

CHAPTER ONE

“Cast in a Contentious Crowd”



THERE SEEMED TO BE SOMETHING inevitable about Texas and revolution. It lay near the center of a hemisphere called the New World, bracketed by revolutions above and below. It experienced the last in a series of revolutions, and the most sudden and yet briefest of all, as if the men and women involved sought to accelerate the process in order to catch up to history. Texas became almost a compulsion, not just for isolated men, but in the personality of a whole generation. Hiram Taylor, a thirty-five-year-old New Yorker, confessed himself caught in the irresistible gravity of the idea of Texas when he complained of “the inexorable will of providence” that had “impelled me onward to the verge of poverty, ruin and contempt.” Abandoning even wife and children, his mind chafed “nearly to a PHRENZY,” he gave in to magnetic forces beyond his control. “In a moment of enthusiasm I agreed to join the expedition to *Texas*,” he shamefully confessed to the wife he left behind. “I have now cast myself in a contentious crowd; I have to struggle for the palm with thousands, to obtain the wayward and far spreading renown which rends the air with the loud huzza of praise.”¹

That compulsion, those contentious crowds, threw the New World into a revolutionary soup just coming to the boil when a new century dawned in 1800. The uprising in Britain’s colonies that became a revolution, then spawned a new and independent nation, shook the American hemisphere and the Western World both to their foundations. Almost inevitably Spain’s American colonies soon followed the path of revolt against their European overlords, for colonialism had brought with it, in human nature, the seeds of its own disruption. First, it guaranteed that

its chief victims, the native peoples of the new continents, finding themselves exploited and dispossessed of their homes and the worlds they had known, even of their religion, must naturally harbor bitter resentments that only force and fear contained. Whole peoples were eliminated in the process, the once mighty Inca and Aztecs and their own empires brought down and reduced to penury, if not slavery. For centuries in the Spanish colonies they lived at the bottom order of a new social scale imposed from afar, one in which the *peninsulares*, men from Spain, came and ruled over all, while beneath them served the *creoles*, men of Spanish blood born in the New World who could rise and succeed but never achieve the top rungs of a ladder controlled by Madrid and its New World capital at Havana. Below them were the *mestizos*, the half-breed products of Spanish interbreeding with the native peoples, and finally at the bottom of the pile were those natives themselves, some of whom descended from the once-exalted ruling class of the Aztec, Inca, and Maya.

It was a system destined to generate multiple and overlapping levels of resentment and unrest. Some of the *peninsulares* in time resented being ordered about by masters in Havana and Madrid. Some of the *creoles* resented being denied access to the social and political strata reserved for the *peninsulares*, and the inability to determine for themselves their own affairs in a world that they themselves helped to carve from the wilderness. The *mestizos* felt some common cause with the *creoles* as they managed to grasp some position and prosperity in their world, limited though it was by their blood, while the Indians, of course, were well entitled to resent everyone. Several things kept the system in place and restive forces in check, starting with the habits of centuries. Spain, England, France, and the rest had been relatively well-ordered feudal then aristocratic cultures for half a millennium by the time they began colonizing the New World. People were born into a social caste and knew to keep their place and be satisfied with it unquestioningly, making peasant revolts almost unheard of. Every colonial empire exported that social system to its New World colonies, but in doing so reckoned without the effect of the wilderness experience on Old World establishments.

In North America, for example, virtually everyone worked in the new colonies. Later mythology about Cavalier aristocrats settling in the Southern colonies and Puritan shopkeepers inhabiting the North to the

contrary, from Massachusetts Bay Colony to Georgia there were no aristocrats sitting idly like lords. Only men and women willing to work hard came to the colonies, and only those who worked hard survived. Naturally, some prospered more than others, acquiring more land and more wealth, but their enhanced property only required them to work harder themselves and to employ—or buy—more labor. Even the master of a large plantation who owned many slaves still had to work long hours himself over his account books and with the merchants, or riding the circuit of his domain to oversee the fields. The very few genuine aristocrats who came here, most as royally appointed governors and officials, returned home at the end of their tenures. Everyone else who stayed felt a personal investment in the land and the place, and in time in the *idea* of where they lived. The shoots of revolution began snaking their way upward through the topsoil toward daylight, and the idea, once born, could not be stopped. Once even limited local government gave them the taste for ruling themselves, the generation of increasing protests and confrontations began.

That Britain’s North American colonies were the first to revolt against their mother empire was hardly surprising. Unlike Spain, Britain saw a vastly larger number of its people emigrate to a New World that absorbed much of the overflow of a middle-class explosion at home that required more scope for enterprise than the small island nation could offer. Only America offered new land for the farmer and the socially relaxed atmosphere that could allow the professional class to prosper and, in time, thoroughly infiltrate—even dominate—the upper social and political elites. Moreover, the North American colonies had the hidden benefit of not being surfeited with fabulous mineral riches, at first a disappointment to colonists and mother country alike. The result was that people came there to plant roots of crops and families, to stay and become a part of the New World, and often in some degree of peaceful coexistence with the natives, for all the conflict that ensued. Consequently, Britain’s colonies were never armed camps, nor did they have to be maintained or governed by military authority. Until the opening of continental warfare with the French in 1756, the American colonists were largely allowed to maintain their own peace, and thus formed yet another habit of independence.

To this growing tradition of limited self-rule, self-reliance, and self-defense, the mother country added the catalysts that had begun New

World adventuring in the first place: ambition and aspiration. Both exploded on the scene in the sixteenth century in the greatest and most dramatic change in the Western personality since the consolidation of Christianity as the one and only European religion. After millennia of acceptance of birth and station, suddenly the class system relaxed dramatically. Royalty and nobility remained the exclusive province of the highborn, but trade, the need for expansion in the professions, and the New World all allowed men—and only men—at almost every lower level to begin for the first time to dream of something better. At the same time, the relatively sudden integration of European nations into a larger trading community, thanks to mastery of the sea, provided the dynamo to power prosperity. Classes bred to lack ambition suddenly found some attainable purpose in aspiring for more education, a better home, more property, a place and means to expand.

Expansion, of course, meant the New World, and the word became almost a motto for those who forged their futures across the Atlantic. Never before had Europeans encountered a limitless horizon. Suddenly people whose families may have spent five hundred years tilling the same patch of land could see just beyond the sunset whole new worlds awaiting plow and axe and community. Accustomed to making decisions for themselves in the freer atmosphere of their American colonies, the colonists saw no reason why they could not—should not—decide to expand their fortunes westward, or that constantly arriving new emigrants should not be able to go immediately to the edge of settlement and drive it a little farther west as they, too, carved themselves new homes. Accustomed to defending themselves, they naturally felt that what they defended was their own, subject to their dictates and not to those of a foreign potentate. Accustomed to acting in concert with their community and with neighboring communities, their sense of themselves and their interests and rights naturally expanded beyond their individual hearths.

By the middle of the eighteenth century they identified themselves as Virginians and New Yorkers and Carolinians, with a collective sense of what was naturally their due. They had worked and sweated and bled to make a civilization out of this wilderness, and it seemed only natural that it was their right to continue to do so, regardless of opposition from London or the protestations of less numerous and apparently less civilized native peoples who did not use the land to its fullest anyhow. At the

eve of 1775, when settlement of the British colonies of North America was still primarily confined east of the Appalachian Mountains, there were already men defying regulations against going farther west, filtering into the Ohio River Valley, planning settlements in the so-called dark and bloody ground of Ken-tuck-ee, and venturing even into the Spanish provinces on the lower Mississippi, to Natchez and New Orleans, and as far west as Natchitoches in the vast and as-yet scarcely comprehended territory of Louisiana. Indeed, the attempt to restrict westward expansion became one of the multiple irritants that led to shots heard around the world, shots that began the century-long death knell of European empire in the Americas. In less than a single life span, the echo of those shots began to be heard in a faraway corner of the Louisiana Territory that the Spaniards called *Tejas*, and which the Anglo-Americans thought of somehow in the plural at first as "the Texas."

Those Texas belonged to someone else, of course, but by the time the British colonies won their independence, Spanish America itself stood close to the same threshold over which its northern neighbor had crossed. At first Spain allied itself with the colonies in their bid for independence, as did France, though it was a move calculated more to halt the growing dominance of Britain on the world stage than from sympathy with the ideals of British colonists. Indeed, European empires felt uneasy about supporting the American Revolution for fear of the example and precedent it might set within their own colonial holdings. After the loss of Canada in the war of 1756–1763, however, France largely gave up on the New World except for a few islands in the Caribbean.

Spain was another matter. Its empire in the New World predated Britain's by more than a century, and was vastly larger and richer. It stretched from La Plata and the southern tip of South America, northward across the entire western half of the continent, and as far north as a territory not yet called Oregon, from the Pacific shores eastward to the Mississippi, and onward along the Gulf Coast to the Florida peninsula. It embraced fully one third of the later United States. The Spaniards had divided it into four massive viceroalties, each with its subordinate captaincy-generalships and local *audiencias*, while Portugal maintained one huge viceroyalty over Brazil. La Plata embraced modern-day Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Bolivia. New Granada contained most of latter-day Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela, while the viceroyalty of Peru oversaw Peru and Chile. Of them all New Spain was the largest,

encompassing Mexico all the way to Oregon, the Caribbean islands that made up the *audiencia* of Santo Domingo, and the captaincy-generalships of Guatemala and Cuba. ²

The very size of the colonial hold posed a problem for Spain from the first, one compounded by the mother country's unabashed policy of rabid exploitation. The native population was simply swept aside, eradicated or enslaved, mollified with a new religion and controlled by intimidation. Three hundred years of enforced subservience, on top of many more centuries of subjugation under their earlier native empires, went as far as possible in driving aspiration and assertiveness out of the whole native culture, yet still some sparks of resentment smoldered on. Unwittingly, in the Catholic Christianity that Spain imposed on its new serfs, it gave them an ideology that acknowledged oppressors in the Romans, lauded attempts to rebel and cast off chains in a holy cause in the exodus from Egypt and the revolt of the Hebrews against the Herods, and held out the prospect of something better for those who suffered. The more the Spaniards had to impose rule by force to maintain order and keep the mines working and the treasure galleons returning to Spain, the more the crown sounded like pharaoh and the greater grew the store of resentment against it.

The land itself also worked against a pacific population in Spanish America. So much of it was simply uninhabitable. The Andes Mountains cut north to south through the center of the South American continent. Huge deserts covered much of Mexico and all of the west coast of the lower continent as well as portions of its interior. Much of the rest lay hidden beneath an impenetrable canopy of jungle, with the result that out of all of this immense land mass, only a very small part of it could be broken by the plow and made habitable. That, and the fixation of Spain on exploiting mineral wealth, exerted a natural pressure to confine expansion and settlement. As late as 1800, most communities hugged the shoreline of the Atlantic and Pacific or the Gulf of Mexico. What agriculture and livestock herding there was remained confined to the near environs of the coastal plains and the fertile higher plateaus of South America, or central Mexico, and a great deal of that lay in the hands of *grandees* controlling vast acreage tended by *peons*.

The result was a population easier to control than that of North America, partially out of long habit, but also because it had not dispersed very far from the centers of power and authority. Whereas dis-

tance from the mother country and rather benign local authority allowed the revolutionary spirit to flourish in the British colonies once ignited, in New Spain it took much longer for such ideas to spread. The disproportionate distribution of wealth and education also kept the masses either from being exposed to republican ideas, or having the wherewithal and organization to mount resistance. Revolutionary dissatisfaction was thus confined to a substantially smaller part of the population than in North America, chiefly the middle and upper classes among the *creoles*, thanks to their being the only ones with access to education and the dissemination of information. Still they could command, either by force, habit, or inspiration, the loyalty of some of the lower classes, and would find as well some support among the *peninsulares*, though most of that class remained loyal to Spain to the end.

One influence in New Spain that positively promoted revolutionary spirit in a way not known in North America was the absolutely abominable nature of the colonial administration both by Spain itself and the viceroys on the scene. The mission of the colonies was to send wealth home and to be a market for goods from the mother country, all of it geared to the prosperity of Spain and not the colonies, which found themselves exploited on all sides. Rule was arbitrary and authoritarian, the *peninsulares* dominating over a *creole* aristocracy, both of them looking down on the cadre of entrepreneurs from Spain who came as merchants and managers, and at the same time trying to keep down the growing class of professionals, the lawyers and physicians, who comprised the intelligentsia such as it was. So absolute and unbending was colonial rule by the viceroys that in New Spain, unlike the Old World, the infamous Inquisition was looked upon largely as a protector rather than as a threat. The resentment and dissatisfaction was always there as an undercurrent, but so long as the harsh authority of the viceroys remained in place, it had neither the organization nor the courage to emerge from hiding.³

And then the world began to teeter on its ancient axis, and even remote parts of New Spain felt dizzy. Iberia and France became intellectually and culturally linked with each other early in the eighteenth century, and in step with Great Britain began gradually retreating from the absolute monarchy of preceding centuries. Reforms at home allowed rights to trickle down from the nobility into the professional classes, the burdens on the land-tied poor were lightened, art and education were

encouraged and expanded, and the Enlightenment was well under way. Once men began talking freely about human rights and the nature of the state, it was an invitation to ask for redress. All three great nations, Britain, France, and Spain, steadily reduced the power of the throne and the aristocracy during the first half of the eighteenth century, commensurately granting more and more political influence to the professional, middle, and upper classes. Unwittingly, they were opening the gates to the flood.

Wise heads in Spain might suspect that such relaxations were only asking for trouble either at home or in the colonies, but the ruling class believed that it was, if anything, diffusing unrest in the Americas by allowing greater local rule and thereby encouraging more prosperity for the middle and *creole* classes. But when in 1759, Charles III ascended the throne, the pendulum swung toward greater exploitation. Taxes and export duties all but killed Mexican industries other than mining, and even the autonomous church was brought under viceregal rule for a time. The later shift to a more lenient regime under a new viceroy came too late, for even as the *creoles* and the professions enjoyed more freedom, they did not forget how easily and quickly it could be taken from them. Reform, efficient administration, free trade, the encouragement of industry and agriculture, all became their talking points, and not surprisingly each, if pursued, led toward local prosperity and solidarity. When they also began demanding more of a political role in their own government, the revolution was born in their hearts. After centuries of being exploited by the mother country and arbitrarily ruled by appointed *peninsulares* who knew nothing of their interests and concerns, educated men throughout Spain's New World empire were tired and frustrated. It needed only example, encouragement, and opportunity for the status quo to collapse.

All three came a step closer in the wake of the 1756–1763 war between Britain and France, when Spain sided with the latter. The ultimate British victory lost Spain some of its Cuban holdings and a part of the Honduran mainland, and required a trade of Florida to regain Havana. To reward Spain for its ill-fated alliance, France ceded to it the Louisiana Territory in 1762, and thus the balance of power in the New World shifted, leaving Spain and Britain the only competitors for hemispheric hegemony. They remained bitter enemies. When the revolutionary inundation washed over the British Empire in 1775 with the

American Revolution, Spain was happy to join with France once more to try to weaken Britain. This time it worked. An independent set of thirteen colonies, weak and isolated to the Atlantic seaboard, seemingly posed far less threat of competition to Spanish interests. But still there was that worrying precedent. For the first time in modern history a group of colonies had revolted with sufficient strength, organization, and commitment to succeed in wresting away its independence. To be sure, it was only French military aid in the New World, and the distraction of French and Spanish armies confronting Britain in Europe, that sufficiently weakened Britain for it finally to let the colonies go in 1783. Still there was a lesson, that a distant and isolated colony could be hard to hold on to by a mother country distracted by internal upheaval. At least one man in Spain, Conde de Aranda, a minister in the court of Charles III, warned that dissident elements in New Spain might look enviously at what their northern neighbors had done and one day seek to emulate them. The king, however, was too pleased by the recovery of Florida and Honduras to see troubles ahead.⁴

Next into the revolutionary cauldron in 1789 fell France, an example that still stuns and confounds for its unchecked violence and radicalism. The rebels of 1776 created a stable, democratic state. The rebels of 1789 launched themselves on a self-consuming orgy of bloodshed that led first to the dictatorship of Napoleon and later to a restored monarchy as Frenchmen sought nondemocratic solutions for their own folly. Which example would Spain's colonies follow? When Charles III died in 1788, he was succeeded by his son, a man simply unfit for rule even at home, let alone over a set of colonies thousands of miles distant and populated by increasingly dissatisfied elements. Indeed, the first weak fumbles at revolution had taken place already, though quickly quelled. In the very year that the Americans effectively ended the military part of their revolution in 1781, a descendant of the Inca rulers of old in Peru named José Gabriel Condorcanqui managed to incite thousands of the native peoples of Peru in an uprising against Spanish rule. They besieged Cuzco, captured the Spanish governor, and killed him. The Spaniards retaliated with massive force, putting down Condorcanqui's followers and taking him and his family prisoner. His family they butchered before his eyes and then his captors cut out his tongue, tied his arms and legs to saddle horses, and ripped him to pieces. However disorganized and ill prepared, however bloody and unsuccessful, it had

been the first real revolutionary uprising in Spanish America after over two hundred years.⁵

The Peru revolt may have been nothing more than an outburst of frustration, with no thought-out long-range plan, yet even the temporary success of Condorcanqui's revolt sent shivers throughout Spanish America, and the quaking continued when the excesses of the French Revolution found echoes in the New World. The same kind of pent-up frustration and anger that put Condorcanqui's followers on the road to Cuzco excited half a million slaves on the island of Hispaniola to rise up against their French overlords. Vincent Ogé, an educated free mulatto of comparative affluence, went to Paris at the outbreak of the French Revolution to beg for extension of civil rights to free mulattoes and for the emancipation of slaves on Hispaniola. Rebuffed, he returned to the island in 1790, and when the French governor refused to remove restrictions on slaves and free blacks, Ogé incited and led an insurrection. Defeated and captured, he was tried, convicted of treason, and broken on the wheel, but within months erupted the bloody coup led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, a former slave serving as an officer in the French colonial garrison. It saw thousands murdered and most of the balance forced to flee, many of them to French Louisiana.

The unrest on Hispaniola, and the exodus of refugees, continued for a decade off and on, until 1803 when, after retaking Louisiana from Spain, Napoleon then sold it to the United States and simply abandoned French attempts to hold on to Hispaniola. Thus, for the first time, a colony within the very environs of New Spain had given sway to revolution, an ethnic one at that, and had apparently achieved its de facto independence. By 1803 Spain was just as weak in the New World as France had been, and just as distracted and overextended militarily and financially in Europe. If a rabble of slaves could achieve independence on Hispaniola, what could discontented *creoles* and a rabble of *mestizos* and even Indians bring about, especially if outside agitators incited them to take advantage of Spanish weakness?

The ideal place for a separatist movement or revolt would be at an isolated outpost of the Spanish empire, far from the seat of power in Mexico City. Poor communications meant perhaps weeks in passing information, and the long distances over rough ground would cause delay and hardship to any military forces sent to keep order. Not surprisingly, eyes looked to "the Texas." A few, in fact, had looked in that

direction for some time. In 1791 a twenty-year-old Irish-born clerk named Philip Nolan, working in New Orleans for General James Wilkinson, obtained a passport from the Spanish governor of Texas to trade with the inhabitants. His work for Wilkinson made him alive to the untapped trade opportunities presented by the communities in Texas, which had raw resources that Louisianians could use, and whose closer proximity to New Orleans than to Mexico City promised a market hungry for consumer goods. His being a member of the Wilkinson household also no doubt influenced his interest, for the general was a perennial plotter after Spanish empire west of the Mississippi.

The mercantile enterprise failed, but Nolan spent much of the next three years living with the natives and trading in wild horses. Watchful Spanish officials did not miss the attention Nolan paid to local terrain, his mapping of rivers, and his friendliness with the United States officials then trying to establish the western boundary of the United States along the Mississippi River. In 1797 Nolan went into Texas once more on a horse-trading trip, this time going as far as San Antonio de Béxar, the provincial capital, but by now officials believed they had evidence that the horse-trading expeditions were a blind and that Nolan's real purpose was to incite the native population into a revolt against Spain. Still Nolan was allowed to stay in Texas more than a year, in violation of Spanish trade regulations, and when he returned to Natchez, Mississippi, in 1799 he brought with him twelve hundred horses and a great deal of information. It is hardly coincidental that his employer and mentor Wilkinson, one of American history's greatest schemers, already had well-developed personal interests and ambitions that involved the southwest. A few years earlier he went secretly on the payroll of the Spanish to advise them of American designs on their territory, and now was commanding general of the United States Army and still taking Spanish bribes. Yet Wilkinson always worked essentially for himself, and what Nolan was able to tell him of the temper of the native population in Texas, of its roads and river crossings, and of the state of Spanish colonial outposts, all helped to inform his grand designs for some kind of empire of his own. Nolan was widely believed to have made the first map of eastern Texas, the portion chiefly inhabited by the Spaniards, and if so a document that would be of inestimable value to any expedition setting out to take the province. Certainly the Spaniards suspected this, for the word soon went out to the Indians that Nolan was, as he

himself put it, "a Bad man," with a warning that he should not be allowed to enter their villages.⁶

Thus, if not at Wilkinson's instruction but certainly with his blessing, Nolan went once more to Texas in 1800, this time at the head of a party of twenty-seven armed men, though still under the pretense of being on a trading mission. By October he was building a fort near Nacogdoches, then corrals for captured horses, but Spanish authorities had seen enough. Spanish *soldados* from Nacogdoches appeared with orders to arrest him and his men on March 21, 1801. They resisted, and a small battle broke out in which Nolan was killed and his men all taken. Ever afterward there remained uncertainty as to just what his purpose had been, and how much involved were Wilkinson and other would-be empire builders at the expense of New Spain. Certainly Wilkinson remained interested in Texas for years to come, and within two years one of Nolan's associates, Robert Ashley, was believed to be planning an expedition of his own into Texas, coincident with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 that gave the United States its first shadowy claim on the province.⁷

PHILIP NOLAN—WHOSE STORY later writer Edward Everett Hale considerably fictionalized in turning him into his *Man Without a Country*—was probably not the first of the future so-called filibusters, a term likely of uncertain Dutch origin in the word *vrijbuiter* for pirate. But he was one of those shadowy figures who appeared so drawn to Texas, men of mixed and shifting motives, bent on quick personal gain and yet somehow impressed with the larger opportunity represented in the untamed and largely unclaimed land. Most likely he was chiefly—perhaps only—interested in the lucrative horse trade, yet the fact remained that he was willing to risk his life and break American and Spanish law by interloping into Texas to seek fortune. That at least made him the spiritual precursor of the armies of Americans who would follow, and in much greater numbers, while the fears that he implanted in Spanish minds about the intentions of their neighbors to the east awakened the rulers of Texas to its vulnerability to outside intervention and the potential for internal revolt.⁸

Meanwhile, Spain's hold on its Caribbean empire was crumbling. It gave up to the French its claim on Saint Domingue, which shared the

island of Hispaniola. Then the British began brazen occupations of Puerto Rico and Trinidad, and by the turn of the century the *creoles* and even the *peninsulares* saw their mother country being insulted and buffeted with impunity by Britain and France alike. That led to a disdain of Spain and their royal rulers that only fed already deep-seated resentments over centuries of local exploitation and incompetent and corrupt viceregal rule by favorites appointed in Madrid. When Napoleon sent an army to Hispaniola in 1802 to put down Toussaint L'Ouverture's uprising on Hispaniola and restore slavery, inhabitants of Spain's colonies were horrified, wondering when it would come their turn to fall under French rule. The expulsion of the French from Hispaniola in 1804 by another black uprising, and the declaration of independence of the newly named nation of Haiti, gave hope to restive elements in New Spain. Haiti was the first colony in the Spanish colonial sphere to declare and maintain its independence. The lesson was clear. If even France, under the legendary Napoleon, could be evicted from the New World, surely Spain could, too. Disorganized, weakened, and distracted colonial powers could be pushed out of the New World and self-rule established. When Spain unwisely allied itself with France in Napoleon's continuing war with Britain, the Spanish fleet was all but erased from the seas at Trafalgar, and in a stroke the mother country simply lost the means of enforcing its authority from afar in the New World.

Even in remote Texas and its capital at Béxar, such fears and ideas took root. The Nolan expeditions left Spanish authorities there anxious about what might come next from the *americanos*, especially after Napoleon sold Louisiana to the United States, and now the Americans and Texas became wary neighbors. Texas had been an unarmed border between two Spanish provinces and later between two friendly powers, Spain and France. Now events in Europe and Washington shifted the situation dramatically, especially after refugees from Catholic Louisiana began pressing to move away from feared Protestant domination under the Americans, and live instead in a neighboring Catholic province. To meet all of these feared and anticipated pressures, authorities in Mexico City began the steady militarization of Texas. In 1801, the year Nolan's last expedition had sparked the first serious concern, royalist *soldados* in Texas numbered fewer than 200. By 1806 their number had soared to 1,368, most of them centered at Béxar.

Interestingly, more than one tenth of those were local men, either

native *béxareños* or men who had been on duty there for some time, meaning that the local garrison was not entirely free from the domestic discontents troubling other elements in the province.⁹ Then came more blows, first the confiscation of charity funds raised by the church to bolster a bankrupt Madrid treasury, and next Napoleon's astonishing occupation of Spain itself, and his installation of a puppet king, his brother, on the throne. In Mexico City, whose rule extended to Texas, the authorities had no intention of remaining loyal to a French usurper. The *peninsulares* and *creoles* seemed in the main disposed toward creating a provisional government in their colony, remaining loyal to their deposed king until he should be restored to his crown. Yet they did not dare risk expanding either civil or political power lest they threaten their own hold on the colony. The example of the French Revolution that led to Napoleon's tyranny over them was worrisome, because they saw it as a triumph of the rabble. If that idea spread to Mexico, then the *mestizo* and native Indian population, so successfully kept at bay for centuries, might erupt. Numbering four of every five inhabitants, they would be unstoppable if aroused.

Mexico and its Texan province drifted on the verge of insurrection for the next few years. Not so the rest of Spanish America, however. Almost everywhere at once it seemed to explode in a revolutionary frenzy. In Venezuela republicans overthrew its *peninsulare* ruler and the following year declared for independence under the leadership of Simón Bolívar. Chile had already done the same with a declaration of its own, and Buenos Aires soon followed suit. The idea of revolution and republicanism spread rapidly, rumbling like one of South America's frequent earthquakes all along the Andes and right up the backbone of Central America into Mexico. There the *peninsulares* split with the *creoles*, the former arguing to remain obedient to the sitting viceroy, while the latter, sniffing the opportunity for more autonomy, argued for an interim provisional government.

When the viceroy came out in favor of the *creole* plan, the *peninsulares* rose against him and sent him back to Spain under arrest, then chose their own safely royalist viceroy in his place. That kept Mexico City quiet until September 16, 1810. In Guanajuato, just one hundred fifty miles north of the capital, a cabal of *creoles*, a local priest, and others aroused the smoldering unrest of the Indians and *mestizos* and broke out in rebellion. The *mestizos* looted Guanajuato, killing full-blooded

Spaniards regardless of caste and showing that once unleashed, their anger could be vented indiscriminately. The *peninsulares* and the *creoles* were forced to unite for their own survival. They immediately shifted their allegiance to the viceroy, who sent in forces to attempt to put down the rebellion and scatter its leaders.¹⁰

None of this escaped notice in Texas. Indeed, a few of the refugees from the quashing of the rebellion found their way across the Rio Grande, while the Mexico they left behind still teetered on the edge of a *mestizo* revolution. Mexican officials in Texas braced themselves in fear both of a similar outbreak in their own bailiwick and the spread of the existing rebellion northward. Almost monthly they saw more disruption to the south. In Nueva Santander loyalist forces ousted a governor, and then in Coahuila, just across the Rio Grande from Texas itself, the entire military force of the royalist governor changed sides to join the rebels as they advanced.

By January 1811 it appeared to men in Béxar as if the old Spanish regime was about to be ousted completely. The governor of Texas, Manuel de Salcedo, received credible information that revolutionary agents were acting in his own province, plotting to funnel arms and munitions from sources in the United States through Texas to the rebels. Salcedo remained loyal to Spain and arrested the agents, and then began to ready an expedition with his small force to assist in defending against the rebel advance. Yet on January 22 *béxareños* rose up and arrested Salcedo and all of the *peninsulares* in the area. This was no movement for local Texan independence, to be sure. The Béxar rebels were simply siding with the larger *creole* revolution against rule by the *peninsulares*—now called *gachupines*—and soon carried out a purge of their foes from all offices, confiscating their property. Their leader, Juan Bautista de las Casas, sent troops to Nacogdoches, arrested *gachupines* there, too, and then established a provisional government for the province in this new capital. It marked a milestone. For the first time, Texans themselves, both Spanish-blooded *creoles* and *mestizos*, acted as a regional people rather than as castes. It was the beginning of the "Texas spirit," the first time that Texas was seen as something more than an appendage to a larger entity, and the first time that Texas was its own political melting pot. The first true Texians, in this sense, were called *tejanos*, people of Spanish and Indian ancestry living in Texas. And now they had risen in rebellion.¹¹

Just as interesting, Casas sought to shift the center of power in Texas northeastward some two hundred fifty miles from San Antonio to Nacogdoches. In part, no doubt, he did so to place his provisional government that much farther away from any attempt by royalist forces to reimpose their power. But it cannot be denied that the move also put his capital a scant sixty-five miles from the Sabine River, and thus within easy reach of the United States. His motive is unclear, but that he was positioning it to be able to receive that same military aid from the Americans that had initially upset Salcedo seems inescapable, especially when representatives from the main body of revolutionaries in the interior passed through Béxar on their way to Nacogdoches and the United States to try to buy arms.

How much more he may have envisioned he never had time to reveal, for his revolution proved short-lived. Elements within Casas's own organization changed sides to the royalists still at large, and under the leadership of Juan Manuel Zambrano they soon waged a counterrevolution. In March, Casas was overthrown and sent south of the Rio Grande to Monclova, the capital of Coahuila, where he was tried and executed for treason. Now completely in charge, Zambrano created his own new ruling junta and declared for the royalist cause, placing Salcedo back in power. The revolution farther south in Mexico also disintegrated, and though the remnants of the revolutionaries planned to retreat into Texas toward the Sabine and safety in Louisiana, they were dispersed or captured by the end of March.

One of the few who escaped was José Bernardo Maximiliano Gutiérrez de Lara. He had been sent to Washington to try to excite support for the revolutionary cause, and thus was absent when the Casas regime collapsed. But he did not abandon his cause, nor would he. Surviving a Spanish plot to assassinate him on his journey, Gutiérrez met a warm reception on his trip to Washington. Along the way influential men wined and dined him, governors suggested that thousands of men could be forthcoming for his plans, and President James Madison and Secretary of State James Monroe listened as he outlined plans for a republican government in Texas and set his goal at enlisting enough adherents to invade Texas and reclaim it from the royalists. If that was all he could do, then Texas would be a free and independent republic, but his dream extended beyond that to using Texas as a springboard for sending liberating forces south into Mexico to drive out the royalists for good. He

asked for men and money, and most of all arms, and the president initially promised him ten thousand muskets and extensive credit, but the deal fell apart when Gutiérrez insisted that he must himself command any insurgency. Gutiérrez did not suspect that Madison cared little for Texas dreams in their own right, but had his own agenda, for with war with Britain looming, and Spain now allied with Britain, any distraction in Texas worked to Washington's advantage. For Gutiérrez an independent Texas was only a means, not the end in itself, but still for the next decade he would strive to keep alive the ambitions of one cadre of Hispanic people to release the colony from the grip of another. The drive to involve support, money, and manpower from the United States only widened the door opened by Nolan a decade before. Hereafter, no one looking toward a change of regime in Texas could do so without American influence and ambition being a part of the equation. After 1811, the center of revolutionary gravity for Texas shifted dramatically to the north and east, across the Sabine, to Louisiana, Mississippi, and even as far as the Potomac.

NO PLACE ON THE NORTH AMERICAN continent was destined to be the scene of so much revolutionary and insurrectionary activity as Texas. The background of revolt in Mexico and among its own *tejanos* merely set the stage for a generation of expeditions and invasions. Before 1811, with the exception of Philip Nolan's efforts, pressure had come only from the south, and within. Increasingly, Americans from the north now swarmed into Texas and catalyzed an already unstable solution. No sooner did Anglo-Americans east of the Mississippi feel secure in their own independence than they rapidly spread westward to the great river itself. In 1803, with the purchase of the vast Louisiana Territory from Napoleon, the grasp of the new United States in a single leap spanned the continent to the northwest Pacific coast, north to British Canada, and across the southwest along an ill-defined border with Spanish possessions. Of special importance to the story of Texas, however, was the fact that the border between that Spanish province and the Louisiana Territory was ambiguous at best.

The treaty of San Ildefonso, confirmed in October 1800, and by which Spain transferred Louisiana to the French, did not actually define the western boundary of the territory. It merely declared the line to be

the same as it had been when France previously owned the area. Napoleon soon declared that the southern boundary was the Gulf of Mexico, and the western one was the Rio Grande. When President Thomas Jefferson bought the territory in 1803, his negotiators tried to get a more precise definition, but the French insisted on retaining the vague wording used when they acquired it from Spain three years before. As a result, Jefferson himself was not at first certain that his acquisition extended any farther west than the north side of the Red River, which excluded almost all of modern Texas. Soon, however, he changed his mind. "We have some pretensions to extend the western territory of Louisiana to the Rio Norte [Grande], or Bravo," he confided in August 1803. However, having already gotten a remarkable bargain from Napoleon, Jefferson was reluctant to press for more. He would have to negotiate with Spain, which claimed that Texas had never been a part of Louisiana, but Spain was still a larger power in the hemisphere than the United States. Jefferson anticipated that Spain soon would be at war with France and hoped to press his advantage to make yet another bargain New World buy.¹²

The Spaniards felt nothing but chagrin at seeing Napoleon sell their onetime empire to the infant United States, for at a stroke it made the Americans a far more equal competitor for hegemony in the region. Furthermore, it now gave them a common border—wherever it might be—with the Yankees. Spain had already seen enough of the expansionist temper of the Americans to expect that such a border would really be little more impassable than a fence, for Spain already felt American expansionist pressure in Florida and Oregon. They wanted a buffer zone. Moreover, the Spaniards objected to Napoleon selling what they considered to be a part of their own territory. Negotiations commenced and continued during which they argued that the Red River was the true border of the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson and his Congress held to their own construction, and thus there was no settlement, though always Jefferson expected at some time to press his claim to the Rio Grande, even if he had to back it with more money to a war-strapped Spain.¹³

The difference went unsettled for years. In 1806 the United States and Spain conducted negotiations to agree on a so-called Neutral Ground, in order to avert unnecessary border friction. At one point Jefferson almost expected war with Spain to erupt over the boundary dispute. It did not, but they never finally agreed, as each side kept trying to press the buffer

zone east or west according to its interests.¹⁴ Not until 1819 and the Adams–Onís Treaty would the line finally—yet still tentatively—be set, and by that time Texas was already thoroughly embroiled in the kind of expansionist agitation the Spaniards feared from the first. The buffer had enclosed a strip roughly forty miles wide, running north and south between the Sabine on the west and the Calcasieu River on the east. The intent was that neither side was to occupy or settle the Neutral Ground, pending any subsequent definite settlement of the boundary, but there was no binding proscription on either side when it came to settlement. Into that sort of vacuum thousands of budding entrepreneurs, expansionists, and simple adventurers stood poised to leap.¹⁵

Regardless of the treaty, the result was an open invitation to those seeking the most liberal—and westerly—interpretation of the Louisiana boundary. Spain was no longer the power that once it was, and the revolutions of South America were sure to continue after Napoleon invaded Spain itself in 1807. Anglo adventurers from the United States, knowing Spain’s weakness and the claim the United States had to ownership of a substantial portion of the province by the Purchase, could hope—dream even—that if they simply marched into Texas and took it, the Spaniards would be too weak, distracted, and irresolute to stop them. Their own fellow Americans would be happy to take advantage of the position thus gained to lend them support and security. In short, whether legally purchased or not, Texas was there for the taking. Logic, the Purchase, geography even, all seemed to dictate that even if Texas was not part of the United States, it should be, and if not that, then still it ought to be free and independent of its Iberian masters. The term “Manifest Destiny” would not be coined for another generation to define American attitudes toward westward expansion, but the words were already reflected in the glimmer in the eyes of ambitious men who turned their gaze toward Texas.

The first American attempt to grab Texas may have lain within the still shadowy dreams of a onetime vice president of the United States, Aaron Burr of New York. In 1806 he organized a substantial party of men and set off down the Ohio toward the Mississippi, ostensibly aiming to seize Spanish West Florida, the region west of Pensacola that would later form portions of the states of Alabama, Mississippi, and the Louisiana parishes east of the Mississippi. He may have intended to create his own empire, or perhaps to take West Florida with a view to

annexation by the United States. Anglos living there had already been agitating to do the same thing for two years by this time. Some of them, especially the three Kemper brothers, were beginning there what would become virtual careers as revolutionaries.¹⁶ Reuben, Samuel, and Nathan Kemper were Virginians who moved to Spanish West Florida in 1801 and made turbulence a way of life thereafter, perpetually at odds with Spanish authorities as they divided their time between farming and tavern keeping, and fomenting one rebellion after another. Or Burr may have had grander dreams, for even as his expedition moved down the Ohio, rumors spread in Mexico that his aim was Texas. Whether true or not, it cannot be denied that a marked number of Burr's followers later became agitators in the drive to wrest Texas from Spain, and later Mexico.¹⁷

The Burr episode ended comically, with Burr and his men captured and the expedition broken up before it even reached the Mississippi River. Future, unequivocal, blows at Texas liberation would not be so easily disrupted, or so bloodlessly. By 1810, when Gutiérrez made his journey to Washington to seek official aid in a Mexican revolution against Spain, there were already hundreds of adventurers gravitating to west Louisiana and New Orleans in the hope of somehow joining an expedition into Texas for adventure, plunder, and perhaps to create a new state or nation. Though ultimately unsuccessful in his effort to gain Madison's aid in his scheme, Gutiérrez found a partner for his enterprise in Augustus W. Magee, who launched his own invasion of Texas in August 1812. Magee, a West Point graduate from Massachusetts, finished third in his class just four years before and seemed to be one of the most promising young officers in the army. But then in an episode of thwarted ambition of the kind that sent so many men to Texas, he was denied a promotion despite the earnest recommendation of his immediate superior, who just happened to be the ubiquitous General Wilkinson. Magee's frustration may account for his actions early in 1812, when he was stationed near the Neutral Ground to protect Spanish traders from marauding bandits. On one occasion when he captured two of the robbers, he tied them to trees, whipped them, then held hot coals to their backs in a needless act of torture before handing them over to civil authorities. Not content with that, he also burned their homes to the ground.

Unable to contain his anger at being refused promotion, the twenty-

four-year-old resigned his commission in June and went to the Neutral Ground to help organize the adventurers there gathered. Scores had come, among them Louisianians like Rezin Bowie and Warren D. C. Hall, and Magee whipped nearly one hundred fifty of them into a semblance of an "army," if such a word could be affixed to so small a force.¹⁸ Gutiérrez had hoped to command the force himself, but his vanity and pomposity discouraged any confidence in his ability, and thus he wound up only as second-in-command.

Magee enjoyed initial success in skirmishing with Spanish defenders once he crossed the Sabine. Soon he was in Nacogdoches, the Spaniards continuing to retreat before him or even deserting to the adventurers' banner. It looked as if the political center at San Antonio might be taken before long, and that within two months or more all of Texas would be in Magee's hands, though the once boastful Gutiérrez had now lost his nerve and seemed reluctant even to be with the command. Not so the adventurers who flocked to Magee in even greater numbers after his initial success. By mid-September more than seven hundred followed him when he set off for San Antonio. Fortune continued to favor the bold as Magee took La Bahía in November, but then he met determined Spanish resistance, his men began to desert, and suddenly he became pessimistic of his future chances. After he fell ill, his men lost their confidence in him and were ready to turn over the command to Samuel Kemper. Gutiérrez did nothing but stand on the periphery and watch. Magee died on February 6, 1813, of unknown causes, some said from fever, while others hinted at suicide, even assassination by poison.¹⁹

With Magee's death the expedition took renewed determination and a few days later drove the Spaniards in their front from the field. Suddenly all of Texas as far as San Antonio de Béxar lay open to them. When the capital at San Antonio itself fell to the invaders, it seemed nothing could halt the march toward an independent Texas. In a city now under the green flag of Texian independence, a few days saw the appearance—for the first time, but not the last—of a declaration of independence and a constitution for Texas. Yet it would also witness that swift and brutal violence that itself so often accompanied events in the province. When the Spaniards capitulated, fourteen of their officers remained, unable to get away with their commands, among them the Spanish governor of Texas, Manuel de Salcedo, and another Simón de Herrera, the governor of the neighboring province of Nueva Leon. On April 3 they were taken

out on the road from San Antonio, told they were being taken to the coast to be sent to the United States. They got only a mile and a half on the journey before the commander of their escort suddenly stopped the column, ordered the men to undress, robbed them, and then gave chilling orders. The escort drew swords and beheaded them one by one, not even allowing them to pray before their deaths. The executioners cut out Salcedo's tongue before they killed him.²⁰

The atrocity cast a pall over the remainder of the expedition. Some of the better men deserted, among them Warren D. C. Hall, of Natchitoches, who would be heard from again in Texas. Still, on April 6 they framed a declaration proclaiming themselves "free and independent" of Spain and asserting that henceforward they had no allegiance or duty to any foreign power. Not surprisingly, though no one knows who drafted the declaration, it showed some remarkable similarities to one issued in Philadelphia in 1776. Gutiérrez was asked to appoint a commission to frame a government and select a governor. Not surprisingly, Gutiérrez appointed himself governor, and he immediately published a proclamation opening Texas to settlement, especially encouraging Americans to come and make it their home. Unfortunately, he outlined the new government in a constitution that showed that he viewed himself more as a Spanish governor than a democratically responsible American one. In the newly created office of president-protector, he was in all but name an autocrat, all legislative acts subject to his approval. His constitution also revealed that Gutiérrez, at least, wanted Texas to be an independent nation, and not just a latterly claimed part of Louisiana. The first article of his constitution asserted that Texas was a part of the Republic of Mexico, even then struggling to wrest independence from Spain. Beyond this there were to be no gestures toward religious freedom. Texas, like Mexico, was a Catholic province.

There would be little opportunity for Gutiérrez to exercise his authority, however. That summer a Spanish command returned to attempt the retaking of San Antonio. Samuel Kemper had already left on furlough in disgust with Gutiérrez, and his successor in command of the army, Major Rueben Ross, resigned in June, to be succeeded by Major Henry Perry, who marched his nine hundred men out of San Antonio and drove back the would-be besiegers. That done, Perry joined with other American leaders, including advisers and wire pullers in the Madison administration, to maneuver the ouster of Gutiérrez and his replace-

ment. On August 3 Gutiérrez had no choice but to turn over his office and agree to be banished to the United States. The next day José Alvarez de Toledo took over, just in time to preside over the death of the first Texas revolution.

Knowing of the approach of a new Spanish army toward San Antonio, Toledo marched his own out to meet the foe. By August 18 Toledo had his army of about fourteen hundred men just east of the Medina River, a few miles outside Béxar. He did not expect Spanish forces to appear just yet, but when Perry saw an enemy officer appear on the horizon, he told Toledo the foe must be closer than they thought. Reasoning that the Spaniards would still be spread out along their line of march and somewhat disorganized, Perry argued that this was the moment to strike before the foe could form battle lines. Toledo agreed, and the little army set out, only to find itself on a hot, dusty march of two miles or more without sighting the Spaniards. They stopped for water when they came to the Medina, then saw another Spanish party, which quickly fled before them. Toledo and Perry did not realize that it was a feint designed to lure them into following the hastily retreating party back onto the Spaniards' main line. What started as a seemingly victorious pursuit turned into a hot, disorganizing march. Men fell out with thirst, the sand made walking exhausting, their cannon fell behind, and some men became unruly to the point of demoralizing others. Then they suddenly bumped into almost two thousand Spanish *soldados* well positioned in ambush. While most of the Americans in the little army still stood their ground after the initial surprise, even rushing forward to attack the enemy line, some Mexican companies with them refused to answer orders and after several hours simply left on their own. Seeing that, the Americans, too, joined in the retreat. The victors pursued, executing most of those whom they captured—primarily *tejanos* who had joined the revolutionaries, 327 in San Antonio alone—while the remainder of the Americans did not stop running, in most cases, until they reached Louisiana, bringing their families with them.²¹

In just three years Texas had suffered three revolts: one against royalist rule, one against the republicans, and now the repulse of the first insurrection fomented and supported by outside filibusters from the United States. From now on all of its internal upheavals would come at the hands of outsiders. Revolution and invasion would soon be hard to tell apart.