

San Jacinto, part of bigger thing

While San Antonio goes all out to celebrate Fiesta, the Battle of San Jacinto, the original reason for the big party, generally gets overlooked.

The importance of Texas' victory at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, is that it set off a series of geopolitical events that culminated with the U.S.'s acquisition of the Southwest.

The victory at San Jacinto resulted in Texas's independence from Mexico, but this had to be secured by the United States annexing Texas. Annexation, in turn, served as the catalyst for U.S. war with Mexico (1846-48), which resulted in the American takeover of Mexico's northern territories.

Beneath the turbulent events, a vibrant economy and an accompanying population surge would have fueled expansion westward almost inevitably.

The U.S. links with the global economy made the American acquisition of San Francisco essential for U.S. commercial and industrial interests that wanted to trade with Japan and China.

The same economic dynamism that sent the U.S. involvement in world trade attracted large numbers of immigrants from Europe and supported a very strong natural growth — important demographic developments that pushed settlers westward.

U.S. decision-makers and politicians had called the takeover of this land "Manifest Destiny" — "the clear will of God."

The population grew as the U.S. economy recovered, and the settlers started growing cash crops (cotton grown by enslaved persons), which they exchanged for tools, consumer goods, and a variety of food items not grown in Texas.

Once the link with the United States was available to Tejanos (Mexican Texans), they quickly became engaged in activities that bound their destinies to the U.S. economy as well.

Additionally, some of those who promoted Texas' independence had bigger dreams than the exportation of cotton to the United States and beyond.

They were not content, at the end of the Texas Revolution, with just claiming the farmlands extending from the Sabine River to San Antonio but they claimed the Rio Grande as the southern and western boundary.

By acquiring the trans-Nueces River area, these leaders hoped to gain access to Brazos Santiago, the port of Matamoros, and the entry point of Santa Fe in Nuevo Mexico.

The dreamers of a Texas commercial empire drummed up several "Take Matamoros" and "Take Santa Fe" campaigns.

When the U.S. economy recovered in the early 1840s, the bigger American dream of trade with Asia and conquering the continent — Manifest Destiny — engulfed the nation.

In the sweep of that storm, San Jacinto was a mere tornado.