset and as speculation, especially as some settlers anticipated that political change or eventual annexation might increase property values. Migration thus combined individual opportunity with larger questions of sovereignty, markets, and national expansion.

Slavery, Cotton, and the Texas Conflict

Slavery was central to the conflict over Anglo-American settlement because many migrants from the southern United States wanted to reproduce a cotton economy dependent on enslaved labor. Mexico moved toward abolition after independence, while settlers and enslavers in Texas sought legal arrangements that would preserve coerced labor. Cotton linked the region to international markets and made land and enslaved labor economically valuable, helping transform the borderlands in ways that contributed to the Texas Revolution and later annexation debates (Torget, 2015). This history complicates celebratory language about liberty and frontier opportunity. Anglo-American settlers could demand political autonomy from Mexico while denying freedom to enslaved African Americans, and the expansion of the United States could be described as national progress while depending on the acquisition of land already inhabited by Indigenous nations. Tensions in Texas also involved taxation, immigration restrictions, federalism, local autonomy, and political centralization, so slavery was not the only cause. It was nevertheless inseparable from the economic and political order many settlers wanted to protect and expand.

Indigenous Dispossession and the Meaning of

Expansion

The language of “Anglo-American civilization” often presented westward settlement as the spread of law, commerce, agriculture, and representative institutions into supposedly empty or underdeveloped territory. That description obscures the fact that Indigenous nations possessed their own governments, trade systems, cultural traditions, and territorial relationships. Expansion occurred through warfare, treaties, purchases made under unequal conditions, fraud, legislation, forced migration, and the conversion of Indigenous homelands into surveyed private property. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 accelerated this process east of the Mississippi. Federal officials described removal agreements as negotiated exchanges, but coercion, state pressure, contested treaties, and military force shaped many of them. The removal of Cherokee, Muscogee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, and other peoples opened millions of acres to white settlement and the expansion of plantation agriculture (National Archives, 2022; Saunt, 2020). Indigenous communities resisted, negotiated, litigated, adapted, and rebuilt institutions after displacement, so they should not be portrayed as passive victims. Nevertheless, territorial growth imposed immense demographic, political, cultural, and economic losses that are essential to understanding United States expansion.

The Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

The Mexican-American War and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo extended these territorial transformations. Signed in 1848, the treaty ended the war and transferred a vast region from Mexico to the United States while establishing a new international boundary. The agreement contained protections concerning property and the status of Mexican residents in the ceded territories, but implementation was uneven as land claims encountered new courts, surveys, taxes, legal costs, fraud, and political change (National Archives, 2022). The result was not simply a line moving on a map. Mexican communities, Indigenous nations, migrants, ranchers, miners, merchants, and governments entered a new legal and economic environment in which sovereignty, citizenship, property, and race were contested. These developments also intensified the United States debate over whether slavery would expand into newly acquired territories. The broader history therefore links Mexican independence, Texas settlement, Indigenous dispossession, slavery, and Anglo-American expansion without reducing them to one cause. Each process changed who could claim land, exercise political power, move across borders, and define membership in the emerging national states.

Conclusion

Mexican independence and Anglo-American expansion reshaped North America through overlapping struggles over citizenship, race, land, labor, and sovereignty. Independence weakened the formal colonial caste system and created a national political identity, but it did not eliminate inherited

inequality or produce immediate comprehensive land reform. Mexican efforts to develop Texas encouraged Anglo-American migration, bringing investment and settlement while also introducing conflicts over slavery, political authority, immigration, and the future status of the territory. Expansion by the United States created new farms, towns, markets, and transportation networks, yet those gains were closely connected with the forced removal and dispossession of Indigenous peoples and, in important regions, the growth of slavery (Torget, 2015; Saunt, 2020). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo further transformed sovereignty and property relationships after 1848. A complete historical analysis should therefore avoid presenting national growth as an uncomplicated march of civilization or independence as an instant end to hierarchy. The central pattern is more complex: institutions changed, opportunities expanded for some groups, and political communities were reorganized while other populations experienced coercion, exclusion, displacement, and unequal access to the benefits of the new order.

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