

SAM HOUSTON: A STUDY IN LEADERSHIP

SAM HOUSTON WAS A LEADER WHO SOUGHT PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS OF HIS TIME. HE FACED HIS GREATEST CHALLENGE DURING HIS FIGHT AGAINST TEXAS SECESSION FROM THE UNION.

Born in Virginia in 1793, Sam Houston moved with his family to Tennessee when he was 14. His father died soon afterward, leaving Sam's mother with a farm, a small store, nine children, and five slaves.

Sam hated school and refused to attend, but he learned to read and educated himself by reading his father's books. Bored with farming and clerking at the family store, he ran away at 17 and joined a peaceful tribe of Tennessee Cherokee Indians.

Sam took on the Cherokee ways and became fluent in their language. The chief, Oolooyeka ("He who puts away the war drum"), adopted him as his son. Sam also took a Cherokee name, "The Raven," a symbol of good luck.

Houston enlisted in the U.S. Army when the War of 1812 erupted on the frontier. He quickly advanced to become an officer under Gen. Andrew Jackson.

During the war, Houston fought the Creek Indians with Jackson and suffered severe wounds. When the war ended, he remained in the Army and became one of Jackson's favorite officers.

In 1817, Gen. Jackson appointed Houston as his special Indian agent. Jackson ordered Houston to relocate the Tennessee Cherokees across the Mississippi River to Arkansas. Houston faced a difficult dilemma because his adoptive father, Chief Oolooyeka, opposed the move. Houston took a pragmatic, or practical approach. He persuaded Chief Oolooyeka to leave Tennessee under favorable conditions arranged by Houston, which avoided the use of military force.

Houston left the Army in 1818 and returned to Tennessee where he studied law and opened a law office. He won election to the U.S. House of Representatives and served two terms. In 1827, he was elected governor of Tennessee.



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Among Sam Houston's many accomplishments, he was a U.S. senator, the governor of two different states, and even the president of Texas when it was an independent nation.

Two years later, Houston, 35, married Eliza Allen, 19. She was the daughter of a wealthy Tennessee planter. But almost immediately, the marriage fell apart, and Eliza returned to her parents. Most historians think she loved someone else and only married Houston to satisfy her socially ambitious parents.

Shocked and depressed, he soon resigned as governor and left Tennessee to again live with the Cherokees, this time in Arkansas.

A Texas Hero

Houston tried to start his life over again with the Cherokees. But he remained depressed about his failed marriage. He drank a lot. The Cherokees called him "Big Drunk."

Finally, President Jackson persuaded Houston to meet with the Comanches, probably the most warlike tribe in the Southwest. His mission was to get them to agree not to attack the Eastern tribes Jackson planned to remove across the Mississippi River. In 1832, Houston crossed into Texas, then a part of Mexico, to reach the Comanches.

Texas already had a sizeable American immigrant population as Spain and later Mexico had encouraged set-

tlers to come and help develop the empty land. Many Americans from the South brought their slaves with them. This was illegal under Mexican law, but the law was not enforced.

Texas and Chihuahua were combined into one Mexican state. The American immigrants, calling themselves "Texians," wanted Texas to be a separate Mexican state with strong self-rule.

Houston did not succeed in arranging a treaty with the Comanches, but he decided to stay and become a Texian. He secured two land grants, started a law practice, and soon became involved in the movement to make Texas a separate Mexican state.

In 1834, Gen. Santa Anna, calling himself the "Napoleon of the West," took on dictatorial powers in Mexico City. He quickly abolished all state governments and replaced them with governors whom he appointed.

Alarmed by Santa Anna's actions, Texians met in a convention to debate what to do. Houston spoke against declaring independence since he thought that it would lead to a war with Mexico that the Texians were not ready to fight.

The convention finally sent Stephen Austin to present the Texas case for statehood and self-rule to Santa Anna. But the Mexican leader imprisoned Austin. Set free more than a year later, Austin returned to Texas and argued that the only path to take was independence and war.

At another convention on March 2, 1836, Houston and the other Texian delegates voted to declare the independence of the Republic of Texas. The convention also appointed Houston commander in chief of all Texas military forces.

Even before the convention adjourned, word arrived that Santa Anna with a large army had crossed the Rio Grande River and was attacking the Alamo, an old fortified Spanish mission in San Antonio. Houston, however, did not yet have a Texas army.

Santa Anna's army conquered the Alamo and captured the Texian garrison at Goliad, killing most of the



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A painting depicts Santa Anna surrendering to the wounded Sam Houston after the Battle of San Jacinto, 1836.

soldiers who had surrendered. Santa Anna then organized an attack across Texas to crush the rebellion. Houston quickly assembled volunteers for the Texas army, but needed time to train them and the right opportunity to attack. Buying time, he retreated from Santa Anna's invading army, causing many to call him a coward.

Finally, an overconfident Santa Anna led an advance unit of his much larger army closer to Houston and camped at San Jacinto. This was the opportunity Houston wanted.

On April 21, 1836, Houston on horseback led the Texans together with a unit of Tejanos (Texas Mexicans) in a surprise attack on Santa Anna's camp. Houston's fighters, yelling "Remember the Alamo," slaughtered the Mexican soldiers. Most important, they captured the "Napoleon of the West" himself. In exchange for his life, Santa Anna signed an agreement sending the rest of his army back to Mexico.

Houston was badly wounded in the ankle. But his strategy of waiting for the right moment to attack made him a Texas hero.

President Houston

In September 1836, Houston was overwhelmingly elected the first president of the Republic of Texas. He served two terms as president separated by a term in the Texas Congress.

Houston released Santa Anna after the dictator promised to recognize Texas independence. Once in Mexico

City, however, he broke his promise, claiming Texas was still part of Mexico.

Houston opposed schemes by Texas hot heads to invade Mexico and occupy territory south of the Rio Grande. Invading Mexico was not practical, he said, because "We have no money!"

As president of Texas, Houston took a number of unpopular stances. He condemned the brutal treatment of Cherokees and other peaceful Texas tribes by white vigilantes. To settle differences between Indians and whites, he negotiated just treaties. He also refused to enforce a law that gave free blacks two years to leave Texas or be re-enslaved.

In between his two terms as president, Houston finally divorced his first wife, still living in Tennessee. In 1840 at age 47, he married 21-year-old Margaret Lea from Alabama. During their marriage, they lived in various houses and farms with a dozen slaves. She gave birth to eight children. She also sobered him up.

From the beginning of his presidency, Houston strongly pushed for annexing Texas to the U.S. He realized that the republic had little hope of defending itself against hostile foreign powers. After some stalling, the U.S. Congress voted to annex Texas to the Union in 1845.

Texas citizens voted for annexation in a referendum by an overwhelming majority. The new Texas state legislature elected Houston as one of its two U.S. senators. (The direct election of

U.S. senators by the voters did not occur until 1913.)

Senator Houston

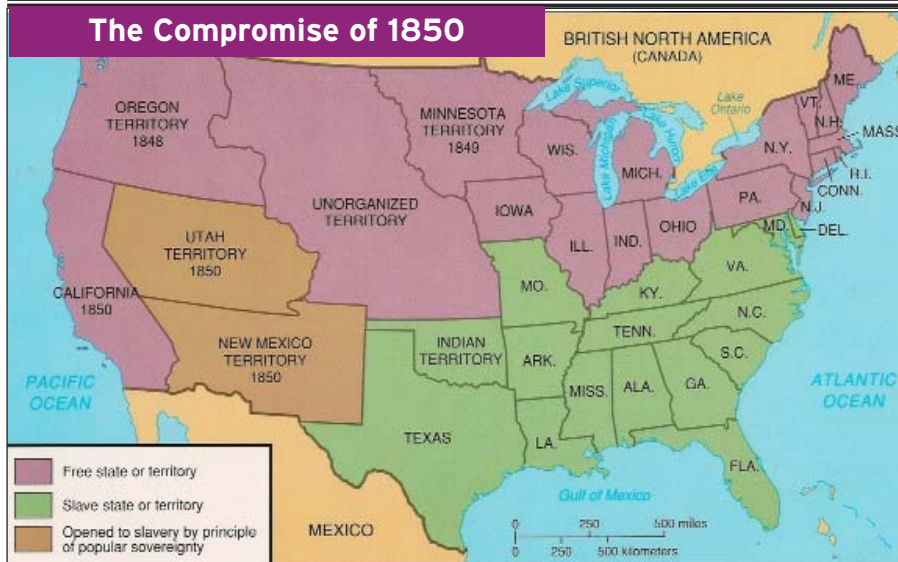
Sen. Sam Houston, who declared himself a Democrat, first arrived in Washington in early 1846. He was immediately involved in Senate debates on war with Mexico. Santa Anna disputed the new international boundary with the U.S., following its annexation of Texas. After clashes between Mexican and American troops, Santa Anna declared war on the U.S.

President Polk urged Congress to declare war on Mexico, which it did with Houston's full support in May 1846. Many Southerners favored the war because the U.S. would likely acquire new western territories that would enable the expansion of slavery and admission of new slave states.

Houston's upbringing in the South influenced his beliefs about slavery. He defended slavery and believed that whites were superior to blacks. But he once said that Indians and black slaves were equally intelligent. The difference between them, he explained, was that Indians were born free and raised to be self-reliant, while black slaves were born as property with their lives forever controlled by their owners.

Unlike most Southern slave owners, Houston allowed his own slaves to learn to read, write, and do arithmetic. They could also keep any money they earned when they worked for others.

Houston believed that suddenly abolishing slavery would ruin the



economy of the South and result in large numbers of former slaves “cast into the streets,” unemployed and impoverished. He believed it was better for the North and South to work on a compromise, perhaps by sponsoring the return of freed slaves to a colony in Africa.

After the war with Mexico, the question of slavery in the newly acquired lands in the West became heated in the Senate. Houston criticized both the Northern abolitionists for their “mad fanaticism” and the Southern extremists for their “mad ambition.”

South Carolina’s Sen. John C. Calhoun threatened secession from the Union unless slavery was permitted in Oregon and the Mexican Cession territories. Houston argued that the climate and nature of agriculture in the West did not make plantation slave labor practical.

The Compromise of 1850 admitted California as a free state but required that slaves who had escaped to the North be returned to their owners. Many Southerners fought against the compromise since it did not guarantee the right to own slaves in all the Western territories. Houston voted for the compromise.

Three years later, Sen. Stephen Douglas, a Democrat from Illinois, proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This would leave it up to the people of these new territories to vote whether they wanted slavery or not. The act would repeal that part of the 1820 Missouri Compromise that prohibited slavery north of the 36° 30’ line of latitude from the Mississippi to the Pacific.

Southern slaveholders supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act because it opened the door to expanding slavery into the

West. Northern abolitionists hated it. Houston feared the repeal of the Missouri Compromise would threaten the protection of slavery in Southern states south of the 36° 30’ line.

In 1854, Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Houston voted against it and was viciously attacked as a traitor to the South.

Fight Against Secession

In 1859, Houston ran for governor of Texas. He campaigned against extremists who favored secession from the Union and reopening the African slave trade (banned by Congress in 1808). Secession, he warned, would only lead to a civil war the South could not win. He argued that the best way to resolve the slavery issue was by compromise within the Union.

Houston criticized both the Northern abolitionists for their ‘mad fanaticism’ and the Southern extremists for their ‘mad ambition.’

Houston’s moderate and pragmatic positions on the slavery issue helped him win the governorship of Texas. But a few months later, John Brown raided the federal armory at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, and threatened to arm a slave rebellion. Most Texans now believed that the intention of the Northern abo-

litionists was to destroy the Southern economy and way of life. From then on, the secessionists had the upper hand in Texas.

In the crucial presidential election of 1860, the dominant Democratic Party split apart. Northerners supported Stephen Douglas, who ran on his idea of letting the voters decide the slavery issue in the Western territories. Southern Democrats nominated their own candidate, who called for secession from the Union unless slavery was permitted in the Western territories.

The Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln, who opposed the spread of slavery. Lincoln was not an abolitionist, but most Southerners distrusted him.

Other candidates, including Sam Houston, entered the presidential race. Although officially a Democrat, Houston despised the secretive politics at party nominating conventions. He preferred to be thrust up for election by the people themselves. A group of Texas supporters gathered at the San Jacinto battlefield and voted to nominate him for president. He agreed to run. Surprisingly, Houston had supporters in the North, especially in New York.

A few months later, thinking he had no chance for election, he withdrew his name as a candidate. He spent the rest of the campaign pleading to keep the Union together (see sidebar on page 9).

Lincoln’s election on November 6, 1860 ignited the secession movement in Texas and the rest of the South. A month later, South Carolina was the first to secede from the Union.

The Texas state legislature was not in session, and it alone could authorize a secession convention. Houston stalled and refused to call a special session of the legislature, hoping delay would calm things down. But in January 1861, he brought the legislature back to Austin, the state capital. He tried to persuade the state legislators to hold off authorizing a convention, but they voted overwhelmingly for it.

The convention met quickly and voted almost unanimously to approve leaving the Union. Then in a referendum, 75 percent of Texas voters approved secession. Even most non-slaveholders

seemed to believe that only by seceding from the Union could they maintain their economic well-being.

Houston accepted the will of the people, but challenged the convention when it voted for Texas to join the Confederacy. He argued neither the legislature nor the voters had called for that action. But the convention ignored him. It ordered all state officials to take an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy, but Houston refused. The convention then removed him from office.

The convention made it clear that Houston was no longer welcome in Austin. His friends tried to persuade him to use armed force to remain as governor. Even Lincoln sent messages, offering him aid. But Houston rejected the idea of starting a civil war within Texas.

Houston left Austin with his family. A few days later, he said to a crowd of Union supporters:

The civil war is now near at hand and will be stubborn and of long duration. . . . The soil of our beloved South will drink deep the precious blood of our sons and brethren.

'Texas! Texas! Margaret'

Houston reluctantly supported Texas in the Civil War. His oldest son, Sam Jr., joined a Texas volunteer infantry unit and was severely wounded at the Battle of Shiloh.

In September 1862, Lincoln issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Freeing one's own slaves was illegal in Texas. But Houston gathered his dozen slaves at his home, read Lincoln's proclamation to them, and declared them free.

In his last days, Houston still plotted to rescue Texas from the disaster of defeat. He wanted Texas to secede from the Confederacy and become an independent republic again with himself as its leader. "The people will uphold me in this," he said, "and

Sam Houston's Speech at a Mass Meeting for Preserving the Union

Austin, Texas September 22, 1860

In this excerpt, Houston gave his reasons for Texas remaining in the Union.

Power, wealth, expansion, victory, have followed [the American people], and yet the . . . Union has been broad enough to [include] all. Is it not worth perpetuating? Will you exchange this for all the hazards, the anarchy and carnage of civil war? Do you believe it will be [divided] and no shock felt by society? You are asked to plunge into a revolution; but are you told how to get out of it? Not so. . . .

What is there that is free that we have not? Are our rights invaded and no Government ready to protect them? No! Are our institutions wrested from us and others foreign to our taste forced upon us? No! Is the right of free speech, a free press, or free suffrage taken from us? No! Has our property been taken from us and the Government failed to interpose when called upon? No! No, none of these! . . .

I come not here to speak in behalf of a united South against Lincoln, I appeal to the nation. I ask not the defeat of sectionalism by sectionalism, but by nationality. The Union is worth more than Mr. Lincoln, and if the battle is to be fought for the Constitution, let us fight it in the Union and for the sake of the Union.

1. In the first paragraph, why does Houston believe preserving the Union is better than disunion?
2. In the second paragraph, what overall point does Houston seem to be making with his series of questions?
3. In the last paragraph, what method does Houston propose to resolve the issues that divided the North and South?

with God's help we will save Texas." Nothing came of his idea: Texas remained in the Confederacy.

Houston's health declined rapidly, partly due to wounds from the War of 1812 that never healed properly. His last words to his wife as he lay dying were, "Texas! Texas! Margaret." He died of pneumonia at age 70 on July 26, 1863 only days after the decisive Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg.

DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. Do you think Sam Houston's experience with the Cherokees influenced his career as a leader? Explain.
2. What evidence is there that Sam Houston was neither an anti-slavery abolitionist nor a pro-slavery extremist?
3. Do you think Sam Houston as a pragmatic leader was a success or a failure? Why?

ACTIVITY

A Better Choice for President?

1. Based on the information in the article, each student should write an essay on this question: **Knowing now what happened after Lincoln was elected, do you think Sam Houston would have made a better choice for president in 1860?**
2. The students will then meet in small groups and hold a collaborative discussion on the question, trying to reach consensus if possible.
3. Each group will finally report and give the reasons for the results of its discussion.

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Sources

Joan of Arc

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Margaret Thatcher

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Standards

Joan of Arc

National High School World History Standard 23: Understands patterns of crisis and recovery in Afro-Eurasia between 1300 and 1450. (9) Understands the significance of Joan of Arc (e.g., her role in the Hundred Years War, her subsequent trial and execution, the Church's review of her trial 25 years later, and her revered image as a patron saint of France).

California History-Social Science Standard 7.6: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Europe. (3) Understand the development of feudalism, its role in the medieval European economy, the way in which it was influenced by physical geography (the role of the manor and the growth of towns), and how feudal relationships provided the foundation of political order. (8) Understand the importance of the Catholic church as a political, intellectual, and aesthetic institution (e.g. founding of universities, political and spiritual roles of the clergy. . . .).

Common Core Standard RH.6-8.1 and RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Common Core Standard RI.7.8: Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

Common Core Standard RI.9-10.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

Sam Houston

National High School U.S. History Standard 9: Understands the United States territorial expansion between 1801 and 1861, and how it affected relations with external powers and Native Americans. (3) Understands shifts in federal and state policy toward Native Americans in the first half of the 19th century (e.g., arguments for and against removal policy, changing policies from assimilation to removal and isolation after 1825). (6) Understands Mexican and American perspectives of events leading up to the Mexican-American War (e.g., the Alamo, the treatment of Mexicans and Cherokees loyal to the Texas Revolution in the Lone Star Republic prior to 1846).

National High School U.S. History Standard 11: Understands the extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800. (2) Understands the positions of northern antislavery advocates and southern proslavery spokesmen on a variety of issues (e.g., race, chattel slavery, the nature of the Union, states' rights).

National High School U.S. History Standard 13: Understands the causes of the Civil War. (2) Understands events that fueled the political and sectional conflict over slavery and ultimately polarized the North and the South (e.g., the Missouri Compromise, the Wilmot Proviso, the Kansas-Nebraska Act)

California History-Social Science Standard 8.7: Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the South from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced. (2) Trace the development of slavery; its effects on black Americans and on the region's political, social, religious, economic, and cultural development; and identify the strategies that were tried to both overturn and preserve it. . . .

California History-Social Science Standard 8.8: Students analyze the divergent paths of American people in the West from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced. (6) Describe the Texas War for Independence and the Mexican-American

War, including territorial settlements, the aftermath of the wars, and the effects the wars had on the lives of Americans. . . .

California History-Social Science Standard 8.9: Students analyze the early and steady attempts to abolish slavery and to realize the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. (4) Discuss the importance of the slavery issue as raised by the annexation of Texas and California's admission to the union as a free state under the Compromise of 1850. (5) Analyze the significance of the States' Rights Doctrine. . . , the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854). . . .

California History-Social Science Standard 8.10: Students analyze the multiple causes, key events, and complex consequences of the Civil War. (3) Identify the Constitutional issues posed by the doctrine of nullification and secession. . . .

Common Core Standard WHST.6-8.1 and 11-12.1: Write arguments focused on discipline specific content. . . .

Common Core Standard RH.6-8.2 and 11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source. . . .

Common Core Standard SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Margaret Thatcher

National High School Civics Standard 5: Understands the major characteristics of systems of shared powers and of parliamentary systems. (2) Understands the major characteristics of parliamentary systems . . . (3) Understands the relative advantages and disadvantages of the various ways power is distributed, shared, and limited in systems of shared powers and parliamentary systems . . .

California History-Social Science Standard 12.9: Students analyze the origins, characteristics, and development of different political systems across time, with emphasis on the quest for political democracy, its advances, and its obstacles. (2) Compare the various ways in which power is distributed, shared, and limited in systems of shared powers and in parliamentary systems, including the influence and role of parliamentary leaders (e.g., William Gladstone, Margaret Thatcher).

Common Core Standard RH.1112.3: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Common Core Standard RH.1112.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Common Core Standard SL.1112.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

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