

Politics and the Texas Revolution, 1836

Introduction

Texas's fight for independence from Mexico was an uphill battle from the very beginning. Texans were outnumbered and outmatched by the much more powerful Mexican military, and the province was plagued by quarrels within its own provisional government. Its indecisiveness and questionable military pursuits led Governor Henry W. Smith to disband the council. In response, on January 10, 1836, the council voted to impeach him and appointed an interim governor, but Smith defiantly held his post. This political turmoil occurred during what is widely considered the turning point of the revolution: the siege and fall of the Alamo Mission in present-day San Antonio.

After the Mexican army abandoned the Alamo in 1835, Texans took over the outpost, but government and military leaders could not agree on its fate. General Sam Houston ordered Col. James Bowie to strip its resources and destroy it so the fort could not be used by Santa Anna's advancing troops. Bowie, following the advice of Lt. Col. James C. Neill, disregarded this order, citing the fort's strategic importance, and instead began to fortify it. By the end of February 1836, Mexican forces had closed in on the Alamo.

Smith, a longtime supporter of Texas independence, issued this call to arms in February and, weeks after he had been suspended, signed it as "Governor": "Fellow-citizens, I call upon you as your executive officer to 'turn out;' it is your country that demands your help." Volunteers went to the Alamo, but their numbers were few. The fort ultimately fell to Santa Anna's troops on March 6, 1836.

Smith continued in politics, serving as the first treasurer of the new Texas Republic and then as a one-term congressman in the House of Representatives in Washington DC. He was struck by gold fever in 1849 and left Texas for California, where he died in 1851.

Excerpt

TEXAS
EXPECTS EVERY MAN TO DO HIS DUTY.

FELLOW-CITIZENS OF TEXAS,

The enemy are upon us! A strong force surrounds the walls of San Antonio, and threaten that Garrison with the sword. Our country imperiously demands the service of every patriotic arm, and longer to continue in a state of *apathy* will be *criminal*. Citizens of Texas, descendants of Washington, awake! arouse yourselves!! the question is now to be decided, are we to continue as freemen, or bow beneath the rod of military despotism. . . . Fellow-citizens, I call upon you as your executive officer to "turn out;" it is your country that demands your help. He who longer slumbers on the volcano, must be a madman. He who refuses to aid his country in this, her hour

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of peril and danger is a traitor. All persons able to bear arms in Texas are called on to rendezvous at the town of Gonzales, with the least possible delay armed and equipped for battle. *Our rights and liberties must be protected*; to the battle field march and save the country.

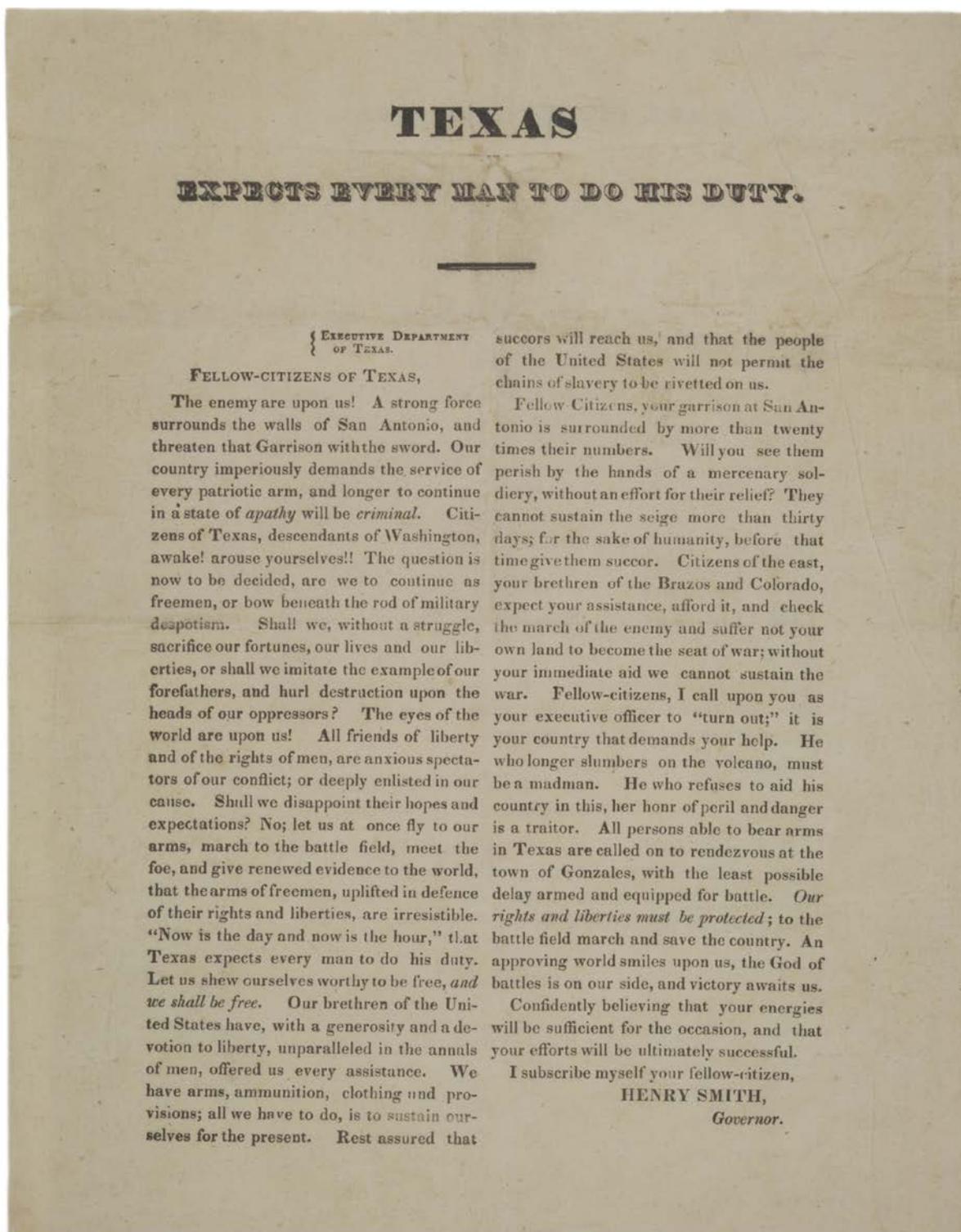
Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction and study the document. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. Identify the following: Henry Smith, the Alamo, James Bowie, Sam Houston, and Santa Anna.
2. Did Henry Smith exceed his authority when he urged his “Fellow-Citizens of Texas” to defend the Alamo? Why or why not?
3. What arguments did Henry Smith employ in his attempt to persuade Texians to defend the Alamo?

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Image



Henry W. Smith, "Texas Expects Every Man to Do His Duty," February [28], 1836 (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC03230.01)