

‘Adelante, adelante—nunca pa atrás’:

Analyzing the Transformation of Tejane Racial Identity Throughout Nineteenth and Twentieth-  
Century Texas

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Who exactly qualifies as Tejane? Moreover, how do Tejanas identify themselves? These are questions which have puzzled both Texas and US political actors, as the incredibly diverse Mexican American community challenged—and continues to challenge—these regions' traditional delineations of identity as starkly categorical and segregated. In considering the particularly heterogeneous nature of Tejane heritage and identity, then, how have Texas and the United States racialized and re-configured this community into a largely homogenous 'racial identity' compatible with Texas and US constructs of race? An examination of nineteenth and twentieth-century Texas history reveals both the gradual racialization of the Tejane community by various imperial actors, and the consecutive impact this racialization had on Tejane identification and sociopolitical autonomy.

Through this writing, I will analyze the origin and transformation of the Tejane racial identity between 1820-1930. In studying this intricate time period, I will address two research questions central to understanding the development of Mexican American experience and identity within Texas: What role did imperialism play in shaping racial constructs and identity within Texas? And, how did Mexican Americans respond to and interact with these imperial-instituted racial constructs? As a Tejana, this research is significant to me as it allows me to both explore my own heritage while simultaneously increasing the representation of Mexican Americans and Latines within historical narratives—something I aspire to do within my future career. Through my writing, I hope to highlight an overarching theme which I emphasize throughout this research as central to understanding the larger, encompassing development of race and racial constructs within the United States: race—and racial identities deriving from the concept—were instituted through a highly segregationist and discriminatory imperial agenda. Additionally, through this writing, I hope to practice and contribute to the process several authors

have termed the ‘decolonization’ of history by centering Tejane voices and autonomy within my writing. In light of the violence and racism Mexican American communities continue to face throughout Texas and the larger United States, I hope to empower my community through highlighting our autonomy in navigating racialization and systemic discrimination throughout Texas, and US, history.

In order to facilitate the greatest clarity in understanding the formation of racial identities within Texas, I will divide this paper into two sections. The first of these will focus on the nineteenth century, demonstrating the role of Anglo-American, Spanish, and United States imperial actors in creating and forcefully instituting racial hierarchies within Texas. Through this section, I will address my first research question—that is, how imperialism shaped Texas racial constructs—contesting that imperialism, specifically as enacted by imperial actors, not only actively instituted the concept of ‘race’ within Texas, but also further developed what I will term a ‘racial hierarchy’ (interchangeably termed ‘racial order’) which treated certain communities—Mexican Americans, indigenous Americans, and African Americans—as inferior to Anglo Texans on the basis of their racialized ethnolinguistic background. Therefore, I further argue that race was consecutively enforced throughout nineteenth-century Texas through the unequal social, political, and economic treatment of Texans on the basis of their newly assigned racial identities. Within this first section of my paper, I will analyze two specific events in Texas history—the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War—which further evidence and strengthen this argument.

The second section of my paper centers nineteenth and early twentieth-century Tejane resistance to their racialization, as this community navigated and contested their newly racialized identity in order to secure greater sociopolitical, economic, and spatial autonomy in an

increasingly discriminatory Texas. Through this section, I hope to answer my second research question—that is, how Mexican Americans navigated new imperial-implemented racial constructs—through highlighting how Tejanas reacted to racial constructs instituted within Texas. I will continue interweaving discussion of my first question—that is, the role of imperialism in institutionalizing race in Texas—within my discussion of Tejana resistance. However, through this section, I hope to center Mexican American perspectives and voices over those of imperial agents—an aspect of my writing intended to counter traditional imperial-centric teachings of both Texas and race.

In beginning such an intricate and multifaceted study, I will delineate here how I plan to define terminology central to this research. In particular, I would like to highlight the rhetoric I will use to connote specific demographic communities living within nineteenth and twentieth-century Texas. I will utilize the terms ‘Mexican American’ and ‘Tejano(a/e)’ interchangeably throughout this paper to connote individuals living within Texas who are ethnically Mexican. I would like to note here that the term ‘Tejana’ is a contemporary, gender neutral (e.g. ‘Latine’ versus the Anglicized ‘Latinx’) form of the traditionally heavily gendered Spanish terminology. In attempting to create a more inclusive and encompassing dialogue, I will use the term ‘Tejana’ when referring to the general Mexican American community residing within Texas. In referring to individuals originating directly from Mexico living either within Texas, Mexico, or both, I will use the term ‘Mexican.’ I will use the terms ‘Anglo,’ ‘Anglo American,’ and ‘Anglo Texan’ interchangeably to refer to individuals living within the Texas region ethnically descended from Europe, and in particular, from the Anglo-Saxon or Iberian regions. I will occasionally utilize the term ‘Spanish,’ versus encompassing it under ‘Anglo,’ in order to more closely specify which European actor I am referring to. It is important to note here that I will not refer to Mexicans,

Tejanas, Spanish, or Anglos as singularly ‘American,’ as each group played a role in invading and colonizing indigenous spaces—the only group who, in my opinion, can legitimately be considered ‘American.’ Yet, I conversely recognize the colonial roots of the label, ‘American,’ making it highly problematic to refer to indigenous communities as ‘American.’ Therefore, when possible, I will label indigenous and Native ‘American’ communities through their own culture’s terminology in the hopes of creating a more inclusive and de-colonized writing.

### *Part One*

This first section of my research is dedicated to understanding the role of imperialism in shaping racial constructs and ideology within Texas. Through this, I will demonstrate the role of imperialism in introducing racial constructs and imposing racialized identity specifically onto the Tejana community. Due to the particularly diverse assortment of imperial actors—Spanish, Mexican, Anglo American—involved in Texas politics during the nineteenth century, my research here will concentrate on the nineteenth century as it was particularly demonstrative of this section’s focus on imperialism. I argue that imperial actors not only intentionally constructed the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘racial identity’ within Texas, but further instituted what I will term throughout this writing to be a ‘racial hierarchy’ within the region, which established Anglo superiority over non-Anglo communities on the basis of ‘race.’ Additionally, I will show how imperial actors established racial hierarchies within Texas to more easily facilitate the colonization and economic exploitation of the region and its peoples.<sup>1</sup> Through the rhetoric of race, communities claiming an Anglo—or as it would be labeled within the racial hierarchy, ‘white’—race were perpetuated as biologically, culturally, and politically superior to non-Anglo (termed ‘non-white’) or mixed-race communities. These racial identities, in turn, were forcefully

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<sup>1</sup> G. Reginald Daniel, “From Multiracial to Monoracial: The Formation of Mexican American Identities in the U.S. Southwest,” *Genealogy* 6, no. 2 (Jun. 2022): 30-33.

implemented onto Texans through both violence and degrading social, political, and economic treatment of ‘non-white’ communities, including Tejanas. Through this section, I emphasize race and *ideological* labels deriving from the construct—that is, ‘white,’ ‘black,’ ‘brown’—as precisely that: purely ideological. Additionally, I aim to dismantle the colonialist roots of race as a construct throughout my paper, and through this further reveal how deeply entrenched imperialist vernacular continues to be within even our most basic rhetoric and identifiers.

In analyzing nineteenth-century constructs of race, I will briefly explicate the two major conceptualizations of race established by Texas’s two major colonizers: Spain and the United States. I would like to establish here that the reason I did not choose to additionally discuss Mexico’s role as a colonizer within Texas is twofold. First, Mexico is in itself a product of colonialism, with its primarily mixed-race population yielded from the violence of Spanish conquest upon indigenous communities. Therefore, I argue that Mexico’s conceptualizations of race and racial hierarchy were largely a product of, and even instituted by, Spanish colonialism, thereby making it more coherent to study the origins of this racial hierarchy directly from its institutor, that is, Spain. Second, and perhaps most significantly, Mexico ruled over Texas (known as the Texas-Coahuila region) for an incredibly brief period of time (a mere 15 years.) Due to this, I decided to focus my research on the role of Texas’s most impactful—defined in this paper by longevity—imperial actors, that is, Spain and the United States.

Consistent within both of these imperial powers’ conceptualizations of ‘race’ was an explicit favoring of Anglo, labeled ‘white,’ peoples as inherently superior to non-Anglo or mixed-race, labeled ‘non-white,’ communities. Though both imperial powers favored Anglos within their racial hierarchies, Spanish and Anglo American colonizers practiced starkly contrasting approaches to establishing these racial orders within their colonies. Perhaps the most

critical of these distinctions for this research was the enactment—or banning—of miscegenation, a practice which yielded diverse, mixed-race populations. Spanish imperial agents utilized miscegenation to increase Spanish populations and political control within their colonies (e.g. Mexico,) while Anglo Americans vehemently objected to the practice, developing an incredibly segregated racial hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> Due to the centrality of slavery in building and maintaining Anglo American colonies (e.g. the United States,) the Anglo racial order explicitly delineated a segregation between ‘whites’ and ‘blacks,’ but provided no identification or recognition of other racialized, non-Anglo or mixed-race communities who did not fit into this limited binary. This particular element of the Anglo racial hierarchy is crucial to understanding later developments of race and racial identity during the Anglo colonization of Texas. Due to the severe polarization of the Anglo American racial order, racial groups that did not conform to this racial binary—such as the multiracial Mexican American community—were incompatible and literally undefinable within this conceptualization of race. Therefore, Mexican Americans were simultaneously a product of colonialism (through Spanish miscegenation) and an unclassifiable enigma of the (Anglo) racial hierarchy.

Understanding the complex history of Anglo-Tejane relations throughout the early nineteenth century evidences the pivotal roles of the Texas Revolution (1834-1836) and the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) in consecutively reconstructing these ethnolinguistic communities’ relations. I argue that the racialization of Tejanos was first initiated during the Texas Revolution, and later accelerated by the Mexican-American War, as both events developed and consolidated racial hierarchies which were used to establish and justify Anglo political, social, and economic supremacy. Through this, social, political, and spatial relations

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel, “From Multiracial to Monoracial,” 1-2.

between Anglo and Tejana communities were radically transformed. I further contest that this process of racialization was part of the larger ‘Anglicization of Texas’ resulting from Anglo American victories within both the Texas Revolution and the Mexican-American War. For Tejanas, this institutionalization of race resulted in their racialization and consecutive subjugation on the basis of their newly proscribed and uniquely confusing identity as legally ‘white’ under the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, but socially ‘non-white.’ Through this seemingly contradictory labeling, Tejanas’ political, economic, social, and spatial autonomy was severely restricted, and questions regarding Mexican American ‘identity’ and belonging only further heightened.

Early nineteenth-century Texas was, contrary to latter delineations within imperial narratives, incredibly diverse and multicultural. Indigenous Americans—specifically, Tonkawa, Lipán Apache, Karankawa, Comanche, Caddo—Tejanas, Mexicans, African Americans, and Anglo Americans co-existed, navigated, and contested Texas’s diverse and spacious terrain.<sup>3</sup> Despite officially being a Mexican colony, Texas (known at the time as Coahuila-Texas) was a primarily indigenous American space well into the nineteenth century. Tejanas and Mexicans comprised a small portion of the Texas population during the early nineteenth century (an estimated 2,000 inhabitants as of 1820,) with most concentrated within the San Antonio-Goliad region.<sup>4</sup> In conjunction with Mexico’s colonization efforts, beginning in the 1820s, Anglo Americans began migrating to Texas at a rapid rate, with an estimated 1,000 per year between 1823-1830 and 3,000 per year by 1831.<sup>5</sup> The primary drive for Anglo migration to Texas—

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<sup>3</sup> Omar S. Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 47-49.

<sup>4</sup> Andrés Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier: Texas and New Mexico, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 20-21.

<sup>5</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier*, 21-22.



cotton—is critical to understanding the consecutive relationships developed between newly arrived Anglo settlers and their indigenous, Mexican, and Tejane neighbors.<sup>6</sup> Close in proximity to economically flourishing US markets within the American South, Texas provided a promising economic opportunity for Anglo Americans to further pursue capitalism.<sup>7</sup> Their consecutive introduction of greater economic (capitalism) and human (slavery) resources into Texas during the 1820s and 1830s intensified an already highly competitive socioeconomic sphere. Therefore, Texas’s significant diversity was a significant factor in the consecutive success of capitalism within the region, as various communities delineated among ethnolinguistic—and not racial—lines competed to secure resources and political power.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Native Americans, Tejanas, Mexicans, and Anglo Americans all actively engaged with US capitalist markets, seeking to access greater economic and political resources, and through this, spatial claims to Texas.

Crucially, race did not yet play a role in Texas communities’ interactions. The one exception to this point which I wish to emphasize, due to their frequent overlooking within Texas history, is the experience of African Americans, who were subject to the incredible violence, oppression, and racism of the existing Anglo racial binary, as evidenced through their forced migration to Texas as economic property (slavery).<sup>9</sup> Though the Anglo binary was not yet explicitly present within Texas (with the above exception,) nor did it yet racialize Tejane communities, the discriminatory culture of this binary was becoming evident in Texas in other ways. One of the most striking of these was Anglo Americans’ consistent settlement into highly segregated *colonias* within Texas, despite the Mexican Government’s encouragement of

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Teresa Palomo Acosta and Ruthe Winegarten, “The Status Of Women In The Colonial Period,” in *Las Tejanas: 300 Years of History* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 39.

<sup>6</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier*, 162.

<sup>7</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 129-130.

<sup>8</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier*, 55.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel, “From Multiracial to Monoracial,” 32-33.

multinational and multiethnic settlements.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, Anglo settlers consistently destroyed capitalist endeavors strikingly on the basis of seemingly ethnolinguistic lines. Tejanos and Mexicans were frequently run out of business by Anglo competitors, while major trade routes (Santa Fe Trail, Texas-Louisiana trade) simultaneously became dominated by exclusively Anglo communities.<sup>11</sup> Indigenous American communities were the most violently and adversely affected by these increasingly aggressive relations, as Anglo settlers and traders violently forced indigenous communities out of their homelands in order to secure capitalist opportunities.

Several themes arise within this discussion of early nineteenth-century Texas. First, Texas politics during this period were heavily influenced by capitalism, and through this, by the United States. This heightening of capitalistic endeavors intensified Texas's dependence on economic trade with the United States, a development which—as most observable following the Mexican-American War—would sharply impact future Texas politics. Second, and perhaps most critically for this writing, capitalist endeavors by all ethnolinguistic communities within Texas yielded deeply regional affiliations and attachments rather than attachment to a particular racial, ethnic, or national label. Identity within early nineteenth-century Texas was therefore incredibly fluid. Rather than classifications based on race, identity was primarily determined by regional affiliation and ability to secure socioeconomic and political resources. Racial hierarchies, though somewhat present ('white'/'black' binary,) were not yet applied to Tejanos communities. Rather, as I will evidence within the following paragraphs, this racialization would occur following the tumultuous events of the Texas Revolution.

The Texas Revolution of 1834-1836 was one of two major events which I argue initiated the racialization of Tejanos, and to a larger extent, anyone of Mexican heritage. I further contend

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<sup>10</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier*, 117.

that this racialization developed following this historic event due to its heightening of already present biases against non-Anglo, and in particular Mexican and Mexican American, populations, as the War was fought on largely ethnolinguistic lines. Though I would like to acknowledge the consequences of the Texas Revolution for indigenous American and African American communities, for the purposes of this paper's topic, I plan to specifically examine the racialization of Mexican Americans following the Texas Revolution. My focus on the racialization of Tejanos also allows me to emphasize the community's historic ethnic, linguistic, and national diversity. Through focusing on such a diverse community, I will further emphasize the homogenizing, incomprehensive, and generally inaccurate dimensions of the Anglo racial binary instituted within Texas.

In considering the argument I have put forth above, it may seem somewhat counterintuitive to begin with a discussion of the Texas Revolution's initial cross-cultural support.<sup>12</sup> Tejanos, Mexicans, Native Americans, and Anglo Americans all contested the centrist and economically restrictive decisions of the Mexican Government.<sup>13</sup> Increasingly connected to the United States by capitalism, Texas communities generally supported opposition to the conservative Mexican Government and the complete secession of Texas from Mexico in order to further expand economic and political opportunities. Therefore, upon the beginning of the Texas Revolution in 1834, many Tejanos supported and even fought alongside Anglo revolutionaries—a fact frequently excluded within traditional presentations of the Revolution.<sup>14</sup> Critically, however, it was the Texas Revolution which triggered intensifying anti-Mexican and anti-Tejano

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<sup>12</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier*, 149.

<sup>13</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier*, 152-153.  
Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Reséndez, *Changing National Identities At The Frontier*, 166.

sentiment among Anglo Texans, despite widespread Tejane support for the Anglo cause throughout the war:

The Texans are a bold, chivalrous, enterprising people, they consider the Mexicans a feeble, dastardly, superstitious priest-ridden race of mongrels, composed of Spanish, Indian, and negro blood and are always willing to fight them or the Indians five to one.<sup>15</sup>

Fighting within a largely Spanish-speaking, Mexican-dominated area of Texas (e.g. San Antonio,) underlying Anglo prejudices against the Mexican and Mexican American communities became more explicit, as the Texas Revolution divided itself into fighting units rooted in ethnic and national difference.<sup>16</sup> Anti-Mexican prejudice only deepened following Texas's secession and rapid anglicization following an Anglo Texan victory against Mexico in 1836, initiating further economic, spatial, and political displacement of Mexican Americans in favor of Anglo settlers.<sup>17</sup>

It is worth ruminating on particular aspects of Mexican Americans' racialization during the Texas Revolution in order to better highlight how race was connoted and institutionalized within nineteenth-century Texas. First, it is apparent from this historical event that racial identity within Anglo Texan constructs was determined largely through an individual's ethnicity, heredity, phenotype, and language. This emphasis on external, genetic variables is most evidenced by Anglo Texans' consecutive labeling of *all* individuals of Mexican ancestry—including Tejanas who fought alongside them during the Texas Revolution—as the same racial 'other.' Furthermore, it is interesting to note the violent setting in which Tejanas were racialized and, considering the 'us' (Anglo) versus 'them' (Mexican) mentality of the Revolution,

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Milton Nance and Joseph Eve, "A Letter Book of Joseph Eve, United States Chargé d'Affaires to Texas, Part III," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (Apr. 1940): 494.

<sup>16</sup> David Montejano, "The Rivalship of Peace," in *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 24.

<sup>17</sup> Valerio Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 8.  
Acosta and Winegarten, *Las Tejanas*, 40.

politically demonized within Anglo racial constructs, fueling later colonial desires to purge ‘antagonistic’ Mexican Americans from Texas in order to protect Anglo Texan liberty. This labeling therefore demonstrates the limited and homogenizing aspect of the racial hierarchy, and subsequent racial identities, instituted within Texas. The Texas Revolution additionally unintentionally reveals the racially charged atmosphere of the young Republic of Texas, and, as I contest, the reasons for instigating the Revolution in itself. Through this analysis, the Texas Revolution is revealed to have been intended as a political, economic, and spatial victory for Anglo Texans—exclusively. The Texas Revolution was therefore in itself a pivotal moment for institutionalizing not only the racialization of Tejanas, but also white supremacy within Texas.

In its brief 11-year life span, the Republic of Texas developed an increasingly solidified racial hierarchy, enacting the blatant racialization of, and racially-targeted discrimination against, Tejana communities. Violence against Tejanas—such as the pillaging of Tejana-majority towns, outright theft of Tejana property, and physical assault—was rampant throughout the Republic. Anglo Texans transferred their post-war animosity towards Mexico onto Tejanas.<sup>18</sup> This racially-targeted violence evidenced the explicit racial labels Anglo Texans imposed on Mexican Americans, as they (inaccurately) labeled Tejanas as indistinguishable from Mexicans on the basis of their (frequently) shared phenotype, language, and ethnicity. Furthermore, Anglo Texans attempted to enforce a homogenous racial identity onto Tejanas due to confusion over, and fear of, this community’s multiracial heritage. Reflecting the traditional Anglo racial conceptualization practiced within the United States, Anglo Texans did not want to lose their nation’s supposed homogeneously ‘white’ racial purity through mixing or interacting with multiracial communities. As a result, Anglo Texans enacted increasing amounts of racially-

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<sup>18</sup> Montejano, “The Rivalship of Peace,” 26-29.

targeted violence onto Tejane communities throughout the 1830s on the basis of their delegated non-Anglo race, with heightening distinctions made between Anglo Texans' 'whiteness' and Tejanas' 'non-whiteness.'<sup>19</sup> This labeling of Mexican Americans as a non-white racial 'other' marked a significant transformation in the traditional Anglo racial hierarchy, as the binary expanded from a 'white versus black' classification system to that of 'white versus non-white.'

Facing hostility and tensions with Mexico following its secession, the Republic of Texas renewed its efforts to be annexed by the United States a mere 11 years after its formation. As evidenced through transformations instituted under the Republic of Texas, Tejanas were gradually being profiled and labeled as a distinct, non-white 'race' throughout the mid-nineteenth century. The initiation of the Mexican-American War in 1846 to secure Texas—and nearly a third of Mexico—as economic property for the United States only further intensified this process of racialization against Tejanas. Perhaps best reflected through the name it is referred to within Mexico, 'The War of North American Invasion,' the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) dramatically increased racially-targeted violence and institutionalized discrimination against Tejanas. The unfathomable degree of atrocities, racially-targeted violence, socioeconomic plunder, and chaos instigated by United States soldiers throughout Mexico and the Republic of Texas during the Mexican-American War was so horrific that it remains one of the only wars within US history to be un-commemorated by the United States Government and largely erased within US historical narratives.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps most infamously remembered about this otherwise forgotten War was the role of the Texas Rangers, a group of Anglo American *volunteers* bent on lynching, murdering, and committing genocide against Mexicans, Mexican

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<sup>19</sup> Daniels, "From Multiracial to Monoracial," 37.  
Montejano, "The Rivalship of Peace," 29.

<sup>20</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 136-137.

Americans—regardless of national affiliation—and indigenous Americans.<sup>21</sup> For Texas, the War resulted in its annexation to the United States, resulting in a massive, subsequent wave of Anglo immigration into the new state.<sup>22</sup> Politically and economically devastated from their defeat in the War, Mexico was forced to sign the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which—critically for Tejane communities—promised all newly incorporated Mexicans in the United States the rights of citizens:

[Article VIII] In the said territories, property of every kind, now belonging to Mexicans not established there, shall be inviolably respected. The present owners, the heirs of these, and all Mexicans who may hereafter acquire said property by contract, shall enjoy with respect to it guarantees equally ample as if the same belonged to citizens of the United States.

[Article IX] The Mexicans who, in the territories aforesaid, shall not preserve the character of citizens of the Mexican Republic, conformably with what is stipulated in the preceding article, shall be incorporated into the Union of the United States and be admitted at the proper time (to be judged of by the Congress of the United States) to the enjoyment of all the rights of citizens of the United States, according to the principles of the Constitution; and in the mean time, shall be maintained and protected in the free enjoyment of their liberty and property, and secured in the free exercise of their religion without; restriction.<sup>23</sup>

In Texas, this demographic of newly-incorporated Mexican Americans was roughly 100,000.<sup>24</sup>

Despite comprising a vast majority of Texas’s population upon its annexation, Tejanas were gradually stripped of their political, economic, and cultural autonomy within the newly established state on the basis of their now overtly labeled ‘non-white’ *race*. According to the racial hierarchy now firmly instituted within Texas, non-white (Tejane) populations needed to be

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<sup>21</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 137.

Acosta and Winegarten, *Las Tejanas*, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 140-142.

<sup>23</sup> The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo articles 8-9, February 2, 1848, Yale Law School, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/guadhida.asp#art8](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/guadhida.asp#art8).

Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 139.

Daniel, “From Multiracial to Monoracial,” 37.

<sup>24</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 139.

removed—and even eliminated—to provide white (Anglo) communities with the greatest socioeconomic and spatial opportunities, and to additionally maintain homogenous, white racial ‘purity’ throughout the United States:

[referring to Mexican Americans in Texas] It was that of an *old race* passing away—a *new race* [Anglo Americans] pressing on its departing footsteps—a new scene in the *history of the Country, a possession by conquest*.<sup>25</sup>

Anglo Americans used multiple tactics to racialize and strip Tejane communities of their autonomy following the Mexican-American War, and through this, further institutionalized Tejane’s status as second (or third)-class, ‘non-white’ citizens within Texas. Tejanas were stripped of their political autonomy through their criminalization within the Texas legal system, resulting in disproportionately high levels of Mexican American incarceration and further denial from participation in legal or court settings.<sup>26</sup> Tejanas were robbed of their property through legal and extralegal means, the illegal invasion and settlement of squatters onto their land, and (following the Civil War) their forced participation in the system of indebted labor when they could not pay taxes—a process bearing an eerie resemblance to slavery.<sup>27</sup> Even Mexican American culture was targeted, as exemplified through Texas’s subsequent banning of traditional Mexican cultural events within the state upon its annexation to the United States.<sup>28</sup> Above all, institutionalized racism and perpetual fear was enforced on Tejanas through violence, as seen through the widespread deportation of Mexican Americans, military occupation of Tejane-majority towns, segregation of towns and schools, police brutality against Mexican Americans,

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<sup>25</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 133.

<sup>26</sup> Acosta and Winegarten, *Las Tejanas*, 46-47.

<sup>27</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 186.

Daniel, “From Multiracial to Monoracial,” 38.

<sup>28</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 151-152.



disproportionate incarceration of Tejanas, and racially-targeted lynching.<sup>29</sup> The results of the Mexican-American War for Tejanas was, in short, cultural, spatial, and physical genocide.

These tactics used to enact racialization and discrimination against Tejanas varied greatly by region within the new 'lone star' state. Regions of Texas with Anglo-majority populations enacted racialized discrimination onto Tejanas much more rapidly than did areas with Tejanas-dominant demographics, as reflected through these regions' abilities to maintain Mexican American traditions and culture to a much greater extent, as still noticeable in Texas to this day (e.g. San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Brownsville.) Another critical distinction in how the process of racialization was delineated within Texas was based upon class distinctions. Many elite Tejanas negotiated and bartered Texas' economic and political situation alongside the state's growing Anglo population, to the detriment of lower-class, impoverished, and recently immigrated Mexican Americans.<sup>30</sup> Though class was significant during the mid-nineteenth century in preserving socioeconomic autonomy for wealthier segments of the Tejanas population, this favoritism of upper-class Tejanas soon eroded in the face of growing Anglo populations hungry for socioeconomic and spatial opportunities.<sup>31</sup> According to the ever omnipotent US racial hierarchy, even the most elite classes of 'mixed-race' or 'non-white' Tejanas were inferior to (supposedly) authentically 'white' Anglo populations, and therefore needed to be gradually weakened in political and economic power as increasing amounts of Anglo settlers arrived in Texas.

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<sup>29</sup> Montejano, "The Rivalship of Peace," 37-38.  
Montejano, "The Structure of the New Order," 162.  
Daniel, "From Multiracial to Monoracial," 40.  
Acosta and Winegarten, *Las Tejanas*, 86-87.

<sup>30</sup> David Montejano, "Introduction," in *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987): 7.

<sup>31</sup> Acosta and Winegarten, *Las Tejanas*, 46-47.

Two aspects of Tejanas' gradual racialization throughout the nineteenth century are particularly revealing to understanding how the concept of race was connoted, and in itself gradually transforming, within Texas. Contrary to early nineteenth-century connotations of (at the time) non-racialized identity as highly fluid and subjective, the introduction of state-led, racially-targeted violence against Tejanas following the Texas Revolution and Mexican-American War transformed delineations of identity, within Texas through re-creating the concept as a static, biological, and permanent 'racial' construct. In particular, the role of the penal system and police—and the violence delegated by both towards the racially 'othered' Tejanas community—reflects transformations in both the fluidity previously associated with identity in Texas, and additionally, the introduction of the state as a conduit through which this violence could be enforced. Contrary to the unorganized and decentralized wave of hate crimes against Tejanas following the Texas Revolution, the Mexican-American War institutionalized violence against, and persecution of, Tejanas on an unprecedented level.

An additional theme which is particularly noteworthy is the observable transformation in the rhetoric being used by imperial actors to enact this racialization within Texas following the Mexican-American War. One aspect of this rhetoric which I found particularly interesting was Anglo Americans' legitimation of the newly-instituted racial hierarchy through describing 'non-white' races as 'ancient' and 'primeval,' while 'white' races were presented as 'new' and 'advanced'—and through this logic, a welcome and 'modernizing' change to Texas.<sup>32</sup> By way of this highly racialized and condescending logic, the 'old' races (Tejanas) must be replaced—and even eliminated entirely—by the 'new' (Anglo.) This is strikingly resemblant of the rhetoric used to justify the genocide and racialization of indigenous Americans, an atrocity

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<sup>32</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 133.  
Daniels, "From Multiracial to Monoracial," 37.

simultaneously occurring alongside Tejane persecution within Texas throughout the nineteenth century. Perhaps most critically, however, this transformation in rhetoric reflects the development of both racial hierarchies and genocidal thought within connotations of now racialized identity.

*Part Two*

Having investigated the role of imperialism and (specifically) imperial actors in largely introducing and institutionalizing race within Texas, I will dedicate this second section of my paper to analyzing several methods through which Tejanas responded to these newly-implemented racial identities and hierarchies. I would like to stress the particular significance of this section of my paper, as my writing moves away from the more traditional scholarly focus on imperial actors and, instead, centers Mexican American autonomy and agency within this narrative. In examining Tejanas' resistance against their racialization and persecution, I will examine two specific socio-political methods—interethnic marriage and the court (legal) system—through which this community re-negotiated their racialized identities and further challenged institutionalized racism in order to secure greater autonomy within an increasingly discriminatory Texas. I recognize that there are a large assortment of socio-political methods far beyond the scope of this research which additionally evidence Tejanas resistance to racialization, but for the purpose of this relatively short writing, I will focus on the above two methods. Through addressing my second research question, I hope to highlight the role of Tejanas in navigating and contesting their proscribed racial identity within a deeply segregated, violent, and racist Texas, and through this, participate in the larger de-colonization of Texas history through centering these 'minority' perspectives.

Often overlooked within narratives of Tejanas history, Mexican American women were at the forefront of resistance against their subjugation and discrimination within the Texas racial hierarchy. Contrary to their 'hypereroticized' and 'crazed' depictions within Anglo American media, Tejanas carefully assessed their rapidly transforming society, using their political and

sexual autonomy to protect and even expand their economic, spatial, and social agency.<sup>33</sup> In particular, upper-class Tejanas arranged and entered interethnic marriages with Anglo men in order to legally cement ownership of their existing property, wealth, and social status following the Mexican-American War. These interethnic marriages were simultaneously beneficial for Anglo Texans, as newly emigrated men sought greater economic, social, and spatial resources within Texas.<sup>34</sup> The practice of interethnic marriage with Anglo men was available primarily to wealthy, upper-class Tejanas. While more impoverished, lower-class Tejanas did also participate in inter-ethnic marriages during the nineteenth century (largely to African American and indigenous American men,) the use of this practice to secure greater economic and political opportunity was almost exclusively available to upper-class women. This was due to Anglo Texans' connotation of this social strata of Tejanas as racially 'white' on the basis of their elevated economic position, while lower-class Tejanas were generally labeled as racially 'non-white.'<sup>35</sup> The labeling of upper-class Tejanas as socially 'white' did not correlate to Anglo's acceptance of them as genuinely racially 'white.' Rather, upon marriage, Anglo men frequently emphasized their Tejana wives' 'Spanish' blood, and encouraged them to participate in Anglo American, rather than Mexican, traditions in order to distance themselves from what was considered to be 'non-white' heritage.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, despite Tejanas' successful utilization of interethnic marriage to secure greater autonomy, their socioeconomic class did not fully exempt them from racialization within their new Anglo Texas communities.

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<sup>33</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 153.

Acosta and Winegarten, *Las Tejanas*, 53-55.

<sup>34</sup> Montejano, "The Rivalship of Peace," 34-37.

<sup>35</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 202-203.

<sup>36</sup> Acosta and Winegarten, *Las Tejanas*, 52-55.

Though anti-miscegenation laws were established in Texas in 1837, Tejanas claimed racial ‘whiteness’ to bypass this legal impediment through embracing the rhetoric of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which guaranteed all incorporated Mexicans “the enjoyment of all rights of citizens of the United States as guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore through the US legal system—one which treated Mexican Americans as ‘white but not equal’—Tejanas utilized their legal ‘whiteness’ to defend and seek greater, spatial, political, and economic autonomy through interethnic marriage. Through the US legal system, Tejanas both secured greater sociopolitical agency in an increasingly discriminatory society, and also—perhaps most critically—simultaneously challenged the solidity of the newly implemented racial hierarchy. Through embracing their (inaccurately) proscribed racial identity, Tejanas challenged the hierarchy’s labelings, re-introducing identity fluidity—common, as discussed in section one, prior to the Texas Revolution—and, simultaneously through this, establishing Mexican American resistance against such confining and discriminatory systems. Perhaps most ingenious about this form of resistance was that it was completely legal. As a result, Tejanas technically demonstrated no threat to dismantling or challenging Anglo racial hierarchies—while simultaneously exploiting them to their own benefit.

In analyzing Tejana resistance against the Texas racial hierarchy, several elements emerge which were unobservable from an imperial-oriented perspective. First, Tejanas’ successful contestation of their racialization and latter classification demonstrated racial identity to continue to be—despite all attempts of the Texas state—fluid. Perhaps most significantly to my research, however, Tejanas’ navigation and successful contestation of the racial hierarchy demonstrates the resourcefulness of termed ‘non-white’ communities in developing empowering

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<sup>37</sup> Valerio-Jiménez, *River of Hope*, 139.

and creative alternatives to reclaiming their identity under a deeply violent and oppressive government. In attempting to perpetuate narratives which contradict notions of total imperial domination over ‘colonized’ peoples, I argue that nineteenth-century Tejanas’ stories of interethnic marriage, love, and resilience in the face of institutionalized violence both counters this commonly (and falsely) perpetuated imperial-centric narrative, and additionally sheds light on the perseverance, intelligence, and resourcefulness of the Tejane community.

Despite enacting incredible amounts of violence and oppression, the Texas legal system was simultaneously utilized and challenged by Tejanas to secure greater sociopolitical autonomy within an increasingly racist and violent Texas. Much like Tejanas did through entering interethnic marriages with Anglo men, Tejanas embraced their legal ‘whiteness’—enshrined within the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo—throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in order to provide legal justification for their right to alleviation (and, furthermore, the illegality) of their experienced discrimination and segregation within Texas society.<sup>38</sup> Through this, Tejanas invoked the rhetoric of race to counter both the instituted Anglo racial hierarchy and their seemingly contradictory experience with discrimination as legally ‘white’ people. Tejane court cases invoking this rhetoric pertained specifically to demands for the alleviation of Jim Crow-implemented discrimination (such as segregated schools,) securing greater political and social autonomy (such as being allowed to serve on the Texas courts,) and contesting discrimination based on ‘race’ or ethnicity.<sup>39</sup> The rhetoric of race, in a sense, became a tool for Tejanas to both contest their racialization, and subsequently experienced discrimination, and reclaim their identity.

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<sup>38</sup> Clare Sheridan, “‘Another White Race:’ Mexican Americans and the Paradox of Whiteness in Jury Selection.” *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 109-110.

<sup>39</sup> Ariela J. Gross, “Texas Mexicans and the Politics of Whiteness,” *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 197-199

The rhetoric of race, however, was simultaneously used to counter and even at times blatantly deny Mexican Americans of their sociopolitical, economic, and even physical autonomy. Rather than acknowledge the blatant racism presented by Tejanas through the court system, Anglo Texans exploited the rhetoric of whiteness to attempt to further silence and erase Mexican Americans from Texas. Tejanas claiming whiteness, Anglo court officials countered, connoted that it was therefore impossible for them to experience discrimination or racism on the basis of race, as they were—according to the law—'white.'<sup>40</sup> Through this argument, Anglo Texans both denied Tejanas sociopolitical autonomy and, perhaps even more critically, refused to recognize a separate or unique 'Mexican American' identity or experience. Texas court systems therefore served as a particularly sinister cultural and identity eraser, transforming Mexican Americans from a racial 'other' to a completely unacknowledged and homogenized 'white' community.

Tejanas' complicated and deeply challenging relationship with the Texas legal system reveals several elements of racial identity and construction reflective of broader, nineteenth and twentieth-century conceptualizations of race. Perhaps most demonstrated through Tejanas' contestation of their racialization is the extreme subjectivity of race and racial identity. The discrepancy in nineteenth and twentieth-century Texas courts' actions reveal race, and racial identity, to be purely human constructs. This subjectivity further reveals the role of race as an imperial and colonial weapon for political, social, and economic control—an aspect which I have attempted to insinuate throughout my writing, but now explicitly evidence through Texas courts' consistent failure to follow their own previously explicated racial constructs in order to continue subjugating 'non-white' and even socially 'white' communities.

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<sup>40</sup> Gross, "Texas Mexicans and the Politics of Whiteness," 199.



What is therefore deeply moving to observe within this otherwise incredibly violent narrative is the continuous element of defiance and resistance against such shameless oppression. Rather than submit to the subjugating rhetoric of race, Tejanas attempted to embrace and re-define their racialization to their benefit. Resilience and ingenuity are themes seen time and time again within the Tejane community. Through recounting their frequently silenced and minimalized presence in and contribution to Texas history, I hope to honor their—our—continued fight for sociopolitical, economic, and spatial justice.

In concluding this writing, I would like to delineate several overarching themes which stood out to me as I spent weeks researching in the depths of Clapp Library, usually with coffee (number three) in hand. On beginning this writing, I had not anticipated the significance of capitalism in rapidly spurring the development of competitive and, inherently through this, hierarchical divisions among Texas society. One theme within my writing I hope readers garner is the notion that communities are not innately divided by ‘race’: rather, race is a purely ideological construct. We are not inherently biologically different: we are all human. As reflected throughout this writing, humans are instead moved to create such segregating and discriminatory constructs in order to maximize benefits from an economic system rooted in antagonism, numbers, and inequality. It is important for me to underscore here—with great sadness—the violent, corrupting, and de-humanizing impact of capitalism on both the socioeconomic ‘victims’ and ‘victors.’ Capitalism is an unnatural and, as I will put forth here, racist process, tearing us apart and filling our societies—as it did within those of nineteenth and twentieth-century Texas—with hate, fear, and loss. In considering the context of where this paper was written (the United States,) I hope that I have implicitly raised doubts about, and challenged the legitimacy and further morality of, existing racial and economic hierarchies.

And yet, in the midst of this extreme violence, persecution, and discrimination, Tejanos persevered. Throughout my research, I have been awed by my communities' incredible resilience, determination, and creativity in resisting such profound hardship and suffering. Rather than accept their erasure and subjugation within imperial-instituted racial hierarchies, Tejanos fought against such discrimination, navigating and contesting their rapidly transforming world in manners that would empower, dignify, and honor them—and their ancestors before. Culture has a particular significance within Tejanos's richly diverse and colorful heritage. Perhaps it is due to this reason that resistance continues to be of such importance for Mexican Americans, as we challenge and refute imperial-implemented notions of homogeneity, immobility, and cultural genocide. Tejanos contestations of race and identity certainly did not end in the period in which my writing stops. As evidenced through the momentous Chicano movement of the 1970s and the more contemporary Xicano movement, Tejanos continue to fight for greater autonomy and reclamation of their identity into the present day.

For Tejanos, life is a vibrant and effervescent gift to be shared, loved, and celebrated with your community. The multifaceted and multicultural identities that bind you to your community, to this irreplaceable gift of life, are to be defended at all costs and against all odds—cherished as the sacred connection between you and your roots. My bisabuelo encapsulated this determination through his beloved catchphrase, “Adelante, adelante—nunca pa atrás.” I hope that, through this writing, I have continued his narrative of resilience, and honored my culture's spirit of hope, love, and determination.

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