Lamar's Presidency

Main Ideas

Section

- **1.** As president, Mirabeau Lamar tried to create a public education system in Texas.
- 2. Lamar's administration faced great financial challenges.
- **3.** Under Lamar, Texas adopted a harsh policy toward American Indians.

Why It Matters Today

Mirabeau B. Lamar faced many challenges during his presidency. Use current events sources to learn about the problems facing a political leader in the United States today.

The Story Continues

Early one August morning, a few people in Linnville noticed a huge cloud of dust on the horizon. As the dust cloud neared, the residents realized that it was a Comanche raiding party. Some 1,000 Comanches swept down on the town. They captured and killed residents and stole horses. As they left, the Comanches burned the town. The raid was an angry response to a massacre that had occurred earlier at a peace conference.

★ Lamar in Office

Sam Houston was no longer president when the Comanche raid on Linnville occurred. In September 1838, Texans had elected new leaders. Houston could not run for re-election because, under the Republic's constitution, a president could not serve consecutive terms, or two terms in a row. But even if Houston could have run, he might not have been re-elected. Many Texans disliked his policies, particularly his American Indian policy.

Texans elected Mirabeau B. Lamar as their new president and David G. Burnet as vice president. Both men strongly disagreed with Houston's policies and personally disliked him. A hero of the Revolution, Lamar was also a poet and fiercely devoted to education.

Key Terms and People

- charter
- Edwin Waller
- capitol
- homestead law
- redbacks
- Battle of the Neches
- Council House Fight
- Battle of Plum Creek



myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on the issues and events of Lamar's presidency.



Mirabeau B. Lamar (1798–1859) A native of Georgia, Mirabeau B. Lamar came to Texas in 1835 to join the fight for Texas independence. After the war, Lamar served as vice president and then as president of the Republic. Lamar pursued an aggressive Indian policy and opposed annexation to the United States. He also faced many challenges, including a growing public debt and ongoing conflicts with Mexico. By the end of his presidency, Lamar had lost much popular support. He retired from politics and focused on his love of writing poetry. In 1857 Lamar re-entered the political world, becoming U.S. minister to Nicaragua and Costa Rica. He died in 1859, two months after his assignment ended. What political positions did Lamar hold in the **Republic?**

Analyzing Primary Sources

Identifying Bias Why else might the writer be critical of Austin becoming the Texas capital? On taking office in 1839, then, he stressed the need for a public education system. He stated that a "cultivated mind is the guardian genius of Democracy." Following Lamar's lead, the Congress passed education acts in 1839 and 1840. These acts granted each county 17,712 acres of land to support public schools. The government also set aside 231,400 acres for the future establishment of two public universities.

The first college in the Republic to receive a **charter**—a document granting permission to operate—was Rutersville College. This private college opened in 1840 in Rutersville, near La Grange. However, the Republic never actually established either a public school system or public universities, largely due to financial issues. Nonetheless, because of his efforts, Lamar is known today as the Father of Texas Education.

Reading Check Finding the Main Idea How did Lamar's administration try to promote public education?

🗙 A New Capital

During Lamar's administration, the government also selected a permanent capital for Texas. President Lamar and many members of the Congress were unhappy with Houston as the capital. Lamar thought Houston was too far east. He wanted to move the political center of Texas west, closer to the edge of Texas settlement. Lamar believed this move would strengthen the Republic's control of the region and perhaps allow the republic to expand westward.

In 1839 the Congress appointed a group to choose a site for a new capital. The group selected a site next to a village named Waterloo, located on the Colorado River. The town was renamed Austin in honor of Stephen F. Austin. Judge **Edwin Waller** arrived in Austin to lay out the streets and begin building government offices. A temporary **capitol**, or a building in which government officials meet, was soon completed. Homes and other government buildings were constructed, and businesses opened along the town's main street, Congress Avenue.

Not everyone was pleased with the new capital, however. Many Texans, including Sam Houston, claimed Austin was isolated and too far west. They feared it would be vulnerable to Mexican attack because of its location. Austin was also in Comanche territory and would therefore be exposed to Plains Indian raids. One such criticism appeared in a Houston newspaper on April 17, 1839.

TEXAS VOICES

 "The location has been made at Waterloo, an inconsiderable hamlet
[village].... The country around this point is represented to be
exceedingly fertile and beautiful, and the climate remarkably healthy. It is, however, almost entirely uninhabited,

and . . . more exposed than any other point on the frontier."

-Telegraph and Texas Register.

Life in frontier Austin was difficult and dangerous. However, as more people moved to Austin, the town began to prosper. By 1840 more than 850 people lived there, including diplomats from France, Great Britain, and the United States. Eventually, most Texans became satisfied with their new capital.

Reading Check Identifying Points of View Why were some Texans unhappy with Austin's location?

★ Land and Economic Policies

The Lamar administration continued the land policy established by Houston. In January 1839 the Congress passed a **homestead law** that protected a family's home and up to 50 acres of land from seizure for debts. In most cases, this prevented creditors from taking a Texan's home and selling it to pay for a debt.

This protection became important, because the Republic's financial problems worsened under Lamar's administration. Public debt increased due to government spending. Military spending, for example, nearly doubled from the previous year. Part of this money went to re-outfit the Texas Navy with new ships. Public income, however did not rise.

Even as the Republic's debt grew, the value of Texas currency continued to fall. In response, the Republic issued new paper money certificates, so-called **redbacks**. The value of these redbacks dropped quickly—they were basically worthless within three years of their printing. The Republic's financial woes continued.

Reading Check Summarizing What were some of the Republic's financial problems during Lamar's administration?



Interpreting Visuals

Austin. The first capitol in Austin was a rough tworoom cabin. It was replaced in 1851 with the limestone building shown here. Why might Texans have wanted to replace the capitol?



★ Lamar's American Indian Policy

Part of the rise in military spending under Lamar stemmed from his Indian policy. Lamar disliked Indians and wanted to remove them from Texas. Unlike Houston, he did not believe Indians had a right to their land. In his inaugural address, Lamar outlined his Indian policy.

TEXAS VOICES

"The white man and the [American Indian] cannot dwell in harmony together. Nature forbids it. . . . I experience no difficulty in deciding on the proper policy to be pursued towards them. It is to push a rigorous war against them; pursuing them to their hiding places without mitigation [relief] or compassion, until they shall be made to feel that flight from our borders without hope of return, is preferable to the scourges of war."

—Mirabeau B. Lamar, quoted in Lone Star, by T. R. Fehrenbach

In 1839 Lamar ordered the Cherokees to leave Texas. When they refused, Lamar sent some 500 soldiers led by Kelsey Douglass to force them to go. In July fighting broke out near the Neches River. After several days of fighting in this **Battle of the Neches**, more than 100 Cherokees lay dead, including Chief Bowles. Texas forces then pursued most of the surviving Cherokees north into Indian Territory in the United States. Some other American Indians, including the Caddos and Shawnees, also left northeastern Texas during this time.

Analyzing Primary Sources

Making Generalizations and Predictions What is Lamar's view of American Indians, and how do you think this will affect the Republic's Indian policy? Conflict between Texans and the Comanches also worsened during this time. In January 1839 Lamar sent Colonel John H. Moore to attack the Comanches west of Texas settlements. These attacks, coupled with attacks by the Apaches and other enemies, led one group of Comanches, the Penatekas, to seek peace with Texas. They agreed to meet with Texans in San Antonio and to return any Texans they had taken captive.

On March 19, 1840, about 65 Penateka Comanches arrived at the Council House in San Antonio. The Texans there were expecting to receive many returned captives. However, the Penatekas brought only a few. The other prisoners were being held by other bands of Comanches. The Texans, not understanding Indian society, tried to take the Penatekas hostage in exchange for the other captives. Fighting between the two groups broke out in and around the Council House. By the end, of the battle 35 Comanches lay dead, including 12 chiefs, 3 women, and 2 children. At least seven Texans also died. This **Council House Fight** probably destroyed any chance of peace.

When other Comanches heard about the massacre, they were outraged. First, they put their Texan captives to death. Then a large Comanche raiding party struck the settlements of Linnville and Victoria, killing more than 20 settlers, burning houses, and stealing livestock.

Texans called for revenge against the Comanche raiders. A force of volunteers, regular soldiers, and Texas Rangers set out for battle. This force found the Comanche on August 11, 1840, and attacked. During the **Battle of Plum Creek**, more than 130 Comanches were killed. One Texan was killed, and seven were wounded.

Reading Check Identifying Cause and Effect What was Lamar's policy toward American Indians, and what did he hope to achieve with it?





HISTORIC DOCUMENT

Report on the Council House Fight

Colonel Hugh McLeod was in San Antonio and was present at the Council House Fight. His report is one of the main sources of information about the event.

"The troops now being posted, the Chiefs and Captains were told that they were *our* prisoners, and would be kept as hostages for the safety of our people, then in their hands; and they might send their young men to the tribe, and as soon as our friends were restored, they should be liberated.... A rush was then made to the door. Captain Howard collared one of them and received a severe stab from him in the side. He ordered the sentinel to fire upon him, which he immediately did, and the Indian fell dead. They now all drew their knives and bows, and evidently resolved to fight to the last."

Analyzing Primary Sources

- **1. Sequencing** What events led to the death of the American Indian described here?
- 2. Drawing Inferences and Conclusions Do you think McLeod's account is completely trust-worthy? Why or why not?



Texas settlers established small farms across the frontier.

★ The Results of Lamar's Policies

Despite this victory, many Texans still feared the Comanches. As a result, Texas leaders decided to strike farther into the frontier area known as Comanche country. In October, Colonel Moore led a force northwest in search of Comanche camps. Along the Colorado River, nearly 300 miles upriver from Austin, he found a Comanche village. The Texas force caught the Comanches by surprise and destroyed the village. Some 130 Comanches died in the conflict. Following these defeats, the Comanches moved farther west and turned their attention to raiding Mexican settlements instead.

By the end of his term, President Lamar had achieved his goal of removing the Cherokees from East Texas. The Comanches had also been pushed farther north and west, opening up vast lands for settlement. Speculators and settlers were pleased with the prospect of more land and a safer frontier. However, Lamar's new policy proved a disaster for Texas Indians. American Indians in Texas had lost much of their land and had suffered terrible losses of life.

Some Texans were also concerned about the increased warfare and the expense that went with it. Lamar's American Indian policy had cost the Republic \$2.5 million. It had also led to the loss of many lives. All told, Lamar's policies had increased an already soaring national debt. During his term, the debt rose from \$3.3 million to more than \$8 million. One Texan wrote in 1840 that times had become "terribly severe." Once again, Texans were ready for a change.

Reading Check Finding the Main Idea How was Lamar's Indian policy harmful to both American Indians and the Republic?

Section **3** Review

1. Define and explain:

- charter
- capitol
- homestead law
- redbacks

2. Identify and explain

the significance of each of the following:

- Edwin Waller
- Battle of the Neches
- Council House Fight
- Battle of Plum Creek

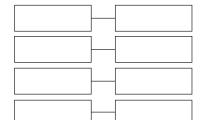
3. Locate on a map:

Austin

4. Summarizing

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to show how President Lamar dealt with the problems facing his administration.

Problem Solution/Action



5. Finding the Main Idea

- **a.** What did the Lamar administration do to promote education in Texas?
- **b.** Why did the public debt continue to be a problem for the Republic?
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ONLINE QUIZ

Analyzing Information Imagine that you are a U.S. official sent to Texas. Write a short report on how changes in Texas policy led to wars with American Indians. Consider the following:

• Lamar's American Indian policy

6. Writing and Critical Thinking

• conflicts between Texans and American Indians during Lamar's administration