

This section is from “Life in American Texas, 1846-1900” in *The Mexican Texans* by Phyllis McKenzie, to be published in 2004 by Texas A & M Press.

The political landscape. In areas where Tejanos were a numerical majority, they won election to local offices throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. This was especially true in the ranching region between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, and in the West Texas villages of Ysleta and San Elizario. In Laredo and Duval County, parties known as the *botas* (boots) and *guaraches* (sandals) vied with each other for control.

Much of South Texas fell under a boss system, where a local strongman ordered people to vote for candidates of his choice. Tejanos sometimes colluded with Anglos in operating the boss system. Most of these lesser players came from old elite families, concerned with protecting their status and property.

In San Antonio, Tejanos held a handful of political offices in the mid-nineteenth century. They successfully rallied against the anti-immigrant Know Nothing Party. But as Anglo newcomers continued to pour into the city, Tejanos lost their foothold in local politics. By 1900 they lacked representatives in city hall.

In many areas of the state, people of Mexican heritage resisted ethnic slurs and economic loss. Some of these conflicts erupted into violence. In 1857 Anglo freighters tried to wrest control from Tejano cartmen who transported goods between Central Texas and the Gulf Coast. The Anglos ambushed and destroyed cargoes and even killed some drivers. The so-called Cart War ended through the intervention of both the U.S. and Mexican governments.

This section is from “Life in American Texas, 1846-1900” in *The Mexican Texans* by Phyllis McKenzie, to be published in 2004 by Texas A & M Press.

In 1857 Juan Cortina, a leader of the Brownsville community, quarreled with the city marshal whom he found insulting a Tejano ranch hand. The altercation left the lawman wounded and Cortina on the run. Cortina rallied local supporters and led a raid on Brownsville, killing three. From his mother’s ranch he issued proclamations urging inhabitants to rise and defend themselves against Anglo intruders.

Mexicans! . . . Flocks of vampires, in the guise of men, came and scattered themselves in the settlements. . . . Many of you have been robbed of your property, incarcerated, chased, murdered, and hunted like wild beasts, because your labor was fruitful.ⁱ

Cortina coordinated further attacks from his stronghold, but ultimately Texas Rangers and U.S. troops drove him into Mexico. Anglos living along the border then took revenge by inflicting violence on suspected sympathizers.ⁱⁱ

In the El Paso area, residents were long accustomed to taking whatever salt they needed from local salt beds. They considered this to be communal property, but a group of Anglos conspired to put the salt lodes under private ownership. In 1877 members of the Salt Ring killed a spokesman for the local Tejanos. Angered, the residents responded with insurrection. Federal troops, Texas Rangers, and posses arrived to quell the disturbance. In the aftermath of the “Salt War,” as after other conflicts, innocent Tejanos suffered acts of violence. Valley residents lost their access to the salt beds.

This section is from “Life in American Texas, 1846-1900” in *The Mexican Texans* by Phyllis McKenzie, to be published in 2004 by Texas A & M Press.

The border region remained unstable through much of the late nineteenth century. Roving bands—both Mexican and American—attacked ranches and drove off livestock. Peaceful settlers found themselves blamed for raids that originated in Mexico. Anglo sheriffs and marshals, often bolstered by the Texas Rangers, represented supreme authority. They could jail and hunt down Mexicans as they saw fit. Tejano suspects died in custody under questionable circumstances—“while attempting to escape” or “from self defense.” No eyewitnesses came forward to confirm these reports.

Lynchings occurred. As a single example, in 1874 a Goliad County mob lynched Juan Moya and his two sons for supposedly for killing a white man. A few days later peace officers captured the real killers and established the Moyas’ innocence.ⁱⁱⁱ

In areas where they were the numerical majority, Tejanos themselves held some law-enforcement jobs—serving as sheriff, deputy, jailer and more. This could thrust them in the position of pursuing or arresting other Mexican Texans. Tejano elected officials were among the lawmen who chased Catarino Garza in 1891-1892.

Catarino Garza was a bold South Texas newspaperman. He wrote criticizing Anglo lawmen suspected of lynching Mexicans. In 1888, a miffed American shot and wounded Garza. Tejano citizens of Rio Grande City rose to the editor’s defense, precipitating a near riot. Garza recovered from his wound

This section is from “Life in American Texas, 1846-1900” in *The Mexican Texans* by Phyllis McKenzie, to be published in 2004 by Texas A & M Press

to resume his journalist career. In 1891 he inveighed against Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz. Garza attempted to lead an army of volunteers to unseat Díaz, but American forces intervened in Mexico to halt his advance. Back in Texas, Garza continued to plan insurrection from Duval County. U.S. officials moved against him, but the local populace shielded Garza and spirited him to safe lodging. Catarino Garza later became a hero of *corridos* (popular ballads), admired for his commitment and courage.

ⁱ U.S. Congress, House, *Difficulties on the Southwestern Frontier*, H. Exec. Doc. 52, 36th Cong., 1st sess., 29 March 1860, pp. 80-81, cited by David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), p. 32.

ⁱⁱ Arnaldo De León, *Mexican Americans in Texas: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1999), p. 39.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, p. 19; Arnaldo De León, *The Tejano Community, 1838-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), pp. 18-19.