

Houston, Crockett and the War for Texas Independence

Essential Question: What roles did Sam Houston and David “Davy” Crockett play in Texas’ independence movement?

In the 1820’s Texas was a vast unsettled territory that belonged to Spain. To encourage settlement, Spain offered large tracts of land to agents, called empersarios, who promised to bring families to settle on the land. American Moses Austin received a land grant in 1821, but before he could claim it, Mexico declared its independence from Spain. Mexico eventually confirmed the grant which passed to Moses’ son Stephen Austin after Moses’ death. Austin selected 300 families to settle the land along the Brazos and Colorado rivers. To encourage settlement, Mexico offered the land at very low prices and promised not to tax the settlers for 4 years. In return settlers were supposed to learn Spanish, obey Mexican law and convert to Catholicism. However, few settlers kept these promises. Mexican authorities hoped to encourage citizens from other parts of Mexico to move to Texas, but the majority of the settlers were Americans who saw the potential for growing cotton in the fertile soil of East Texas. Most of the settlers were Southerners and many immigrated with their slaves.

By 1830, the Mexican government was fearful of the growing American influence in Texas and took measures to stop it. Mexico passed laws to stop the immigration of Americans, and placed a high tariff on goods imported from the United States. These new laws, along with Mexico’s decision to abolish slavery, created even more tension in Texas. Some American settlers began to call for independence, but Austin and others looked for a peaceful resolution. A number of small scale conflicts between Texans and the Mexican military occurred between 1830 and September, 1835. Due to the rising tensions, the Mexican military commander decided to retrieve a cannon that had been loaned to the town of Gonzales for its defense against Native American attacks. The citizens refused to return it and a battle resulted. The Texans were able to defeat the Mexican force and consider the Battle of Gonzales to be the first battle of the Texas Revolution. Following the Battle of Gonzales, Texas called for volunteers to join its army. Two Tennesseans, Sam Houston and David “Davy” Crockett answered the call.

Houston was already an well-known figure when he moved to Texas in 1833. Houston had served under Andrew Jackson in the Creek War and was wounded at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. Jackson, impressed by Houston’s courage, became his mentor and launched his political career. Houston served as Indian agent to the Cherokee, was elected to two terms in Congress, and was elected governor of Tennessee in 1827. Houston was forced to resign the governorship in 1829 due to a marriage scandal. He then moved to Arkansas to live among his Cherokee friends where he ran a successful trading post. Economic opportunities soon drew Houston to Texas where he was selected to lead the army in 1835.

Like Houston, Crockett also served in the Creek War under Jackson and served in Congress. However, Crockett disliked Andrew Jackson and openly opposed him on a number of issues while serving in Congress. Crockett's opposition to Jackson's Indian Removal Act likely caused him to lose his bid for reelection in 1835. Crockett then went to Texas where he hoped to jumpstart his political career.

By the time Crockett reached Texas, the revolutionaries had divided themselves into pro and anti- Jackson factions. Not surprisingly, Crockett supported the anti-Jackson faction which opposed Houston's appointment as commander of the army. When Houston told the men holding the Alamo, an old Spanish mission near San Antonio, to abandon it, they refused. Crockett decided to join the anti-Jackson/Houston defenders in the fort in early February. On February 23, Santa Anna, commander of the Mexican army, laid siege to the fort. William Travis sent numerous messages asking for reinforcements and supplies, but none came. On March 6, 1836, Santa Anna attacked. The 150 defenders in the Alamo held off two attempts to breach the walls by the much larger Mexican force, but were overwhelmed by the third assault. Santa Anna had ordered that the Alamo's defenders be given no quarter, meaning that all the men were to be killed. While sources disagree about the exact circumstances of Crockett's death, he and the other defenders were killed.

By the time news of the Alamo reached Houston, he had regained control of the army and Texas had formally declared its independence from Mexico. Fearing another Alamo, Houston ordered the troops at Goliad to abandon that fort and rejoin his command. The fort's commander, James Fannin, ignored Houston's order until it was too late. When his forces finally abandoned the fort, they were captured, returned to the fort and executed. The people of Texas saw the men of the Alamo and Goliad as martyrs, people who died for their beliefs. In the meantime, Houston was leading his army and a large number of civilians on a strategic retreat. Houston eventually launched a surprise attack on Santa Anna's forces on April 21, 1836 at San Jacinto. The Texan forces shouted "Remember the Alamo!" and "Remember Goliad!" as they attacked. The Texans defeated the army and captured Santa Anna who signed a treaty recognizing Texas' independence on May 14, 1836. Houston was quickly elected as president of the new Lone Star Republic.

One of Houston's first acts as president was to seek annexation by the United States. Southerners favored the addition of new slave state, but most Northerners opposed annexation because it would have tipped the balance of power in favor of the South. President Van Buren wanted to avoid both conflict over slavery and war with Mexico and therefore declined to annex Texas. Houston served two terms as President of the Lone Star Republic before Texas became a state in 1845. He later served as a Senator and governor of Texas, making him the only American to serve as governor of two states and president of an independent nation.

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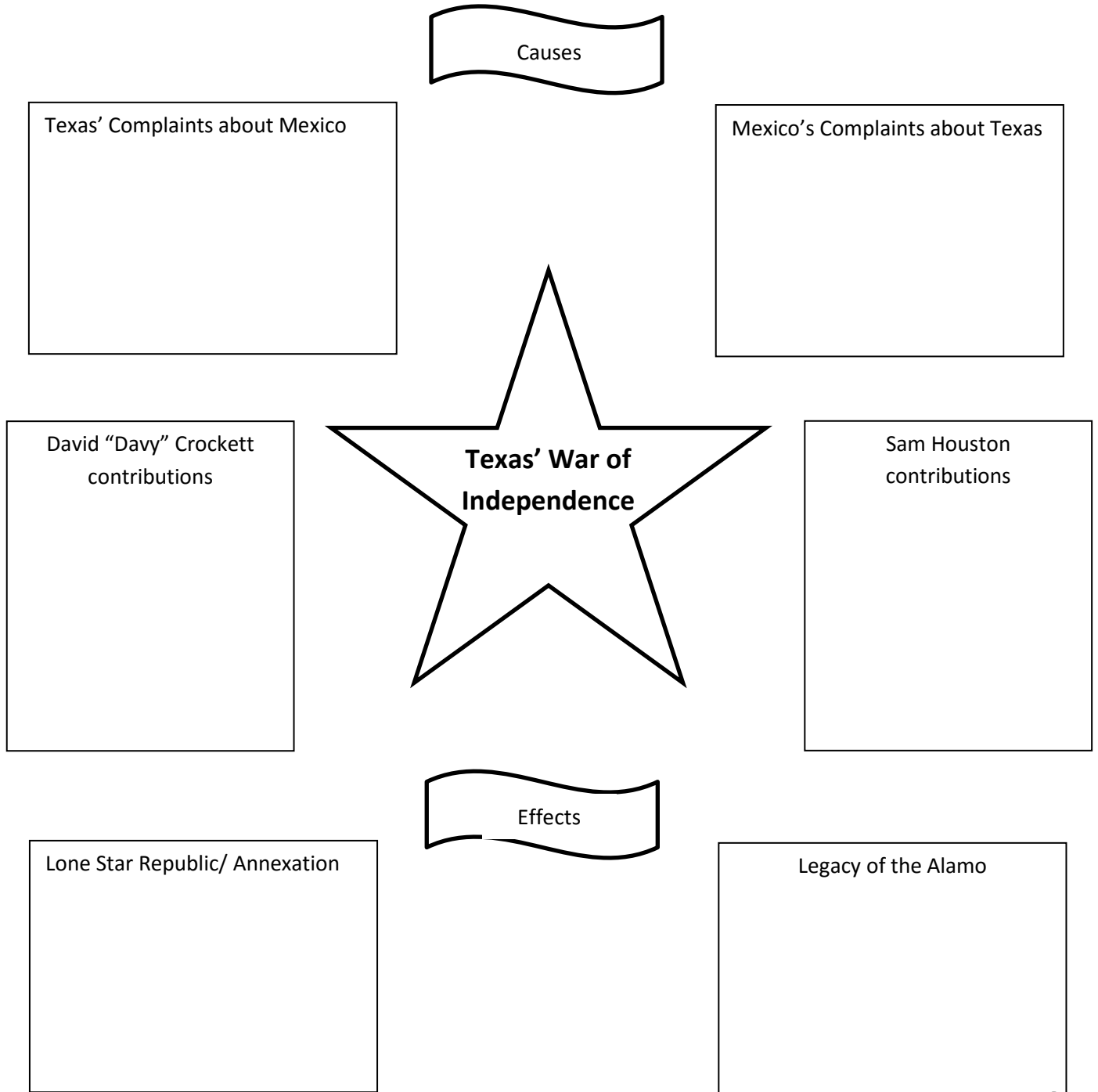
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Using information from the text, complete the graphic organizer below, then complete the writing assignment at the bottom of the page.



Who do you think played a more important role in Texas' independence, Sam Houston or David "Davy" Crockett? Why? _____
