

Episode 2: The Texas Revolution, History & Memory

Transcript

Word Count: 8,618 words

Steve Sisson: Hello everyone and welcome to the second episode of History and Memory: Tejanos and American Wars with Dr. Alexander Mendoza. Thank you, Alex, for being here with us and sharing your insight and wisdom, your background with this content that I, each chapter I read I get more and more excited and more and more enthralled in the narrative that you're pulling through about what it is to be a person that's in an in between place, if you will, like someone who's, these characters that we'll be following both in Texas history but then moving into American history, Mexican history, that we're discussing people who are trying to find, who are in between, in between one nation state and another, between acceptance and non-acceptance, between honor and shame at some level, and so I'm just excited to cover this information with you, and as my really good friend, it's even more fun because we've got so many other things in common that may come through as they did in the first episode. So Alex, thank you for being with us.

Alex Mendoza: Thanks, good to be here.

Steve Sisson: Well, what I thought we would do after reading this first chapter, chapter one, covers a huge swath of world history, especially history of the region. And you do a fantastic job of it, but it's not easily distilled, and even then it was set in a context that seems to be historically situated and populated for basically someone who's relatively up to speed on history in this area of the world. And so what I thought I would do is take a completely amateur stab at setting a more op- more, a wider scene for what we're seeing here. This was with your permission, but I just want to make sure that everyone clear that I am not the historian, and I am making a stab at this for a narrative purpose to give Alex and I an ability to cover more about the specific two topics we want to cover today, and so any failures here are failures of mine and not failures of Alex's, so. So to set the stage, I want to call this and hoping I'm to do this in a pretty short window, but I want to call this La Frontera and the world that it made.

And ultimately, what I'm going to do is cover prehistory to the Texas Republic, or an attempt to set the stage. And the first thing I think that's really important is for everyone to recognize that this part of the world is not one person. It is not one people. It is dozens of distinct nations, distinct lives, and this is a place that has been a place for an extremely long period of time before the humans, human cockroaches made their way into the space. All of the ways that we do, all the things that we do as humans.

We've got the Caddo people from the East who are basically town builders, continental traders, mound raisers, super sophisticated and settled people. You also had the Karankawas who were on the coast, they knew every inlet and every estuary, they were Gulf people. You had the Coahuiltecan people from the South in the brush country, mobile, adaptive with deep roots. You had the Apaches in the area, you had the Comanches in the area, and what you have here is a

land that was full of history, politics, and conflict before any European ever arrived in the space. Then we have the first Europeans show up.

This is especially interesting for those of you who want to get more on this. Just do a Google search of Cabeza De Vaca and follow his story and the story of his journeys, there are two or three amazing books on this topic, but you know, a shipwrecked Spanish treasurer who wasn't a conquistador, he wasn't a conqueror, he was just a survivor, for eight years he basically moves along the interior of his, and is a captive, he was a traitor, a healer, a shaman, and he comes out of this picture, these eight years of wandering, transformed by the land itself and not necessarily by his experience. It's like the land itself, this border changed him and the people in that area, especially indigenous people of the area changed him as much as that area was changed by him, which we now think of Cabeza De Vaca in this way of he is the first person to have been in that space whereas I think he would tell us now, Are you kidding me? I was more changed by the space than I could ever have done otherwise. And this is the first written portrait of Texas.

It's like the first story of Texas that we have. Highly recommend it for anybody to look into. So then Spain moves in because France forces this. It has to happen; we have this battle of ideas and battle of whose area is what in a place that's contested between France and Spain. And so the Spanish basically start creating missions and presidios in the North going up to East Texas, San Antonio De Ver, also the San Antonio River is a very important part of this area, but basically in 1718 this, initially a convent, then becomes a fort.

It is the place where much of what we'll be discussing in the early, in this episode is going to be happening in this, what many people would call the Alamo, but was a mission to begin with and a series of missions. But the Spanish could claim Texas on a map, but governing it was a completely different thing. So it was one thing to say they owned a thing, but that's a whole different thing to be able to control it. We had native prep dep, natives, natives, especially the Comanche and the Apache, who were basically raiding freely and causing all kinds of havoc. And basically what holds this frontier together during this window of time are families of people who are already there, many of whom are one huge constituent party of this are the folks we'll be talking about as Tejanos, but also you had incoming in this area where Spain's desire to try to create an edge here to try to create some distance. So what holds this area, La Frontera, together in this window, both imperfectly and stubbornly, if you will, were the families that were already here. And these are roots of what would become the *Compañías Volantes*, and we will be talking about them a lot more. But right around this time also, Mexico wins its independence from Spain, creates its own nation state, and it but the problem for many of the people in this border area is that it's governed in Saltillo, which is a town at least 100, maybe 150 miles south of the Rio Grande. And so another 150 miles north is San Antonio, and that is a very large swath of land to be controlled by one group.

And so there tends to be this feeling that the Rio Grande becomes this border itself that now is the border that we know of, but that is a place in which the challenges that were happening between Mexico holding its land against the encroachment of the Americans and, well, first the

French, but then the Americans. What the Mexican decided to do was to open land up to Anglo American empresarios. So, Stephen F. Austin, the name of the town I live in, is the main one. His father initially got a land grant from Spain that he wasn't able to do much with, but then Stephen F.

Austin does, and at this point in time, as you start to get Anglo Americans moving into the space with their Manifest Destiny, as I was raised, as I was educated and in my experience as college student in 80s the and 90s, this vision of America expanding and expanding, which it will do exponentially for, and is continuing to do. But what's important here is that at this time, this area, the Mexican government decided to create this space so that there would be a buffer zone to keep the Mexican nation state safe, but to but other ones who wanted to claim all of the resources and opportunities that they had already they did not want to give up any of that space. But the problem here is that you've got more Anglo Americans in the space than you in Mexico at this time, than you actually have Tejanos or Mexicans, so it begins to create the challenges that we'll be unpacking as we go forward into what happens with the battle between Mexico and basically becomes Texas but is really America at that point in time, right? It's just we'll unpack that a little bit more as we get into it.

But ultimately what I want to make sure is clear here in this is that we've got these we have this huge swath of land, a limited number of people who are able to claim the land, but this claiming becomes very, very important to the way that people consider home. And it's really important to realize this is not a line, this is not a right on the river or at San Antonio or wherever the construct of where the land barrier was at that point, which I think was all the way into Louisiana that was owned by Mexico before the Louisiana Purchase. But all of this area is more of a zone, it's a place of contest, a place of negotiation, shifting belongings, shifting people, shifting loyalties and values, and stuck in the middle of all of this is a group of people who have no, who have a mixed view of their nationhood about who it is that they actually are, what nation are they a part of. And so what I'd like to do, Alex, with that is and one thing I will say is that the and then when we get to 1836 and we have the Mexican, the Texas Republic defeat Mexico at the Battle of San Jacinto after winning, air quoting winning the Alamo, which is not really a win, but whatever, it's told us that way.

La Frontera doesn't end, it just basically changes hands again. And so what we're dealing with here in terms of swath of all this period of time is a, again, a group of people who are conflicting groups of people who have identity structures in ways of thinking and ways of being that may not align with the way we think, as modern people, way we think of nations and states and those kinds of things. And I think your book, which I'm so excited talking about in-depth now that I've done this silly little introduction, is how the individual people involved are dealing with that, especially the Tejanos who to are be representing The United States, well, Texas and then The United States in these various wars as we go forward. So, how'd I do, Doctor Mendoza, historian Doctor Mendoza, to do okay, anything we need to reframe or retell, and how would you position this then and say, Where do we go from here? Because we know we've got two threads we really want to pull on, but What do you think?

Alex Mendoza: I think that what you outlined is very indicative of how both you and I grew up in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s. We were conditioned not only by the mandatory Texas history in middle school, and then the mandatory US history, I believe, in eighth grade before you move into history in high school, we were conditioned to kind of think again of who the good guys were. It was what John Wayne depicted in terms of *The Alamo*, freedom loving Americans that came into a very despotic land, ruled by Mexico and their chaotic political structure, and that automatically people just adopted this identity and this concept of loyalty to nation state, the new flag, just automatically. So, it's, again, a very black and white interpretation. So you had good guys, you had bad guys, you had this interpretation that as soon as you crossed over into this particular territory, that automatically—like a light switch—you'd be loyal to Mexico, to Spain, or to Texas, or then later by 1845 to the United States, when the reality is it didn't work that way.

And what this construct taught us was that America, Mexico, this is a land of absolutes, when in fact the people who actually lived there in this forgotten border, this forgotten *frontera*, they actually had a different interpretation of who their loyalties were to and who their identity was. And it's a good thing that you mentioned Austin, because Americans, in terms of U. S. History, don't often think about like this dilemma of the old 300 when Moses Austin got that land grant, then carried on by his son, Stephen Austin, after he passed away. And this is the idea that Americans were willing to give up the loyalty to their country for free land.

So the concept of identity and loyalty and nationhood, I mean, Americans were willing to give it up for free land, and all those Americans that flooded into Texas in the 1820s and the early 1830s were also willing to give up their nation state for a new nation state as long as they gave them free land. I mean, if you recall just loosely, the concept was adopt loyalty to Mexico, learn Spanish, adopt Catholicism, and then voila, you get free land. So what it kind of goes into, and I don't have the credit of being one of the path ground efforts at history. I mean, that goes to the transnational historians, the historians of the borderlands. And one of the things that I found very unique in this, is a historian from California, Andres Resendez. His book and his work now, almost twenty plus years ago, he mentioned it in like this analogy that I still remember. He called these nation states in the early 1800s, like two tsunami forces just kind of butting against one another. And it's the people in the middle, as these two tsunamis are just angling for power, for control, for identity. You have, as you mentioned, you have the indigenous people, you have those Tejanos that have moved there for economic and social betterment, and you have Americans coming in also for economic development and whatnot. But you develop being so far away from nation's capitals, you mentioned, Saltillo, and when you think about where most of these American migrants, immigrants came from, I mean, they're far away from New Orleans or far away from Knoxville and Nashville. You develop Identity.

Steve Sisson: A frontier people. Two, I just want to make this point more, make sure people hear us here. What you're just saying about Stephen F. Austin, we are also saying about Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett. That they left, they decided not to be Americans, at some level, to reframe their situation as Americans, to consider being Texan or whatever it was, but mostly it was for land.

Right? So these ideas of nationhood that we hold so dearly, that we think are so concrete and set. While there was some of that, there's, these are, those two names I just, I mean in Texas, the name Austin is well known. But Jim Bowie, we've a whole he's a huge, and then Davy Crockett, these are extremely famous American frontiersmen who decided to be something other than American, at least in theory, that we should consider. And so I love that you bring that forward as what's going on here is a mercurial mixing pot of boiling, bubbling whatever that ends up having a border that happens to be on the Rio Grande.

But for a while there, what was the northern border of Mexico before we had the Louisiana Purchase? Because that process is where that's where this contest a lot of contesting begins to occur because Americans see there's if they can go that far down, then they can keep going, right? It's that, the opening of that border, the opening of that frontier all the way down, which takes them all the way to the Far West Coast all the way to Oregon with Lewis and Clark, and then it's just, I think it's really interesting for Americans to be thinking about how fluid Americanness is, but also what land was and what the points were and the, I don't know, it's to me very, very telling that we have strong senses of nationhood or senses of where a place is that were more fluid in this window of time, especially from 1800 to '18 till the Civil War, really, you have a lot of especially when and then when we have the Mexican War, we've got a lot more fluidity there.

Alex Mendoza: You know, it's funny, you mentioned Cabeza de Vaca a little, a little while ago, but it's funny that you mentioned him because when he reported when he finally escaped captivity, when he finally spent those eight years on the *Frontera* and made his way to the capital of New Spain, now Mexico City, he reported about all the potential of gold and riches in Texas. So later on in the 1500s, expedition to try to find those seven cities of gold.

Steve Sisson: Cibolo. Yeah, Cibolo.

Alex Mendoza: So Mexico's far north expanded all the way up to modern day Kansas state.

Steve Sisson: I think Colorado too. Texas? Yes.

Alex Mendoza: So they're out there, but they find nothing. So then they give up, they give up for approximately one hundred years until as you pointed out, there's another European state. So then, oh, let's go back and move into Texas to keep the other nation state from claiming that land. So Texas was abandoned for almost one hundred years, because there seemed to be no golden riches, because that was the model throughout the 1500s. Gold, silver, minerals, when they couldn't find that in Texas, they gave up.

Abandoned it.

Steve Sisson: Yet, there were still people living here making their livelihood Yes, I know. That's exactly right. That's the point. That wasn't important.

So in this window of time, we have a group of people, a subset of people, well not a people, but how did Mexico, what was Mexico doing to try to control and keep control of the areas that they wanted as America was encroaching into the area. What were the ways in which we know they set up these impresarios, but they also set up the missions, and but they there were other elements here that were in play that were important.

Alex Mendoza: Yep. Religion, the army, and the settlers. You know, that trifecta was what the Spanish model was all about. And even under Spain in the 1770s, it was supposed to be individual. So it was basically local autonomy, which is going to come back to haunt Mexico, by the 1830s, because the idea of allowing civilians and soldiers as combination to sort of serve as that buffer between them and France and then later The United States, well, that's not going to turn out so well because you allow people that semblance of autonomy, that sense of independence, and it's going to come back to bite you later when they develop a completely different mindset, not a blind loyalty to the nation state, which is hundreds of miles to the south, and it comes back to have consequences.

So what develops on the front that is like this frontier psyche because you're doing things on your own, you're naturally resistant to authority, you're naturally resistant to the nation state, because you're out there yourself as the buffer, you mentioned those *companias* as well as those are our local pieces of law enforcement that are supposed to be raised by local autonomy. So you have that push towards that sense of independence. So you have that frontier psyche. And I think that a choice for identity is important because it's situational. You have situational logic.

So for the Americans that are hard up, that need land, that require a semblance of assistance.

Steve Sisson: Well . . .

Alex Mendoza: it's easy to just give up loyalty to The United States, and adopt Mexican loyalty, because it's situational, your family, your livelihood, your future depends on it. And we think of history kind of like through twenty first century logic when it's hard to give up your home and your livelihood to move to an area hundreds of miles away, but not so in the 1800s. You know, they're moving and just picking up and starting over. It's part of the culture of The United States. It's part of the culture of Spain and later Mexico, that you're willing to uproot your family just to move to somewhere else.

That place that you move to, if it happens to be the *Frontera*, well, you begin to develop a different sense of identity, a different sense of loyalty, a different sense of logic for everything else.

Steve Sisson: Well, tell us a little bit more about these *Companias Volantes*, because they're super interesting to me. As I said to you before we started recording that I think this group of people needs its own book, its own unpacking because number one, it allows us to see that there's a lot here for what people value in their stories about their past. We'll be talking about

the Texas Rangers as we go along, and obviously this is a group that looks a lot like, well before the Texas Rangers, looks and acts a lot like what the Texas Rangers will be looking and acting like, and yet we don't know very much about them. They're not a part of the cultural I didn't learn about these in Texas history. I didn't learn about these in the University of Texas when I studied Western history.

And so, the history of the West. So unpack this group of people. What's going on with this group of people, because they weren't just one people, right? But give us a little bit more flavor here, because I think it can be very helpful, and I think it also helps us see how these were warriors. Basically, Tejanos warriors that we'll be tracking through various war situations, but they're, at this point in time, they're not Tejanos, they're something else.

What is this challenge? What is this nuance around identity? I want to place them in this, like, rarified air of their amazing and look, this is incredible thing, but they weren't an institution, right? Like you said, they are small bands of like minded local people trying to be safe? Anyway, tell about them before I

Alex Mendoza: Well, it's a good segueway to kind of think about, like, the main thread that's going to go through all this, which is memory. You mentioned the Texas Rangers. During our last podcast, we discussed the Texas Ranger statue that went up at the Major League Ballpark that is just down the road from where I live. And while this baseball organization kind of recognizes the Texas Rangers, the Texas Rangers have also lived on in terms of Hollywood, this portrayal, the Lone Ranger, Lonesome Dove, and novels and films, and you have like this just grand view of this law enforcement organization. I mean, just recently Chuck Norris passed away, and in came *Walker: Texas Ranger* from the 1990s, early 2000s, the first meme culture of what Chuck Norris could do, and now going on with A.I., as you know now Chuck Norris has basically taken on Darth Vader, taking on all the villains of movies, both past and present.

So I think that the *Compañías Volantes* actually got short shrift because they foundational piece for how the early Texas Rangers functioned, at least in the nineteenth century. So under the Spanish flag, back in 1713, Spain could not afford to secure the frontier. They're far north. So, what they did is they thought of the next best thing. They're like, let's turn it over to the locals.

Spain let them basically develop a way to secure the frontier, not only from indigenous people, but also from nation states. These *Compañías Volantes*, these are basically flying squadrons, companies of men made up of anywhere from 50 to 100 local individuals. And they were trained by the Spanish army. So think of like a cavalry unit that is able to just be quick, decisive strikes like lightning. And one of the important things about them that's always fascinating, because I've watched these movies like *Lonesome Dove* that series, and I've read the books, you often see like Texas Rangers, Gus McCray, if you're familiar with *Lonesome Dove* carrying extra horses to go pursue fugitives.

And there's both in *Lonesome Dove* and the *Return to Lonesome Dove* that you have these characters of these strong men that basically look at right and wrong and follow law and order

as the utmost of their character. But it was the *Compañías Volantes* who developed the idea of carrying spare horses, they called it the *caballada*. They are the precursor to the Texas Rangers because they are the law enforcement authority there. They are designed to protect against indigenous people, against nation states. And then later, they're the ones that deal with local fugitives.

So these cavalry patrols that crisscross the border, and of course, you and I are familiar with how desolate that South Texas border area could be. South Of San Antonio, it's practically despondent of nature, of water, depending on the time of year. You know, heat can reach into the 110 degree range anytime in a given summer.

Steve Sisson: And it's not just flat. It's not flat. It's got canyons and rivers and crossings, and it's it's a treacherous terrain. When you're talking about these flying what did you call them? Flying ...

Alex Mendoza: squadrons. Flying squadrons. Yes.

Steve Sisson: I think of it makes me think of *Blood Meridian* in Cormac McCarthy's famous book about a much later period, but a group of course, I'm not saying that these folks were horrifyingly violent, but I just think that, okay, this is in my head of, I don't think of the Texas Rangers as much, I think of that group. Right? That book, it's seared on my heart brain in such a way. It's like that doesn't exist without this group of, this kind of independent law, law independent of a nation state that had the ability to make decisions, and that's a lot of what goes on in that book is how one person gets to decide what happens and how the different things play out in it. But to me, and again, I don't want to go down that avenue, but just as a lot of, as you said, *Walker Texas Ranger*, there's a lot of history around this idea of this independent military group that is fighting for the rights or values of a small group of people that are that can go so far.

And it is part of the history and the mindset of this place. This individualism that you're talking about, this rugged individual individualism, is fit in with this. Each of those independent people worked together, but they were all independent as well. Like, it's a it's if you live here, it's deep in our DNA. All of us think this way, you know?

Alex Mendoza: And by the time Mexico gained its independence, one of the things that resonates is independence kind of ruined the *Compañías Volantes* because no longer were locals needed to secure the frontier. So they kind of turned it over to the Americans that were now coming in. And that has its own. But one of the legacies is that Sam Houston, when he becomes the president of the Republic Of Texas, I mean, he encouraged the Texas Rangers organizations back post-Revolution to create organizations to protect and serve as law enforcement. And this idea modeled itself after these flying squadrons, but now excluding Tejanos, for the most part, even though Tejanos did serve, but the leadership extends to this.

And wherever there's areas kind of like Laredo, they continued the *Compañías Volantes* under this transformation into Mexico. But what it does is it also creates this sense of autonomy. You know, for example, at the time the siege for the Alamo and then the Texas Revolution broke out, the city of Laredo, which is about 150 miles situated right in the Rio Grande, I mean, they don't really participate because they're going to wait it out because they want to remain neutral. There is one Laredoan who goes up to partake in the Revolution, but people want stay out of it because this mindset of the *frontera*, this choice of identity is situational, and they don't want to mess with it at this time.

Steve Sisson: Well, Santa Anna, who was the initially Spanish battle commander General, then became president, although he sort of was a pseudo president, right? Became president and then became a rancher and then let somebody else be the president. When there were these incursions of the initial uprisings that happened for Mexico, then later as Texas starts its independence movement of having a revolution, He was known for his brutality of really coming in with very large military presence and just overwhelming and making a very strong statement about how he handled revolution. And so, it would be for a group of people who are in between San Antonio and Saltillo to be in a position of being like, how, what's going to happen there, pain As Santa Anna comes through, how's he going to view that? And I'm making Santa Anna as the only general but there were other generals.

I can also recognize at a deep existential level the need to try to remain neutral. You know, the way we framed it, not that you did, but the way it gets framed is, Oh, they're just trying to protect themselves. But you don't, until you're in that situation, you don't know, really know what it feels like. I can't even imagine what that is, what it would be like.

Alex Mendoza: It's situational logic, kind of like It what we've been talking depends on what's going on at that particular time. I mean, even Tejanos, at the time of the Texas Revolution, you have choices to make, and some Tejanos choose to support the revolution like Juan Seguin, others like Juan Navarro from San Antonio, they choose to kind of remain ambivalent and thinking about neutrality. Laredo stays neutral, and it just depends on your personal situation, how you view your future at stake with the swirling winds of war around you.

Steve Sisson: Well, let's unpack Juan Seguin for a little bit, and if we want to use both Juan Seguin and Juan Navarro as juxtaposing them a little bit, we can, but I think Juan Seguin is someone who really is a great model for how he was bullish to be an American. Bullish to be a Texan, right? Wanted to be separated from Mexico. Once he'd made his decision, he decided to put all his eggs in the basket of Texas. Just tell us a little bit about his story and how that plays out because it does in the in the end, it is does become a pretty tragic story.

It does become a very sad story about how and one that we really need to set the stage for as we go into the Mexican War and then wars from there.

Alex Mendoza: Certainly, Because, I mean, he joined the winning side, and he ended up losing. I mean, losing maybe not the year after the Texas Revolution, not two years, but within a

decade after the Texas Revolution, because he just happened to be originally from Mexico, and therefore his loyalty was questioned, his support of nationhood was questioned, and I'll unpack all of that. But I think that it was truly a fascinating case, because when it comes down to like this time period the sense of patriarchy is very strong with population in Texas. I mean, you follow local leaders, you follow those that are well established.

Steve Sisson: And you follow God.

Alex Mendoza: Absolutely. And in the case of Juan Seguin, he is considered one of the elite Tejanos in the Lone Star at this particular time. So when he joins the ranks of Sam Houston's army, I think it's rather unique that there was already like the semblance of animosity due to the Alamo, due to the massacres of those who surrendered, that Sam Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto, because what did Tejanos have to offer. They were good horsemen. They were excellent cavalymen.

So therefore, they could serve as the eyes and ears for the burgeoning Sam Houston Army. But at this time, the animosity between some of the Anglo soldiers in Houston's army against Santa Anna had animosity towards all ethnic Mexicans, to the point where during the Battle of San Jacinto, Seguin's men had to wear placards on their hats to distinguish them from and the Mexican soldiers just to make sure that they don't get shot off their horses, but they chose to participate. And what happens after the Texas Revolution, the growing animosity towards all Tejanos just eventually catches up to Juan Seguin. I mean, he tries to do everything, righteously loyal to the Texas Republic. As you all know, he becomes mayor to your hometown of San Antonio.

And one of the things that classes, when I teach my Texas history or my class on Tejanos, one of the things that they're often ambivalent about recognizing is just how weak Texas is. Because on the bumper stickers on Interstate 35, what you normally see is like Texas was a nation before it became a state. Therefore, you kind of think that independence gave Texas, like, a better place in the Union after 1845 and after the Civil War because it had that unique upbringing that it was a nation before it was a state. However, I mean, Texas is not alone. Hawaii was also a nation before it became a state.

Nevertheless, we digress. The thing about Texas is that it was politically and economically weak. I mean, there's a reason why the leaders of Texas wanted annexation. They believed that without annexation that they're dead in the water. So they were unable to do is protect that frontier. So, you had incursions coming in from the Mexican army. Mexico's government is so weak that they are unable to do anything with it. But those incursions into San Antonio led the people of the city and nearby Austin to also think that Seguin was in cahoots with the Mexican nation state. And unfortunately, the growing clamor of doubting his loyalty, doubting identity, thinking along racial lines instead of what he had done as a local leader, as a political leader and as a military leader, that went out the window immediately from a drop of the hat.

So he had no other alternative but to give up his adopted Texas identity and flee into Mexico, because his neighbors, his fellow Texans gave him, in his estimation, no other alternative, but to go pursue life elsewhere. And ironically, throughout the 1840s, he's unhappy being in Mexico, what he had to give up in San Antonio. And even though Citi bears his name now, less than an hour east of San Antonio, nevertheless, at that point in time, he was persona non grata. He was not to be trusted. But what it reveals, I think, that choice, that situational choice that he made, is that it's going to create like a ripple effect in terms of like how Tejanos view military service or how they view aligning themselves in a war, like the war with Mexico in 1846, the civil war in 1861, the war against the indigenous people in the late 1860s, early 1870s, and even the Spanish American wars, late as 1898, the Tejanos remain ambivalent because they realize that if they pick the wrong side, if they pick any side, it could come to the detriment of their livelihood, careers, their standing, and their communities.

Steve Sisson: I mean, we in San Antonio, there's a major street called De Zavala, and I never knew all of my years living in San Antonio who Desavala was, but it was in reading your book that I realized who he actually was, was Vice President of the Nation of Texas, of the Republic of Texas Short at a short lived. Very short but still there's this, the one and only, in essence, the one and only Tejanos who was in a position of government, and again, it's just this element of how hard So one question I have for you, and I don't know how relevant, it just seems relevant to me because of growing up in San Antonio, so when, let's just say, an Anglo American Texan is in conflict with a Tejano, the ways that they're not connecting are obviously the way they look, there's going to be a racial difference in the way they look, but a huge piece here is the use of language, because, which is an ongoing, has been an ongoing challenge in the border, the Frontera, all along of Americans speak English, they don't speak Spanish, but yet we have huge numbers of Americans who speak Spanish primarily as their original language.

So talk a little bit here, not just, I don't think of De Zavala as the reason that's putting us in this edge, but it is a thing that will be helpful as we go along because it's not just the way you look like you have with African Americans, but there's also this other element of Spanish being spoken that tends to create I think of Anglo Americans being able to think that they have justification for their attitudes and approaches because of this unique aspect that's different for African Americans or other racial groups because they primarily speak English. Like, it's just another, in the border area, this is a very big issue that someone who lives in Minnesota or somewhere else might not have the same experience of. Maybe if you were in downtown, if you're in Brooklyn or in The Bronx, you might have a similar feeling, but it really is a very strong piece here of difference.

Alex Mendoza: I think so. And you know, let me throw a shoutout to our college, the University of Texas at Austin. We, you and I, and our teammates, were so fortunate to get first dibs in registration. I mean, before any other student, before the grad students, student athletes at UT got first dibs at registration. So I was able to sneak into all the good history classes before anyone else could.

And one of the classes that I snuck into right around 1990-1991 was a class by David Montejano, who wrote the book, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas*. I also took a class with Ricardo Romo, the very first Tejano who broke the four-minute mile at Texas and went on to get his PhD and became a university professor and then a university president in San Antonio. But David Montejano framed it best, called that nebulous area, how language and all those issues, he called it a process of accommodation. And Anglos had come in, they suspected the language, they weren't enthusiastic of the language all the way down to the actual Rio Grande.

But because they had business interests there, they had economic interests, political interests, they accommodated themselves to the language. And the Tejanos there helped the process along by using their culture. For example, weddings, baptisms, the whole concept of *padrinos* godparents, the culture in San Antonio, all the way down to the Rio Grande, it facilitated this nebulous area where the Anglos that had to be there could accept a little bit of the language because they were made godparents to Tejanos child at a wedding or at a baptism and their religious connotations. They wrote about how they suspected Catholicism, how they were curious about the Mexican people who live there, but they accommodated themselves because there seemed to be, like, a reaching out of sorts. And this was done through familial and religious and other cultural practices that kind of bridge the gap, for lack of a better word.

But they accomplished that, and this was something unique up until this time period, up until the Texas Revolution era.

Steve Sisson: Yeah accommodate And then as Texas joins America, that is it is just an American attitude. It seems that English is how we operate and that is the it is pretty ruthless in its whether it's French or Spanish or Native American languages, like it is, it is your, you're, there, you look down the nose if you don't speak anything other than English when we have a country of Italians, Germans, I mean, we're a country of, all of us are immigrants, in essence, except for the indigenous, and they didn't speak English, obviously. So, like, it's just this weird thing to me. I just want to I'm just noting it as maybe something with thread we pull through it depending on how the episodes go, but it's not something that is talked about in your book per se, but it's something in my experience as an Anglo American of how I differentiate myself from you, right?

And why I should do that, I don't know, except you speak fantastic English but I have many friends who I live in a neighborhood right now in Austin where most of my neighbors don't speak English, if they speak any English at all, speak English with a very, very heavy accent, whether Honduran or El Salvadoran or different. So to me it's this piece of our challenge, the challenge of otherness, this challenge of in betweenness that I'm trying to talk about or thread through all of our conversation, are there are reasons for it, but I'm arguing that none of them are good. None of them are reasonable. None of them are ethical. None of them have moral standing.

However, they still exist and they still cause us to be separated in ways that we do not otherwise do it. If I'm in Paris and I don't speak English, I have no reason to be able to think that they

should accommodate me. Mean, Americans are we know what an ugly American is. They're all over everywhere, but, you know what I'm saying? It's like there's this peace, though, in America that just seems really problematic in this country, and it seems to have been for a very long time.

And this area is a place where we can see this, and we can see this, as you just said, it's something of a combination that's working, but at some point in time, those men and women who veterans of wars and are, and if they speak more Spanish or only Spanish or maybe even speak Spanish within their friend groups, they're going to have challenges related to that. It's a real thing.

Alex Mendoza: But it also works both ways. And I'm going to do a deep dive into the memory banks to a time where you and I lived together in San Pedro Oaks in 1991. We were watching television, you and I, and you had this propensity to love the wolf. Yeah, I remember there was a time when we were talking about that, and I couldn't pronounce wolves. I kept saying wooves, wooves, because my lack of the English language on the border, you could grow up, I've spent 18 years on the border up to that point.

And I predominantly spoke Spanish for the most part, spoke Spanish to my parents spoke Spanish to my friends, my classmates, and the only exception was like in front of a teacher maybe anywhere else. But my Spanish was probably 80% to 90% of my daily language. So by the time I got to UT Austin, there were certain words that would trip me up because I never practiced them. I knew how to spell them, but I couldn't pronounce them. And that was when you gave me a hard time.

But eventually, I got to figure it out. And the same thing with hills. You know, we ran hills at UT, but I would say heels. And it just little subtlety of trying to overcome that. But it's because on the border up until the turn of the twenty first century, you could survive without ever learning English because you're predominantly in the majority.

My mom up until her last days, never really learned English.

Steve Sisson: That's interesting. So as we close-up this episode and look forward to the next one, let's pull a little on this thread of memory that we want to hold all the way through. What aspects of what we're discussing what we opened this up with last week, last time we talked about the challenges we had in the 1990s with the statues and the memory of the Civil War playing through, and how that affects our ability, what history is based on what memory we have and how we memorialize. It's not just the memory in the sense of what we remember, but how we remember in the way we do that. What threads do you think are relevant here for to consider as we move into the next episode?

Not that every time we need to talk about memorial necessarily, but I know there are some things we're about the Texan identity all Texans, almost all Americans, feel a very strong affinity for the Alamo. We all know what the Alamo is, but what is our memory of that? What is the

Alamo? And talk a little bit about that as we close-up this episode and set ourselves up for the next one.

Alex Mendoza: Yeah, it's funny you mentioned that because you mentioned De Zavala. But his granddaughter, Adina De Zavala, was one of the architects who made sure that the Alamo was commemorated at the end of the nineteenth century, at the beginning of the twentieth century. She was one of the proponents to emphasize the importance of memory for later generations, because fifty plus years after the Battle of the Alamo, people just don't care. You know, as you mentioned, it's just like instead of a shrine to the past. So here you have a Tejana who is promoting her family, the legacy of what her grandfather did, even though he had a short lived reign as vice president of the Republic of Texas, to emphasize the way Texans and Americans should commemorate the past, in this case, a war.

And it's unique to, like, our continual thread because her brother, Agustin De Zavala, will join the ranks of the US Army to fight in the war against Spain. And this is something that we're going to have to come to grips with just a little bit down the road. And how he views military service is going to be something uniquely different than what others might have thought about at that juncture.

Steve Sisson: Yeah, I find it really interesting. This has been a subcurrent through this, and I think it's just coming into my realization that as we talking about memory, we're using memorials as part of our description of that, and memorials are almost always being done for war. So this thread will be the one we carry all the way through, because it's only after 1972, I'm sure. That particular military conflict does not have a whole lot of memorials. I mean, it only has one or two big ones, but there's a lot of ambiguity and challenge related to Vietnam related because of it being the war that was lost, in essence, right?

But to me, it's really, I'm just now sensing that this memory is one I was considering how we remember what we remember about who we are and what we are, but also how that's memorialized, and these memorials are primarily, as the thread for your book pulls through, related to war, and related to what it is to be an American war. And what it is to be, it is, it's really, really cool, and it makes me so much so appreciative of your book, but even more appreciative of your ability to weave the rest of the history of especially Mexico into Texas history into U. S. History as pulling in these various categories, these various threads that are really interesting from the *Compañías Volantes* to Juan Seguin to De Zavala to it's just really cool how we're threading this idea of memory all the way through this podcast.

Alex Mendoza: I concur. And one final thought to mention, when I was coming through like this passage on the *Compañías Volantes*, one of the difficulties in publishing is getting rights and permissions to artwork. And there was one piece of artwork on the *Compañías Volantes*, a group of *volanteros*, basically, on the search, and it was called *La Huella* the the tracks, the trail. And I couldn't get access to the permissions. But one of our cross country teammates, a native of San Antonio, an artist in his own right, Dan Castro, he came up with his own artistic interpretation of the *Compañías Volantes*.

And it's like a piece that I treasure immensely. I mean, there's things about this book that I'm very proud of, but I'm proud of also, like, it's got so many personal attachments to this. You know, it has you and my cross country teammates giving me that mental fortitude, but it also has like an actual contribution from one of our teammates who actually created something for me on the fly. You know, he came back in a matter of days, he had his own depiction of what a *Compañía Volante* could look like.

Steve Sisson: So cool.

Alex Mendoza: Just pleased. Pleased beyond belief.

Steve Sisson: Hat tip to Danny Castro. I'm sure he's Dan now, but when he when he was our teammate, he was Danny. He was Danny.

Alex Mendoza: Was known as other things, like "The Shadow"

Steve Sisson: Just known as "The Shadow," yes. Well Alex, again, thank you so much. What a treat to go through this, your book, and also just to track this history and these memories through for our listeners. So, thanks to everyone for listening, and we'll see you in the next episode of History and Memory

Alex Mendoza: time. Thank you.