

Faculty Information Literacy Stipend Final Report

Name: Brian Franklin

Course: HIST 3319: Texas History

Semester: Spring 2019

Introduction (This section to include why you decided to create the assignment, and how the information literacy learning goals support the course.)

The name of this assignment was the "Historic Texas Newspapers Project." I decided to create this assignment, because I wanted to walk students through a multi-part project that would teach them how historians work. This project would focus on sources and information: searching, browsing, critical evaluation, analyzation, and making an argument.

My application indicated that this assignment would focus on three student learning outcomes related to information literacy learning: searching as strategic exploration; authority is constructed and contextual; and scholarship as conversation. Each of these relate directly to the goals of almost any course in History, and to this Texas History course in particular. I have designed this course as both a survey and an introduction into historical writing and practice. This project, and these goals, are embedded into the course throughout the semester.

Description of the information literacy assignment or activities

The assignment required students to:

- 1) Identify two historical Texas newspapers from the years 1850 to 1877. Students selected four editions of each newspaper to read, with each edition within a newspaper being at least one week apart, and all eight editions having been published within the same four-month period.
- 2) Identify four topics which stand out to them after a close reading of all eight editions. Write a brief of 250-350 words which describes the topic, how the newspaper covered the topic, and historical context helps the reader understand the topic.
- 3) Write a summary analysis of 750-1000 words for the final project. This analysis can revolve around a subject(s) of the student's choice (a briefing topic to explore deeper; an analysis of a newspaper's methods; a compare/contrast of the two newspapers, etc.). The analysis *must contain*: a thesis argument, explicit reference to or dialogue with *at least four* secondary sources, and a bibliography of sources consulted.

Method of assessment

I assessed students over the course of the semester through three separate assignments, each of which built on the other.

1. Part #1

- a. Annotated Bibliography – students submit bibliographic information for primary sources (eight editions of two historic newspapers) and for secondary sources which they believe will help them in the research going forward.

- b. Research Explanation – In one paragraph, explain the process by which the student located their primary and secondary sources, including the databases and websites consulted, as well as the method by which they chose their sources.
2. **Part #2**
 - a. Students submit two briefings based on two subjects of interest they have identified in the newspapers. These function as first drafts of the four briefings students would submit at the end of the project.
 - b. Submit a thesis proposal. This proposal should specific a question or issue that the student plans to explore for the final essay.
3. **Part #3**
 - a. Submit four briefings of 350-500 words, each based on a topic that stood out from the students' readings of the newspapers.
 - b. Submit a final report of 750-1,000 words. This report should make an argument, based out of the historic newspapers, and engaging with secondary sources.
 - c. Submit a bibliography of all sources utilized and consulted.

Results and impact on student learning (This can include student self-evaluations or feedback, pre- and post-test results, rubric results, and/or impact on other student assignments.)

I only have a couple written evaluations of this assignment available from students thus far. Both of them attest to this assignment helping them improve on their research and writing skills.

As for self-evaluation, my goal for future iterations of this assignment is to spend more time in class walking through some of this research process with students. A little more walk-through guidance in using library resources could pay off significantly, not just for this assignment, but for students' understanding of research more broadly.

Summary and next steps (This can include your reflections on working with the students on information literacy goals, how you might improve on the assignment or activities, and/or how you might address information literacy goals using other methods or in other courses.)

I believe this assignment worked ideally toward achieving information literacy goals. Throughout the semester, I had conversations with students about their growth in understanding how to find sources, distinguishing between academic and non-academic writing, and the process of interacting with both primary and secondary sources.

As I mention above, my main goal for improvement would be to spend more in-class time walking through these various processes. In particular, many students continue to struggle in this web-based world with differentiating between academic, peer-reviewed sources on one hand, and general information to be found on the web.

Appendix (This includes the assignment sheet, rubric if used, and example(s) of student work.)

- 4 assignment sheets attached
- Example of student work for each of the three phases of the project

Historic Texas Newspapers Project

Assignment Summary

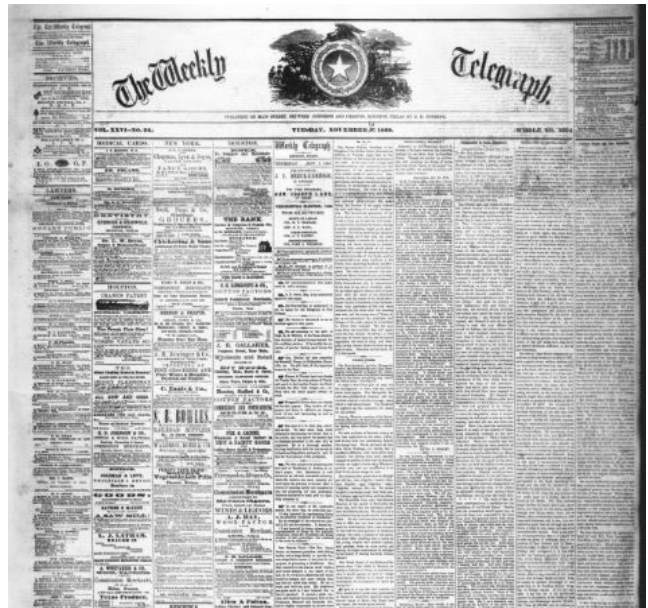
Newspapers are a vital source for studying history. They report on what's happening, they print what's important to society, they reveal people's motives. For this project, students will choose two different historic Texas newspapers from the critical years of 1850-1877. Your project will be to provide a briefing of what these newspapers covered, and make an argument about history based on those sources.

Assignment Details and Directions

1. **Choose two historic Texas newspapers from the years 1850-1877.** You must:
 - Read four issues of each of the two newspapers (a total of eight issues)
 - These issues must all fall within a single 4-month period of time.
 - The issues you read of each paper must fall at least one week apart
2. **Select ONE of two tracks for your project:**

Option #1 – Essay Brief

For this essay-based option, students will write a total of 4 briefings (350-500 words each), and a final report (750-1,000 words).



Students will submit this assignment in three stages:

- 1) Part 1 - 5% - Submit two newspapers you have chosen, an annotated bibliography, and an explanation of how you located these newspapers and sources. – **DUE Feb. 15**
- 2) Part 2 - 10% - Submit two (2) of the four (4) briefings (350-500 words each), *and* submit a working idea for the topic of your final report and thesis. **Due: April 1**
- 3) Part 3 - 20% - Submit the final writing project, which includes four (4) briefings of 350-500 words, and one final report of 750-1,000 words, which offers a thesis argument. Include a bibliography. **DUE: April 29**

Option #2 – Omeka Website Brief

For this website-based option, students will still have to conduct research and do some writing. However, the final product should be presented not as a long essay, but as a website.

Students will submit this assignment in three stages:

- 1) Part 1 and Part 2 – same as above
- 2) Part 3 - 20% - Submit your final Omeka website project. The final website should feature five components, including visuals and briefings on your four subjects of choice, and a page (or series of pages) which offer your overall interpretive report. There is no word-count required, but your website must nevertheless carry the same load an essay does: presenting evidence, providing context, and making an argument. Include a bibliography.

Part #1 – Historic Texas Newspapers Project
DUE: February 18

Assignment Summary

Newspapers are a vital source for studying history. They report on what's happening, they print what's important to society, they reveal people's motives. For this project, students will choose two different historic Texas newspapers from the critical years of 1850-1877. Your project will be to provide a briefing of what these newspapers covered, and make an argument about history based on those sources.

For Part #1 of this assignment, you must select TWO historic Texas newspapers.

- Select four (4) issues of two separate Texas newspapers from the years 1850 to 1877. A total of eight (8) issues.
- You should aim for all eight issues to fall within a single 4-month period of time.
- Each issue from a single paper should appear at least 1 week apart.

Assignment – DUE Monday, February 18

In a single document, submit the following two items:

1. Annotated Bibliography

- Primary Sources
 - Provide bibliographic citation for each of the newspaper issues you have chosen.
 - Provide a 2-3 sentence annotation (description) for each of the two newspapers (you do NOT need to do this for each of the 8 issues). This might include information about the location, editor, writers, general audience, etc.
- Secondary Sources
 - Provide bibliographic citation for three (3) secondary academic sources that you believe will be helpful to you in your research. These should be books or academic articles (not book reviews).
 - Provide a 2-3 sentence annotation (description) of each source. This should tell the reader the main subject of this source and how it applies to the subject at hand (Texas in the years 1850-1877)

2. Research Explanation

- In no more than a paragraph (3-5 sentences), explain the process by which you located *both* your primary sources (newspapers) *and* your secondary sources.
- This explanation might include: how and why you selected your two newspapers; the websites and databases you consulted; your browsing or searching process; how you decided on your particular sources, etc.



Phase #2 – Historic Texas Newspapers Project
DUE: Monday, April 1

Assignment Summary

In Phase #1, you chose your two Historic Texas Newspapers, and began to identify some academic secondary sources which you believe will be helpful to you. For Phase #2 of this assignment, you will build on this, and work toward your final project.



Assignment – DUE Monday, April 1

In a single document, submit the following...

1. Two Briefings

- **Write two briefings, each 350-500 words.**
 - Imagine that a friend has asked you the following question: "What are two of the main subjects that you see your two newspapers covering?" Your answer to this question is your briefings.
 - A briefing provides a detailed summary of how your newspaper(s) cover a particular subject.
 - Your job here is not to make an argument, take a side, or offer a critique. Instead, your job is to present the evidence that the newspapers present (while keeping a critical eye as you develop your own ideas based on the evidence)
 - Your brief should include some combination of the basic facts, context, ways in which the newspapers cover the issue differently, etc.

2. Thesis Proposal

- **Write a thesis proposal, 200-300 words.**
 - Your thesis proposal is aimed at helping you prepare for Phase #3 of this project, which requires a final argument presentation in the form of a 1000-word essay, or a website.
 - Your proposal should do the following:
 - o Specify a question or issue that you would like to explore in-depth for your final project. This might be primarily based off of one of your briefings, or it might be a broader idea which encompasses many subjects.
 - o Discuss in detail how your primary sources (newspapers) have led you to this question AND how specific secondary sources (books, articles) will help you hone your argument going forward
 - **NOTE:** You do NOT need a fully-formed or crystal-clear argument at this point. But you DO need to have a clear question that you aim to answer, or issue that you aim to explore, which will lead directly toward a thesis argument.

* **Keep in mind:** Your final project will require an overall final argument, and identification of four (4) briefing subjects. If you choose the Writing track, this will all be in essay form. If you choose the website track, you will have a combination of writing and visual presentation.

Phase #3 – Historic Texas Newspapers Project

❖ Assignment DUE on Monday, April 29

Assignment Summary

Phase #3 is the final phase of your project on Historic Texas Newspapers. In this phase, you will provide your final historical presentation and argument based on the two newspapers you have chosen for this project.

OPTION #1 – WRITTEN PRESENTATION

Submit your final project in two parts:

1. **Write FOUR (4) briefings. Each Briefing should:**
 - Focus on a specific topic, subject, or issue that appears in your newspapers.
 - Summarize, explain, and provide a brief analysis of how this topic is covered by your two newspapers.
 - Run approximately 350-500 words.
 - NOTE: The best briefing topics will discuss topics which are discussed in BOTH of your newspapers, and in MULTIPLE editions of each. Remember, a briefing is not about picking out a small detail. It's about explaining to a new reader what the big topics were in your newspapers' time.
2. **Write a Final Report. Your report should:**
 - Advance a thesis (a historical argument) regarding some topic or issue that you encountered through your newspaper research. This can be a deeper dive into one of your Briefings, or it could be about a broader (or narrower) subject altogether.
 - Directly engage with both primary sources (newspapers) and academic secondary sources.
 - Run approximately 750-1,000 words
 - Include a bibliography of sources consulted and used (not included in word count)
 - NOTE: Think of this as a mini-research paper. You are not just summarizing what's in the newspapers. You are advancing an argument, answering a question, and/or making a point, and you're providing evidence to back it up.



OPTION #2 – OMEKA WEBSITE PRESENTATION

1. Your website must provide the same basic products as the Written Presentation Option:
 - Four (4) Briefings
 - Advance a thesis argument that is separate from these Briefings
2. The specific word counts do not apply to your website. HOWEVER, your website must contain text that adequately advances an argument and explains the information presented on the Omeka pages/collections. In other words, the website must tell a story and make an argument with clarity.
3. Your website must include visual representations for every briefing and for the final argument you are presenting. These can be photographs, maps, data visualizations, etc. They can be sources you find, or you can create your own from research you have done.
4. You must cite your sources. This should be done in short form (footnote, caption, etc.) on the separate pages on which each source is cited. You should also create a separate page dedicated to a bibliography of all sources you consulted and used.

ADDENDUM

Phase #3 – Historic Texas Newspapers Project

A few details I want to add or emphasize regarding your Phase #3 Newspapers Project:

1. Secondary Sources

- Your Final Report (the 750-1000 word essay) should engage with secondary sources (academic books, articles, etc.). As piloted in Phase #1, you should aim for **3 secondary sources as a high standard.**

2. Citations

- When quoting, summarizing, or analyzing another source, please cite it in the text with either footnotes or parenthetical notation. *You can use any style* (Chicago, MLA, etc.), provided that you are clear and consistent.

3. Website Option – Submitting your Project

- Some of you have chosen the website option for your Phase 3 project. If this is you, you must submit your Phase #3 Project by emailing both me and Mr. Carpenter with the URL of your Omeka website. You must do this by the same Due Date/Time as the rest of the class.

Part #1 Historic Texas Newspapers Project

HIST 3319: Texas History

2/18/19

Annotated Bibliography:

Baker, Robin E., and Dale Baum. "The Texas Voter and the Crisis of the Union, 1859-1861." *The Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 3 (1987): 395-420. doi:10.2307/2209361.

- 1.) This source focuses on voters in Texas and dives deeper into the major influential factors that altered popular opinion or impacted statewide voting patterns in Texas and discusses what implications these trends had on the state in the years leading up to its secession from the union and the start of the civil war. This source provides an analytical approach to the subject matter presented in the Newspapers and discusses key issues like the impacts that Abraham Lincoln's and Sam Houston's elections had on the political climate in Texas and how these outcomes and other events lead to the secession of the state and played a role in the events leading up to the civil war.

Gage, Larry Jay. "The Texas Road to Secession and War: John Marshall and the Texas State Gazette 1860-1861." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1958): 191-226. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/stable/30235683>.

- 2.) This source discusses the role that the Texas State Gazette newspaper played in Texas's secession from the Union, and the start of the civil war. It shows how it used its position as a widely read newspaper across the state to shape popular opinion in favor of and Democratic principles and generate opposition to "Black Republican" viewpoints in Texas leading up to the start of the civil war. This source will be especially applicable for analyzing the 4 editions of the State Gazette that I have chosen and will provide unique insight into the paper's motives and the effect they had on Texas politics.

MacLeod, A. & Dashiell, J. T. *The San Antonio Ledger and Texan*. (San Antonio, Tex.), Vol. 10, No. 21, Ed. 1 Saturday, November 24, 1860, newspaper, November 24, 1860; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth179843/: accessed February 17, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

MacLeod, A. & Dashiell, J. T. *The San Antonio Ledger and Texan*. (San Antonio, Tex.), Vol. 10, No. 27, Ed. 1 Saturday, January 5, 1861, newspaper, January 5, 1861; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth179847/: accessed February 17, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

MacLeod, A. & Dashiell, J. T. *The San Antonio Ledger and Texan*. (San Antonio, Tex.), Vol. 10, No. 31, Ed. 1 Saturday, February 2, 1861, newspaper, February 2, 1861; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth179848/: accessed February 17, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

MacLeod, A. & Dashiell, J. T. *Weekly Ledger and Texan*. (San Antonio, Tex.), Vol. 10, No. 36, Ed. 1 Saturday, March 16, 1861, newspaper, March 16, 1861; (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth182255/: accessed February 17, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

- 3.) *The Weekly Ledger and Texan* was a prominent newspaper published in San Antonio, Texas. During the years 1860 and 1861 the newspaper's publishers were McLeod and Dashiell and the paper's writing closely aligned with common southern Democratic viewpoints, especially regarding slavery, where its pro-slavery position was regularly discussed and clearly outlined in numerous articles.

Marshall, John. *State Gazette*. (Austin, Tex.), Vol. 12, No. 15, Ed. 1, Saturday, November 17, 1860, newspaper, November 17, 1860; Austin, Texas. (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth81460/: accessed February 17, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

Marshall, John. *State Gazette*. (Austin, Tex.), Vol. 12, No. 23, Ed. 1, Saturday, January 12, 1861, newspaper, January 12, 1861; Austin, Texas. (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth180093/: accessed February 17, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

Marshall, John. *State Gazette*. (Austin, Tex.), Vol. 12, No. 26, Ed. 1, Saturday, February 2, 1861, newspaper, February 2, 1861; Austin, Texas. (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth180096/: accessed February 17, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

Marshall, John. *State Gazette*. (Austin, Tex.), Vol. 12, No. 31, Ed. 1, Saturday, March 9, 1861, newspaper, March 9, 1861; Austin, Texas. (texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth180101/: accessed February 17, 2019),

University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, texashistory.unt.edu; crediting The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History.

- 4.) The State Gazette was an influential newspaper published in Austin, Texas. During the years 1860 and 1861 the newspaper's lead publisher was John Marshall, and the paper was known for its continuing criticism of Governor Sam Houston, strong Democratic leanings, clear pro-slavery stance and strong viewpoints in favor of secession from the Union. This paper had a large audience that reached beyond Austin throughout the state of Texas.

Wooster, Ralph A. "An Analysis of the Membership of the Texas Secession Convention."

The Southwestern Historical Quarterly 62, no. 3 (1959): 322-35.
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy.libraries.smu.edu/stable/30235699>.

- 5.) This source discusses the various demographics, and commonalities found amongst those present at the state convention held in Austin, Texas, on January 28th, 1861, and analyzes how these factors influenced the outcome and the course of history as Texas elected to secede from the Union. This source will be relevant for gaining a better understanding and background into the Secession Convention, which is discussed many times in both the State Gazette and the San Antonio Ledger and Texan issues that I have selected.

Research Explanation:

I located my primary sources by using the SMU libraries page to get to the Texas Digital Newspaper Program's "Portal to Texas History" on the UNT website, where I chose to narrow down my search to specifically include only newspapers in Travis and Bexar counties for the window of November 1860 to March 1861. I specifically chose these search parameters because I knew that it was an especially active time period in both Texas and American history, that included major events leading up to the civil war like Lincoln's election as president, the formation of the confederacy and Texas' secession from the Union, and I wanted to see how these major events were interconnected with, and viewed in Austin and San Antonio, two of Texas' most popular cities. Once I had narrowed down my primary sources to a final 8 issues, I began searching for secondary sources that would apply to the subjects covered within the newspapers. In order to do this, I used SMU libraries link to reach the JSTOR database where I searched for sources that focused on Texas Secession, and other similarly related topics. In searching for both my primary and secondary sources I narrowed the results of my search to my final selections by reading or skimming over the documents and weeding out those of less historical significance, or those with less pertinent information to the subject matter at hand.

Part #2 Historic Texas Newspapers Project

HIST 3319: Texas History

4/1/19

Briefing #1

Following the election of President Abraham Lincoln, the months leading up to the start of the American Civil War were an especially active time in both the history of the state of Texas, and the history of the nation as a whole. During this time in the span of November 1860 through March 1861, one of the most prevalent and reoccurring topics in both the issues of the *Texas State Gazette* and in the *San Antonio Ledger and Texan* newspapers that I analyzed, were pieces on the Governor of Texas at the time, Sam Houston. This commentary on the governor's work and his position on issues is so common that it can be found in nearly every issue of the two papers during the time period which I looked at, often even receiving enough attention to have multiple different pieces and articles written solely on Houston published within just a single 4-6 page newspaper issue. Within these pieces, one major commonality across both papers is their expressed disapproval and vocal criticism of the governor within their writings. For example, in the November 10th, and November 17th, 1860, issues of the *Texas State Gazette*, several pieces were published deliberately attacking Houston, and criticizing his role as governor, and his position on recent bills and other matters pertaining to his stance on defending slavery. These two publications and others from the *State Gazette* not only reported on their general disapproval of Houston's politics, they commonly went much further often assigning labels to, and referring to Houston as their "modest", "old", and "weak Governor," in order to discredit him and undermine his position in the eyes of their readers.

One difference between these two pieces is that the *San Antonio Ledger* was much less blunt and aggressive in its efforts to criticize the governor than the *Gazette* was despite its shared disagreement with Houston's policies. The Ledger's reporting style focused less on personal attacks, and more on generating sympathy from its base of democratic readers. In order to accomplish this, they painted Houston as making decisions based on his own beliefs and not listening to the people of Texas. This can be seen in the January 5th, 1861 issue of the newspaper in which the Ledger can be quoted saying "Gen. Houston in his letter to the other Southern states concedes the necessity (for secession)... How then shall the voice of the people of Texas be heard?" Though they are clearly critical, of the governor's stance on the matter, it is evident by the way they refer to him by his title of General that they still have more respect for the man than what we see in the writings of the State Gazette.

Briefing #2

Within this time period, another major topic repeatedly discussed across both the issues of the *Texas State Gazette* and the *San Antonio Ledger and Texan* was, strong anti-northern sentiment and the need for working toward secession. In regard to this issue, the Texas State Gazette was initially much more vocal in supporting the idea and held stronger opinions on the issue, but eventually as the months that I analyzed progressed, *The Ledger* appeared to take a more active and firmer stance on the matter. Just days after the presidential election of 1860, In their November 10th issue, the Gazette used a quote from a Northern congressman from Illinois who stated that "slavery has placed the North against the South," as a form of evidence to paint a picture in the minds of readers showing that there was an attack on their livelihood. In the following issues of the newspaper that I analyzed, they can be seen progressing deeper into this defensive and divisive mentality, by doing things like accusing those not in favor of secession

and the idea of protecting slavery at all costs as being “disloyal” to their roots as a Southerner. They work to perpetuate an “us versus them” scenario as they continually advocate for secession in ways such as choosing to publish only arguments, quotes, and letters to the editor, that show people’s support for the issue, calling for a secession convention to be held, and then urging citizens to approve the decision. Then ultimately posting a somewhat celebratory article with the title “SECESSION PASSED!” once the process had been completed. As a democratic paper, *The Weekly Ledger and Texan*, also shared a pro secession stance, but originally was in less of a rush to make it happen. In the November 24th issue, the Ledger writes that “secession is Texas’ only option” in order to protect slavery, “but it should not be done immediately due to the potential trade implications.” This stance then drastically changes within only a short period of time, going from them having a cold footed position on the issue to them becoming fierce advocates for it. This progression of hatred for and opposition for the Union can be seen in their publishing writings referring to the free states as “our enemies to the north” in their January 5th issue and then eventually calling for a “civil war” in their March 16th issue. Though these two newspapers started out with varying levels of opinion on the issue, it is interesting to see how their viewpoints became more aligned as time progressed.

Thesis Proposal

During my final essay, I would like to further explore the concept of whether the writings of these two newspapers were effective in shaping the popular opinions of Texans, and what role these paper’s writings played in leading the people of Texas to decide to secede from the Union and ultimately join the Confederacy. I am especially curious on whether each paper’s position/prominence allowed it to generate significant support from the general public on issues

relating to the secession in a historically influential way, or if it was in fact the other way around where their writings were only done in response to or in anticipation of the common opinions of their target audience. Perhaps even a third possibility exists as a combination of both, where the newspapers acted as both leaders and influencers in one area but then also partially allowed the interests of their audience to dictate what was written about and discussed in another area.

In analyzing the overwhelming bias, democratic leanings and presence of strong opinions on secession and opposition to Sam Houston's stance on the issue, I found myself constantly asking the question of whether or not the publisher's main intent was to convince and lead others to go along with his own beliefs, or if in each case, his intent was merely to write about things that would be generally received well and agreed upon by its target audience. After further researching this concept and using the secondary sources that I have chosen, I will be able to come to draw a conclusion on this topic to the point where I will confidently be able to defend the point I have chosen. I believe the first secondary source I have chosen will help me hone such an argument, because it focuses on how certain events influenced Texas voting trends leading up to the civil war, which will allow me to see a bigger picture of what else was going on in the past that may have altered the political climate in ways I had not realized. The second source I have chosen will allow me to view evidence on how the *State Gazette* specifically used its position to generate public opinion on secession. Finally, my third secondary source focuses on analyzing the role demographics played in Texas' secession especially the demographics of those chosen for the secession convention, which will allow me to see what role regional factors and played in influencing their decision. Based on my findings within these sources, I will be able to reexamine my newspapers in a new light in order to defend my chosen stance on the matter with confidence.

Part #3 Historic Texas Newspapers Project Briefings

HIST 3319: Texas History

4/29/19

Briefing #1

Following the election of President Abraham Lincoln, the months leading up to the start of the American Civil War were an active time in both the history of the state of Texas, and the history of the nation as a whole. During this time in the span of November 1860 through March 1861, one of the most prevalent and reoccurring topics in both the issues of the *Texas State Gazette* and in the *San Antonio Ledger and Texan* newspapers that I analyzed, were pieces on the Governor of Texas at the time, Sam Houston. This commentary on the governor's work and his position on issues is so common that it can be found in nearly every issue of the two papers during the time period which I looked at, often even receiving enough attention to have multiple different pieces and articles written solely on Houston published within just a single 4-6 page newspaper issue. Within these pieces, one major commonality across both papers is their expressed disapproval and vocal criticism of the governor within their writings. For example, in the November 10th, and November 17th, 1860, issues of the *Texas State Gazette*, several pieces were published deliberately attacking Houston, and criticizing his role as governor, and his position on recent bills and other matters pertaining to his stance on defending slavery. These two publications and others from the *State Gazette* not only reported on their general disapproval of Houston's politics, they commonly went much further often assigning labels to, and referring to Houston as their "modest", "old", and "weak Governor," in order to discredit him and undermine his position in the eyes of their readers.

One difference between these two pieces is that the *San Antonio Ledger* was much less aggressive in its efforts to criticize the governor than the *Gazette* was despite its shared disagreement with Houston's policies. The Ledger's reporting style focused less on personal attacks, and more on generating sympathy from its base of democratic readers. In order to accomplish this, they painted Houston as making decisions based on his own beliefs and not listening to the people of Texas. This can be seen in the January 5th, 1861 issue of the newspaper in which the Ledger can be quoted saying "Gen. Houston in his letter to the other Southern states concedes the necessity (for slavery and secession)... How then shall the voice of the people of Texas be heard?" Though they are clearly critical, of the governor's stance on the matter, it is evident by the way they refer to him by his title of General that they still have more respect for the man than what we see in the writings of *The Texas State Gazette*.

Briefing #2

Within this time period, another major topic repeatedly discussed across both the issues of the *Texas State Gazette* and the *San Antonio Ledger and Texan* was, strong anti-northern sentiment and the need for working toward secession. In regard to this issue, the Texas State Gazette was initially much more vocal in supporting the idea and held stronger opinions on the issue, but eventually as the months that I analyzed progressed, *The Ledger* appeared to take a more active and firmer stance on the matter. Just days after the presidential election of 1860, in their November 10th issue, the Gazette used a quote from a Northern congressman from Illinois who stated that "slavery has placed the North against the South," as a form of evidence to paint a picture in the minds of readers showing that there was an attack on their livelihood. In the following issues of the newspaper that I analyzed, they can be seen progressing deeper into this

defensive and divisive mentality, by doing things like accusing those not in favor of secession and the idea of protecting slavery at all costs as being “disloyal” to their roots as a Southerner. They work to perpetuate an “us versus them” scenario as they continually advocate for secession in ways such as choosing to publish only arguments, quotes, and letters to the editor, that show people’s support for the issue, calling for a secession convention to be held, and then urging citizens to approve the decision. Then ultimately posting a somewhat celebratory article with the title “SECESSION PASSED!” once the process had been completed. As a democratic paper, *The Weekly Ledger and Texan*, also shared a pro secession stance, but originally was in less of a rush to make it happen. In the November 24th issue, the Ledger writes that “secession is Texas’ only option” in order to protect slavery, “but it should not be done immediately due to the potential trade implications.” This stance then drastically changes within only a short period of time, going from them having a cold footed position on the issue to them becoming fierce advocates for it. This progression of hatred and opposition for the Union can be seen in their published writings where they eventually begin to refer to the free states as “our enemies to the north” in their January 5th issue and then begin calling for a “civil war” in their March 16th issue. Though these two newspapers started out with varying levels of opinion on the issue, it is interesting to see how their viewpoints became more aligned as time progressed.

Briefing #3

A third major topic commonly discussed within both the issues of the *Texas State Gazette* and the *San Antonio Ledger and Texan* during the time span that I analyzed, was a continuing expression of opposition for Abraham Lincoln. Both papers offered equally strong verbal criticism and animosity toward Lincoln and reflected a view that was very much in line with the shared feelings of the overwhelming majority of Texans and Southerners at the time. This opposition

toward Lincoln is especially evident in both paper's commentary on the outcome of the presidential election of 1860, as well as in their discussions of how it could affect their livelihood. This can be seen in a piece titled "The President Elect" which ran in *The San Antonio Ledger and Texan* on November 24th 1860 just a short time after the election, where the paper directly called out the Northern states for voting for Lincoln stating that all states in the North, with the exception of "glorious New Jersey" voted for Lincoln, which they say "shows an overwhelming hatred for the South within these states". In the same article, they then go on to accuse all Northern papers who have recently published anything portraying the new President Elect in a positive manner of writing "falsehoods to deceive the people of the South in order to more easily carry out their plan (to abolish slavery) with less resistance." This shows that the paper's dislike for Lincoln was so strong that they refused to believe he had any positive qualities at all. Similar anti-Lincoln pieces can be found across the issues of the *Texas State Gazette*. On November 10th of 1860, they published multiple anti-Lincoln pieces just days after the election. For one of these articles, titled "The Crisis," the name alone is enough to clearly convey how Lincoln's potential victory in the presidential race was received and viewed by *The Gazette*. In the article they discuss how Lincoln's position and the strong anti-slavery sentiment shared by his supporters in the "Black-Republican Party" will undoubtedly result in attacks on the Southern way of life, and on their property rights, something which the paper warns they must be prepared to standup for. They also publish several other pieces in the same issue condemning, Abolitionists, Northers and all others who voted for Lincoln. In these pieces they claim that Lincoln's "willingness to violate the constitution" and to illegally take away their state's rights is what has earned him the vote of these people. This profession of each paper's hatred for Lincoln and their view of him and his supporters as a direct threat to slavery and to the South continues repeatedly in the same manner throughout

later issues in the span of newspapers that I analyzed. Both papers use similar tactics and writing styles to discredit Lincoln and his supporters and share an almost identical position in their disapproval for the President.

Briefing #4

The fourth issue that I noticed being repeatedly discussed again and again within my newspaper issues was a discussion on slavery. This subject was so prevalent within the newspapers and is important enough to both play an influential role in each of the topics analyzed within the previous three briefings, while still remaining significant enough to warrant a discussion of its own. Along with the common viewpoint of Southerners at the time, both *The State Gazette* and the *San Antonio Ledger and Texan* share a strong pro-slavery position. On November 17th, 1860, *The Texas State Gazette* published several articles containing a defensive position in regard to the institution of slavery as well as condemning abolitionist movements and their push to end it. This can be seen firsthand in one article, as the paper proclaims that their state of Texas has already “suffered from abolition incendiarism,” and the “diabolical attempts,” of abolitionists. It goes on by saying that to combat such people, Texans need to “be ready at a moment’s warning to protect our rights, our homes and our property.” This quote shows that they believe owning slaves to be a legal right and clearly emphasizes that slaves are viewed as nothing more than property. The rest of this newspaper issue and the other *State Gazette* issues that I analyzed are all filled with countless additional pro-slavery articles and accounts that make the newspapers’ position on the issue more than clear. For example, in one report from the same November 17th issue, *The Gazette* reports on the hanging of Reverend Bewly in Fort Worth, in which the paper works to justify a lynching based only on the fact that Bewly had received a letter from another abolitionist which it reports “developed a plan to assail the institution of slavery, not only by insurrection and the

murder of slave owners, but by desolating the whole state.” The paper goes further to claim that before dying Bewly verbally expressed genuine support of the ideas in the letter and it condemns such actions by calling him and the spirit of the letter he received “as atrocious as anything ever.” Similar rhetoric and pro slavery pieces can repeatedly be found within almost every issue of *The San Antonio Ledger and Texan* that I looked at as well. One of these pieces for example, that is included in the February 2nd issue of *The Ledger* describes the idea of condemning slavery and the North’s labeling it as sin, as something that has become almost a form of religion for the North that has resulted from what they refer to as “receiving more than thirty years of indoctrination” from everyone in their society, “including their teachers” while growing up. The writers of *The Ledger* then go on to critically describe and undermine the foundations of this “religion” by saying that it has resorted to “the stealing of our property, then resisting the enforcement of the laws of the land enacted for its recovery,” in their “religious fervor and fanatical zeal, ” and that “they have sought by their very bearing and intercourse to render our domestic institution of slavery odious and detestable, not only at the North but throughout all Christendom.” These claims show the passion and tension surrounding the issue and make it evident that the writers of the paper believe that they have more of a moral right to own slaves than the abolitionists and Northerners do to take them away or to free them. This defense of the institution as a legal right and the idea that there is nothing morally problematic about owning slaves, rather those opposed to it are the one who are morally wrong is extremely similar to the aforementioned writings within *The Gazette* and shows just how similar the positions and method’s of delivery on the issue were between the two newspapers regarding the issue of slavery during this time.

The Influence of Slavery on Texas Politics and Secession

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April 29, 2019

Often, in history classes we are often taught by our teachers that the Civil War was started as a result over disputes about “states’ rights” more than it was over the issue of slavery. After researching this topic further and carefully analyzing multiple issues of two prominent Texas newspapers in this era, published in the months leading up the Civil War, *The San Antonio Ledger and Texan* and *The Texas State Gazette*, I believe this narrative is incorrect. I would argue that there was no issue that played as significant a role in Texas politics of the time, nor any issue that was as responsible for leading the state of Texas toward secession than the issue of slavery.

Between late 1860 and early 1861, slavery was well rooted in Texas, and by this time many Texan families had come to view slavery as essential to their way of life. These claims seem justified when you consider that slavery had become so intertwined within the fabric of its society, that a significant portion of the state economy depended heavily on slave labor to produce products and generate income. This economic impact can be seen firsthand in a front page article within *The State Gazette* newspaper released on November 17th, 1860, where *The Gazette* issued a statement of figures on the annual cotton crop stating that the previous year’s crop was “the largest by far ever made” and illustrating that the state of Texas was amongst the top exporters of cotton in the country at the time, having shipped 252,424 bales of cotton in the previous year alone. These immense figures as well as the inclusion of this topic within the newspaper show just how important both agriculture and cotton production, two industries historically known for their strong dependence on slave labor, had become to the Texas economy. This also provides a background explaining why many Texans were so fearful of abolition because they knew if their slaves were freed, they would not only lose “their property” they would lose the workforce that their businesses relied on. This phenomenon of fear would inevitably directly translate to votes in favor of

secession as is discussed within The Texas Voter and The Crisis of the Union, where Baker & Baum, numerically illustrate that in general there was a disproportionate approval in favor of secession amongst cotton producers, and in the other populations in the agricultural sector (Baker & Baum, 406), as well as stating “the secessionists tended to be strongest in plantation areas,” (Baker & Baum, 409).

This fear also is what made them so eager to defend the institution and to condemn any and all who opposed it, on the political front. Which is something that I believe is evident in the fact that within the issues I analyzed of these two newspapers, one of the most prevalent and reoccurring topics were articles focused solely on criticizing abolitionists, and Northern Republicans regarding their stance on slavery. Examples of this band of criticism include a lengthy piece in the November 24th, 1860 edition of *The Ledger* that was released following the presidential election titled “The President Elect” as well as a piece in *The State Gazette*, published on November 10th, 1860 titled “The Crisis.” In *The Ledger’s* article, not only do writers harshly criticize Abraham Lincoln for his stance on slavery, they also criticize all the Northern states (with the exception of New Jersey) for voting for him, and accuse newspapers who have published anything portraying the new President Elect in a positive manner of writing “falsehoods to deceive the people of the South in order to more easily carry out their plan (for abolition) with less resistance.” In a similar fashion, in what Gage refers to as part of the paper’s “bitter battle of words against abolitionism,” (189) *The State Gazette’s* piece accuses the new president elect of only securing necessary votes from Northern voters due to what they call his proclaimed “willingness to violate the constitution” and his intentions to “illegally violate Southerner’s property rights,” speaking of course in regard to slavery. Both these articles reflect

just how passionate and strong Texan hatred was in both San Antonio, Austin, and all across the state toward those who opposed slavery.

Not only were Texans' critical of Northern Republicans and abolitionists, they were also just as willing to express their criticism and disapproval of other individuals in power who they felt were not advocating enough for slavery or were not taking a firm enough stance on the matter to protect it, even when those individuals were Democrat Texans. Nowhere is this clearer than in the way that both newspapers targeted and criticized Texas Governor Sam Houston. Nearly every issue of the two papers that I analyzed during this time period contained critical commentary on the governor's work, with many issues containing several articles focusing exclusively on expressing disapproval toward him for his position on slavery within a single 4-6 page newspaper, indicating that this was an extremely popular topic of the time. As Gage says in his journal titled The Texas Road to Secession and War: John Marshall and the Texas State Gazette 1860-1861, *The Gazette* became known for its criticism of Houston, citing examples like the paper "referring to Houston's following as Flunkies," (206). In their verbal attacks, I noticed they also repeatedly assigned labels to him, referring to him as things like their "modest," "old," and "weak Governor," in order to undermine authority and discredit him and his position on slavery. *The San Antonio Ledger* took a less blunt approach but acted with similar intent, instead opting to discredit him by claiming that he had repeatedly made decisions that put his own beliefs before the beliefs of the people of Texas, writing on January 5th, that "in his letter to the other Southern states, Governor Houston concedes the necessity (for slavery and for secession)... How then shall the voice of the people of Texas be heard?" Though the two papers take different routes in their criticism of the governor, their underlying message that they disapproved of his actions and the idea that they felt they must protect slavery at all costs, and

that secession had become their only viable option was very much a commonality between the two papers and was rapidly becoming a popular position amongst a growing number of Texans, who joined in pressuring the Governor to call for a secession convention, which he ultimately would agree to.

This rising pro-secession position amongst Texans stemmed from their previously mentioned reliance on slaves for their livelihood and economic wellbeing, which when paired with the mounting pressures from Northern states, abolitionists and the president, who sought to end the institution, generated a polarizing political environment that increasingly bred strong anti-Northern values and anti-Union sentiment within Texas. Such sentiment can be observed in the rhetoric of *The Texas State Gazette*, in its November 10th issue, where it accuses any Texans not in favor of secession and those not willing to take such matters to protect slavery as being “disloyal to their roots,” as a Southerner. Though not every Texan was originally as gung-ho on following through with the idea of secession as *The Gazette* was, the change of tone from one that is hesitant, to one that is overtly passionate about secession as time progresses within *The Weekly Ledger and Texan* is more reflective of the masses and sheds light on how the overall viewpoints on the matter may have shifted with the Texas population over time. This strong transition from originally stating in its November 24th, 1860 issue that secession “should not be done immediately due to the potential trade implications” to then referring to the free states as “our enemies to the North” in their January 5th publication before ultimately calling for a “civil war” on March 16th shows that likely the motion to secede from the Union gained more ground and became much more popular amongst Texans as time progressed.

As we know, this movement gained such popularity, that it ultimately passed with a monumental margin at the Texas secession convention and in the general popular vote amongst

the Texas people. According to Ralph Wooster's journal An Analysis of the Membership of the Texas Secession Convention "one hundred and twenty-seven delegates, or 71.8 percent of the convention held slaves in 1860," (326) something that impossible to thing did not influence their decision on the matter. This analysis paired with Baker and Baum's discussion of their findings within the statewide popular vote on secession, in which they state that "In the 1861 referendum the best single predictor of secessionist voting strength (in a specific region) was the percentage of slave holders in the electorate," (409), this drives home and truly justifies the claim that Texas secession was directly influenced by and occurred as a result of Texans' wishes to hold on to the institution of slavery.

In conclusion, after careful analysis of the ideas reflected within the pages of *Texas State Gazette* and *The San Antonio Ledger and Texan*, it is clear that the way Texas had developed such an economic reliance on slavery, which generated strong passion amongst its citizens to protect and defend the institution and inevitably caused them to be critical of any who were not in support of its existence, is ultimately what lead to it becoming such an important political topic that deserves credit for being what drove Texas to seceded from the Union, and later join the confederacy and enter the impending Civil War.

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