

## The Legacy of the Alamo

The battle of the Alamo is one of the great stories of American history that has helped to shape not only the ideas and beliefs of Texas and the western United States, but also the nation as a whole. Because of this, the battle of the Alamo has become known as a great American epic and the historical figures to take part in the slaughter have ascended to legend. Although the stories that most people hear about the siege of the Alamo are largely false, it is a story that the majority of Americans will hear at some point of their lives. And if any American has not heard about the battle of the Alamo itself, then certainly they have at one time or another heard the cry, ‘Remember the Alamo!’

The Last Stand of the Alamo is the Legend of Texas Independence and is akin in both importance and sacrifice as the ancient Battle of Thermopylae, where 300 hundred Spartans gave their lives to defend Greece from Persian conquest. In that same fashion, it is told that on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1836, that a small Texan garrisoned were killed to the last man while defending against Mexican forces under the command of General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna<sup>1</sup>. While this is often the case when most people think of the Alamo, many don’t realize that this is not exactly what happened. In fact, many of the stories telling of the Last Stand myth are largely fabricated. For one, not all of the Texan defenders fought to the death. In *Texan Identities: Moving Beyond Myth, Memory, and Fallacy in Texas History*, Light Townsend Cummins stated that, “several eyewitness account, confirm that *soldados* took six or seven defenders captive.”<sup>2</sup> Cummins also

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<sup>1</sup> Cummins, L. T. *Texan Identities: Moving Beyond Myth, Memory, and Fallacy on Texas History*. (University of North Texas Press, Denton, 2016) 42.

<sup>2</sup> Cummins, L. T. *Texan Identities: Moving Beyond Myth, Memory, and Fallacy on Texas History*. (University of North Texas Press, Denton, 2016) 47.

notes that there is strong evidence that one of these prisoners was David Crocket,<sup>3</sup> refuting the myth that David Crocket had died in the open air surrounded by the bodies of Mexican *soldados*.<sup>4</sup> Although these men were promptly butchered on the order of Santa Anna, it is a counter argument that the defenders fought to their dying breath. However, the debunking of the Last Stand myth should not take away from the importance that the battle has had on Texas and American identity as a whole.

While many historians now agree that most of the stories about the Alamo are in fact myth, it does not change the importance that such a myth has had on the developing United States. More importantly, the myth of the Alamo did not come about because of misunderstanding, but it was more a product of Texan pride. James Donovan agrees to this in his book, *The Blood of Heroes: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo- and the Sacrifice that Forged a Nation*. In it, Donovan wrote that the battle of the Alamo, “More than any other event of the Texas Revolution, their sacrifice truly forged a nation that would one day join a country greater than their own.”<sup>5</sup> The Sacrifice of the Alamo’s defenders soon became the battle cry of Texas Revolutionaries later on and continues to be one of the most recognized cries in American history. Most notably, Texans cried ‘Remember the Alamo!’ as they ambushed Santa Anna and his army in San Jacinto. Cummins writes, “What began as a cry of vengeance become one of pride and exultation. Outsiders, those that fail to understand Texas culture and deny Texas

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<sup>3</sup> Cummins, L. T. *Texan Identities: Moving Beyond Myth, Memory, and Fallacy on Texas History*. (University of North Texas Press, Denton, 2016) 47.

<sup>4</sup> Donovan, James. *The Blood of Heroes: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo- and the Sacrifice that Forged a Nation* (Little Brown and Company, New York, 2012) 292.

<sup>5</sup> Donovan, James. *The Blood of Heroes: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo- and the Sacrifice that Forged a Nation* (Little Brown and Company, New York, 2012) 341.

exceptionalism, find it curious that natives celebrate such crushing slaughter.”<sup>6</sup> The battle of San Jacinto was not only a decisive Texan victory, but also saw to the capture of Santa Anna himself, resulting in his forced recognition of Texan independence. It is also believed that if Santa Anna had been less ruthless with his prisoners and enemy Texans, that the Battle of the Alamo would not have been such an important battle in the war. Cummins wrote, “Had Santa Anna been willing to take prisoner, he would have robbed the battle of its moral power; Americans would remember the Alamo only as a terrible military debacle.”<sup>7</sup> In that sense, Santa Anna’s cruelty is the reason why the Alamo is important to American history. The brutality of Santa Anna became a reason why Texas rebels continued to fight for their independence and refused to surrender, eventually leading to his defeat and surrender at the hands of Samuel Houston.

Another reason that the battle of the Alamo is so dear to Texans and Americans is because of the absurdly high profile cast of characters that took part in it. The like of David Crocket, Jim Bowie and William Barrette Travis all fought and died during the siege of the Alamo.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cummins, L. T. *Texan Identities: Moving Beyond Myth, Memory, and Fallacy on Texas History*. (University of North Texas Press, Denton, 2016) 31.

<sup>7</sup> Cummins, L. T. *Texan Identities: Moving Beyond Myth, Memory, and Fallacy on Texas History*. (University of North Texas Press, Denton, 2016) 47.

<sup>8</sup> Donovan, James. *The Blood of Heros: The 13-Day Struggle for the Alamo- and the Sacrafice that Forged a Nation* (Little Brown and Company, New York, 2012).

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