

## Section

# 4

## The Convention of 1836

### Main Ideas

1. The Convention of 1836 declared Texan independence.
2. The Constitution of 1836 established the first government for the Republic of Texas.

### Why It Matters Today

On March 2, 1836, convention delegates adopted the Texas Declaration of Independence. Today, March 2 is an official state holiday. Use current events sources to learn about how people around the world celebrate their nations' independence today.



**TEKS:** 1B, 3B, 3C,  
3D, 14A, 21A, 21B,  
21D, 22D

### myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on the events and results of the Convention of 1836.

### Key Terms and People

- Convention of 1836
- Lorenzo de Zavala
- George C. Childress
- popular sovereignty
- bill of rights
- petition
- ad interim
- David G. Burnet

## The Story Continues

Rain made travel rough. But on March 1, 1836, delegates began to arrive in Washington-on-the-Brazos. At the newly built settlement, delegates found the streets full of ankle-deep mud. The convention met in a small unfurnished building. Only cloth covered its window openings, and chilly winds blew through the building regularly. In spite of the uncomfortable conditions, the delegates were determined to accomplish their task.



### Texas Declares Independence

At Washington-on-the-Brazos, a group of prominent Texans waited anxiously for news from the Alamo. They had gathered for the **Convention of 1836**, which began on March 1, just days before the Alamo's fall. Many of the convention's 59 delegates, including Sam Houston, had served in the U.S. government. Another, **Lorenzo de Zavala**, had served in the Mexican Congress.

Although not all of the delegates had arrived yet, the convention acted quickly to declare independence from Mexico. On March 2, 1836, the delegates voted unanimously to accept the Texas Declaration of Independence. Copies of the document were sent to towns around Texas to help spread the word to the people.

Written mostly by **George C. Childress**, the declaration was modeled after the U.S. Declaration of Independence. It listed the complaints Texans had against Santa Anna's government. Because the government had denied the rights guaranteed under the Constitution of 1824, Texans could no longer tolerate being part of Mexico.

Of the 59 men who signed the Declaration of Independence, 56 were Anglos. Two, José Antonio Navarro and José Francisco Ruiz, were Tejanos and one, Lorenzo de Zavala, was Mexican. With their adoption of the declaration, the Republic of Texas was born. Texans today celebrate March 2 as Texas Independence Day.

**Reading Check Summarizing** What was the first significant action of the Convention of 1836, and why did the delegates take that action?

## ★ The Constitution of 1836

After accepting the Texas Declaration of Independence, some delegates wanted to rush to San Antonio to aid the defenders of the Alamo, which was still under siege. But Sam Houston urged the delegates to stay and create a constitution, or a plan for government, for their new republic.

Most of the delegates to the Convention of 1836 had been born in the United States. It is not surprising, then, that the Constitution they created was modeled after the U.S. Constitution. Like the U.S. government, the Texas government was to be divided into three branches—legislative, executive, and judicial. Also like in the United States, citizens would elect their leaders. Just like the United States, the Republic of Texas was based on the idea of **popular sovereignty**, the notion that the power to create or change the government comes from the people. At the same time, though, the Constitution reflected some Spanish and Mexican influence, especially in areas dealing with property ownership.



Image Credit: © Witold Skrypczak/Alamy

### Interpreting Visuals

**The Birthplace of Texas.** This modern reconstruction in Washington-on-the-Brazos re-creates the building in which delegates to the Convention of 1836 wrote the Texas Declaration of Independence. **Why do you think Washington-on-the-Brazos has been called the birthplace of Texas?**



## BIOGRAPHY

### Lorenzo de Zavala

(c. 1788–1836) Before moving to Texas, Lorenzo de Zavala served as a Mexican congressman and governor. In 1829 he received a colonization contract to settle 500 families in East Texas, but never built his colony. He served as a diplomat for Mexico but resigned in protest of Santa Anna's actions. As a delegate to the Convention of 1836 and admirer of the U.S. Constitution, Zavala played a key role in drafting the Texas Constitution and was elected vice president.

**How was Zavala important to the Texas Revolution?**

By declaring independence from Mexico, the Convention of 1836 had claimed political freedom for Texas. In the Constitution, they worked to introduce civil and religious freedom as well. The Constitution of the Republic of Texas included a **bill of rights**, or statement of basic rights that the government cannot take away from citizens. Under the new constitution, Texans who had immigrated from the United States enjoyed many of the same civil rights they previously had. For example, the constitution protected freedom of speech and protected people from unlawful arrests. Before, all Texans had been required to be Catholic, but now they could worship as they pleased. The constitution also called for a public school system and a policy of giving land to settlers.

The new Texas constitution also allowed slavery to continue and legalized the purchase of new slaves. It also enslaved African Americans who had been brought into Texas as contract laborers. Neither African Americans nor American Indians were allowed to be citizens without the permission of Congress. Any free African Americans who wanted to remain in Texas had to **petition** the government. A petition is a formal request. Among those who did so was Samuel McCulloch Jr., the first Texan casualty of the revolution. He was wounded at Goliad in 1835.

Because Texas was at war, the delegates at the Convention of 1836 created an **ad interim**, or temporary, government. New leaders would be chosen once republic-wide elections could be held. **David G. Burnet** was selected as the interim president, and Lorenzo de Zavala as vice president. They took office on March 17, 1836, at Washington-on-the-Brazos. Later that day, they fled after hearing that the Mexican army was near. The government set up again at Harrisburg, but was forced to flee again. Constantly on the move, the ad interim government had to leave the future of the Republic in the hands of Sam Houston and the army.

**Reading Check Comparing** How was the Texas Constitution similar to the U.S. Constitution?



## Section 4 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

### 1. Define and explain:

- popular sovereignty
- bill of rights
- petition
- ad interim

### 2. Identify and explain:

- Convention of 1836
- Lorenzo de Zavala
- George C. Childress
- David G. Burnet

### 3. Locate on a map:

- Washington-on-the-Brazos

### 4. Identifying Points of View

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to explain why the convention delegates created the documents listed below.

Document	Delegates' Purpose
Declaration of Independence	
Constitution	

### 5. Finding the Main Idea

- How did the political experiences of the delegates affect the convention?
- How did the Republic of Texas bring political, civil, and religious freedom to Texas?

### 6. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

**Comparing** Imagine that you are reporting on the Convention of 1836. Write an article describing how the structure of the new government is a reflection of some ideas in the U.S. Constitution.

Consider the following:

- structure of the new government
- rights guaranteed in the Texas documents