



**CONTESTED
HISTORIES**
Occasional Paper

#292

No. XIII · December · 2022



San Antonio, Texas
29.4259717, -98.4887168

The Alamo

A complex historical legacy



The Alamo

San Antonio, Texas

USA

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Abstract

The Alamo is the site of a pivotal battle during the Texas Revolution in 1836. American settlers fought Mexico and forged a republic that would later become part of the United States. Long before the Alamo was a battleground, Spanish missionaries used the site to convert Indigenous peoples to Christianity. Native Americans were recruited to build the Alamo, and hundreds of Spanish settlers and Indigenous peoples were buried there. Since then, the Alamo complex has been turned into a plaza that includes tourist attractions and features a Cenotaph that memorialises those who fought in the 1836 battle. This occasional paper examines the challenges that the Alamo presents considering the recent \$450 million renovation plan—and the act of commemorating a site that has multifaceted functions and is remembered differently by various stakeholder communities.

Introduction

The Alamo, known to many as the cradle of Texas liberty,¹ is also called Mission San Antonio de Valero. The site, founded by Catholic missionaries in 1718, was one of five missions built to transform the lifestyle and religion of Indigenous peoples in the area. In the 1800s, as Mexico sought independence from Spain, the mission was turned into a fortress. It subsequently served as a storage depot for the U.S. Army, a marketplace, and currently as a historical park and museum, designated as a National Historic Landmark and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

A place mythologised in popular media, much of the history recounted in the area is on plaques, mounted on walls or signs along the Alamo complex. The limestone walls of its chapel and Long Barracks are deteriorating. Thus, in hopes of renovating the Alamo, the Alamo Plan was conceived in 2016 by state and city authorities and the Alamo Trust, the non-profit organisation that manages the site. As Kate Rogers, the executive director of the Trust noted: 'To a lot of people, the Alamo is an enigma. Maybe they know the battle, but they don't know the place's history as a mission or how San Antonio grew up around it.'²

The Alamo Plan is far from undisputed. For a site with so much history and transforming functions over time, the Alamo has many stakeholders invested in its current status, past, and future. Notably, there are three main points of contention: (1) the Cenotaph's planned relocation; (2) the site as an Indigenous peoples' burial ground; and (3) the site's grappling with its legacy of enslavement.



Figure 1: Image by Jonathan Cutrer via Flickr CC BY 2.0

¹ Norma Martinez Martinez, "Human Remains Discovered at the Alamo Unearth Local Tribes' Frustrations over Cemetery," *Texas Public Radio*, October 15, 2019.

² Jennifer Barger, "Remember the Alamo? A Battle Brews in Texas over History versus Lore," *National Geographic*, June 4, 2021.

History of the Alamo

Yanaguana: 'Land of the Spirit Waters'

Yanaguana, or 'Land of the Spirit Waters,' now known as the city of San Antonio, is the ancestral homeland of the Payaya. This community belongs to the Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan Nation (pronounced kwa-weel-tay-kans). The Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan Nation populated lands across what is now called Northern Mexico and South Texas. Although these tribes are grouped under Coahuiltecan, they speak various dialects and languages.³

The Coahuiltecan were hunter-gatherers, and their villages were positioned near rivers and similar bodies of water. As reported in 2001 by a group of researchers at Texas A&M University in *Reassessing Cultural Extinction: Change and Survival at Mission San Juan Capistrano, Texas*, Coahuiltecan culture represents 'the culmination of more than 11,000 years of a way of life that had successfully adapted to the climate and resources of south Texas.'⁴ In the late 1600s, growing numbers of Europeans displaced northern tribal groups who were then forced to migrate beyond their traditional homelands into the region that is now South Texas. Northern newcomers such as the Lipan Apaches, the Tonkawa, and the Comanches would eventually infiltrate Payaya territory. Conflict among tribes as well as with European colonists, combined with newly introduced European diseases, decimated Indigenous populations.⁵

The way of life of Indigenous peoples further eroded upon the arrival of Franciscan Missionaries, who founded the missions: Mission San Juan Capistrano, Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima de Acuña, Mission Espada, and Mission San Antonio de Valero Mission in 1718, or what we now know as the Alamo.⁶ Spanish expeditions built these missions to evangelise the Coahuiltecan and the other Indigenous peoples living in the region, namely the Jumano. Some reports note that the Coahuiltecan peoples supported the missions to some extent, as they 'provided a refuge for displaced and declining populations,' as well as protection from the Apache, Comanche, and Wichita raiders from the North.⁷ As is the case with other Indigenous peoples across North and South America, the Coahuiltecan were ideal converts for Spanish missionaries due to hardships caused by the colonisation of their lands and resources.⁸ At their most prosperous period between 1720 and 1772, the five missions combined had approximately 1200 Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan and other Indigenous peoples in

³American Library Association, "Indigenous Tribes of San Antonio, Texas," *American Library Association*, October 12, 2021.

⁴Alston V. Thoms, Alexander Dawn A J., and Benavides Adán, "Chapter Eight: Linguistics," in *Reassessing Cultural Extinction: Change and Survival at Mission San Juan Capistrano, Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, Center for Ecological Archaeology, 2001).

⁵American Library Association, "Indigenous Tribes of San Antonio, Texas," *American Library Association*, October 12, 2021.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Texas State Historical Association, "Coahuiltecan Indians," *Handbook of Texas Online* (Texas State Historical Association, n.d.).

⁸American Library Association, "Indigenous Tribes of San Antonio, Texas," *American Library Association*, October 12, 2021.

residence.⁹ Accounts of frequent runaways and desertions indicate that the Indigenous peoples were often dissatisfied with their life at the missions.¹⁰

American Immigrants in Mexico

After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, Agustín de Iturbide, emperor of Mexico from 1822-1823, prioritised colonisation and appointed a commission to design a plan. The plan followed the precedent of the earlier Spanish law allowing settlers to help colonise Coahuila, Nuevo Santander, Baja California, Alta California, New Mexico, and Texas. The proposal suggested that Europeans and American citizens be recruited for most states and provinces, apart from California, where they suggested sending Mexican convicts and recruiting Chinese settlers.¹¹

In order to stabilise the new government, Iturbide enacted the Imperial Colonisation Law on February 18, 1823, where he gave a few land grants to *empresarios*—someone who brought immigrants in exchange for land grants and six-year exemptions from taxation. These *empresarios* agreed to settle several families to populate the region and make it profitable. One went to Moses Austin, inherited by Stephen F. Austin after his father passed.¹² The Austins contracted to bring ‘500 families on the vacant lands remaining within the limits of the colony already established.’ The contract stipulates that ‘the families must be Cat[ho]lics and of good morals.’¹³ Stephen Austin established dozens of communities and brought thousands of settlers into the Mexican province of Texas. Iturbide was overthrown a month after the law was enacted.¹⁴

On August 18, 1824, the Mexican government passed a new national colonisation law: The General Colonisation Law. The law invited people of any nationality to take Mexican citizenship and reside in Mexico.¹⁵ The law did not require settlers to be Mexican citizens, although citizens were given preference in land grants. Additionally, the law did not require the settlers to convert to Catholicism; however, federal laws prohibited all religions except Catholicism.¹⁶ As land was cheaper in Mexico, many Americans immigrated to Mexico. By 1830, Texas had a population of 7000 foreign-born residents, with only 3000 Mexican nationals.¹⁷ The Cahoon Family Professor of American History at Emory University, Dr Patrick N. Allitt, of the video series *The American West: History, Myth, and Legacy* chronicled how things began to go wrong for the Mexican government:

By the late 1820s, the Mexican government was becoming alarmed at the rate of immigration from America – some of it legal, organised by the *empresarios*, and some of it illegal, as opportunists in search of land simply crossed the border on their own initiative and set up farms or plantations... In

⁹ Feria News, “Early Days of La Feria – the Coahuiltecans,” *Feria News*, n.d.

¹⁰ Alston V. Thoms, Alexander Dawn A. J., and Benavides Adán, *Reassessing Cultural Extinction: Change and Survival at Mission San Juan Capistrano, Texas* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, Centre for Ecological Archaeology, 2001), pp. 35-36.

¹¹ David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (New York: ACLS History E-Book Project, 2005), p. 161.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

¹³ Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, “Stephen Austin’s Contract to Bring Settlers to Texas, 1825,” *Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History* (originally written on June 4, 1825).

¹⁴ David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (New York: ACLS History E-Book Project, 2005), p. 162.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

1826, one empresario, Haden Edwards, tried to create an independent state around his land grant. Stephen Austin was horrified, and led his own colony's militia in support of a Mexican army column to suppress this rebellion.¹⁸

In 1830, Mexican President Anastasio Bustamante rescinded all empresario contracts that had not been completed and prohibited Americans from settling in any Mexican territory adjacent to the United States. Mexican Secretary of State Lucas Alamán, who wrote the 1830 law, stated, 'Texas will be lost for this Republic if adequate measures to save it are not taken [...] Where others send invading armies [...] [the Americans], send their colonists.'¹⁹ Additionally, Bustamante suspended immigration from America and banished slavery. By this time, American settlers in Texas outnumbered their Indigenous counterparts ten to one.²⁰

The Texas War for Independence

Many Americans who migrated to Texas at the invitation of the Mexican government did not completely lose their affiliation or loyalty to the United States. Most of these settlers were Protestant, and though they were not required to attend Catholic mass, Mexico's prohibition of the public practice of other religions encumbered their Protestant faith.²¹ Additionally, many settlers were discontent with the Mexican government's abolition of slavery, as many were from the southern states and owned enslaved people.²² Austin wrote in two 1832 letters that 'nothing is wanted, but money and negros are necessary to make it.'²³ Mexico attempted to accommodate American settlers by considering enslaved people as indentured servants. Nevertheless, American slaveholders in Texas wanted Texas to become a U.S. state that allowed enslavement.²⁴ These tensions culminated in the Anahuac Disturbances and uprisings of settlers in and around Anahuac, Texas, in 1832 and 1835, which helped to precipitate the Texas Revolution.²⁵

In 1834, Bustamante's successor, Antonio López de Santa Anna, a soldier and politician, sought to quell any rebellions in Texas. This time, he could not count on Austin to resolve things amicably. Austin had travelled to meet him in 1833 to seek statehood for Texas in the Mexican federation and was imprisoned after calling on settlers to declare it without the consent of the Mexican Congress.²⁶ By the time Austin returned to Texas in September 1835, the political situation in Mexico had changed dramatically, and Texas was on the brink of war.²⁷

¹⁸ Jonny Lupsha, "Texas Ignores Pleas to Protect Alamo's Indigenous Peoples' Burial Site," *Wondrium Daily*, December 3, 2021.

¹⁹ David J. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier, 1821-1846: The American Southwest under Mexico* (New York: ACLS History E-Book Project, 2005), p. 170.

²⁰ Kjetil Ersdal, "Texas 1821-1836," *American History from Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond*, n.d.

²¹ OpenEd CUNY, "U.S. History, Cotton Is King: The Antebellum South, 1800-1860, the Economics of Cotton," *OpenEd CUNY*, n.d.

²² Lynn Burnett, "How the Fight to Protect Slavery Led to the Texas Revolution," *Cross Cultural Solidarity*, n.d.

²³ Bryan Burrough and Jason Stanford, "The Myth of Alamo Gets the History All Wrong," *Washington Post*, June 10, 2021.

²⁴ Lynn Burnett, "How the Fight to Protect Slavery Led to the Texas Revolution," *Cross Cultural Solidarity*, n.d.

²⁵ Margaret S. Henson, "Anahuac Disturbances," *Handbook of Texas Online* (Texas State Historical Association, n.d.).

²⁶ Amelia White, "A Separate State: The Convention of 1833," *Official Alamo Medium*, May 11, 2016.

²⁷ Amelia White, "The Imprisonment of Stephen F. Austin," *Official Alamo Medium*, June 13, 2016.

'Remember the Alamo!'

In early 1835, Americans in Texas rebelled against the Mexican government and confirmed Sam Houston as their army commander. The Texan army under Houston won a series of minor battles in the fall of 1835.²⁸

In December 1835, Ben Milam and fellow Texan volunteers drove Mexican troops out of San Antonio. They settled in around the Alamo, the mission that had previously been adapted to serve military purposes around 1800.²⁹ In January 1836, Santa Anna sent a thousand of his men north of the Rio Grande, and Houston ordered the Alamo to be abandoned. However, on January 19, American Colonel James Bowie arrived at the Alamo and realised that the Alamo could not be abandoned due to the inability to remove the fort's cannon before Santa Anna's arrival. Bowie remained at the fort with his men and reasoned that he would delay Santa Anna's forces from getting to Houston, giving Houston more time to garner enough men for a larger army to defend themselves against the Mexican forces.³⁰ On February 2, 1836, American Colonel William Travis and his cavalry company of 100 joined Bowie and his 30 or so men.³¹ One week later, the frontiersman and former congressman Davy Crockett arrived with a few friends and a nephew, consenting to serve Texas as a 'high private'.³²

On February 23, Santa Anna and 2000 Mexican troops besieged the Alamo. For 12 days, the mission was bombarded with cannon and rifle fire.³³ On February 24, Travis sent a letter titled 'Victory or Death!', addressing it 'To the People of Texas and All Americans in the World.' In the last few lines of the letter, he declared:

I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism and everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch. The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily and will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible and die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honour and that of his country. *Victory Or Death*.³⁴

On March 1, 1836, 32 men from the town of Gonzales arrived to aid the Alamo. Additionally, a group of Europeans came to defend liberty at the mission, including eleven from England, nine from Ireland, four from Scotland, two from Germany, one from Wales and one from Denmark.³⁵ This brought the number of defenders up to almost 200 men.³⁶ On March 2, 1836, Texas formally

²⁸ History, "March 02, 1836: Texas Declares Independence," *History (A&E Television Networks)*, July 21, 2010).

²⁹ Alamo, "Desolate Ruin to Busy Staging Post," *Alamo*, n.d.

³⁰ History, "March 02, 1836: Texas Declares Independence," *History (A&E Television Networks)*, July 21, 2010).

³¹ Archie P McDonald, "Travis, William Barret (1809–1836)," *Handbook of Texas Online* (Texas State Historical Association, n.d.).

³² R Bruce Winders, "David Crockett," *Alamo*, n.d.

³³ Charles Ramsdell Jr., "The Storming of the Alamo," *American Heritage*, February 1961.

³⁴ Stephen L. Hardin, *Texian Iliad* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 117.

³⁵ San Antonio Convention & Visitor's Bureau, "Alamo Honours Europeans Who Fought in Famous 1836 American Battle", *PR Newswire Europe*, February 9, 2011.

³⁶ Alamo, "Freedoms Worth Fighting For," *Alamo*, n.d.

declared independence from Mexico, electing David Burnet as provisional president.³⁷ The Texans adopted a constitution that protected the practice of slavery.³⁸

In the early morning of March 6, Santa Anna's troops invaded the Alamo.³⁹ The Texans were overwhelmed in just over an hour, and the Alamo fell. Santa Anna did not order the taking of prisoners; instead, all the Texan and American defenders were killed in hand-to-hand fighting.⁴⁰ The only survivors were civilians, mostly women and children. Everyone on the official list of 189 Texan defenders was killed, but historians continue to debate the number of defenders inside the Alamo. The Mexican army suffered an estimated 600 casualties.⁴¹



Figure 2: 'The Fall of the Alamo' or 'Crockett's Last Stand' by Robert Jenkins Onderdonk, depicts Davy Crockett wielding his rifle as a club against Mexican troops. Courtesy of a Collection in the Texas Governor's Mansion in Austin. Image by Robert Jenkins Onderdonk via Wikimedia Commons CC BY 2.0.

After the battle, the Mexican army marched east. Meanwhile, Houston had been building his army. 'Remember the Alamo!' became their rallying cry as an urgent reminder to avenge their earlier defeat. On April 21, Texas and Mexico fought again at the Battle of San Jacinto.⁴² The battle lasted only 18 minutes, and Texas was victorious this time and won independence from Mexico.

The defence of the Alamo has been immortalised in several TV series and films, including the 1960s *The Alamo*, starring John Wayne as Davy Crockett.⁴³ The Battle of the Alamo inspired several songwriters. 'The Ballad of Davy Crockett' by Ernie Ford was on the country music charts

³⁷ Grand Lodge of Texas, "David G. Burnet: 'Elder Statesman of the Republic,'" *Grand Lodge of Texas*, n.d.

³⁸ History, "March 02, 1836: Texas Declares Independence," *History (A&E Television Networks)*, July 21, 2010).

³⁹ Raymond K. Bluhm, "Battle of the Alamo," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, July 5, 2022.

⁴⁰ J. R. Edmondson, *The Alamo Story: From History to Current Conflicts* (Plano, TX: Republic of Texas Press, 2000), p. 370.

⁴¹ Library of Congress, "Today in History - March 6," *Library of Congress*, n.d.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Albert A. Nofi, *A Civil War Treasury: Being a Miscellany of Arms and Artillery, Facts and Figures, Legends and Lore, Muses and Minstrels, Personalities and People* (New York City, NY: Castle Books, 2006), p. 213.

for 16 weeks.⁴⁴ 'Remember the Alamo' by Jane Bowers has been recorded by Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, and Donovan.⁴⁵ The U.S. Postal Service issued two postage stamps commemorating Texas Statehood and the Battle of the Alamo.⁴⁶ The current version of the reverse side of the seal of Texas also has appearances of the Alamo mission itself, as well as the phrase 'Remember the Alamo.'⁴⁷

Changing Ownership and Maintenance of the Alamo

During the five years after the fall of the Alamo, the fort was used periodically by soldiers, both Texans and Mexicans. It was ultimately abandoned until 1849 when the U.S. Army began renting the facility as a quartermaster's depot, a distribution point and a supply centre before abandoning the mission again after Fort Sam Houston was established in 1876.⁴⁸ The state of Texas bought the Alamo chapel but made no efforts to restore it, while a mercantile company bought the rest of the buildings and operated them as a wholesale grocery store.⁴⁹

Formed in 1891, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT), led by Adina Emilia De Zavala and Clara Driscoll, convinced the state legislature in 1905 to purchase what was the wholesale grocery store and name the DRT the permanent custodian of the site.⁵⁰ The Alamo official website dubs the Daughters of the Republic of Texas as 'the saviours of the Alamo.'⁵¹ Driscoll and de Zavala had different visions for the Alamo; while the former sought to tear down the Long Barracks and create a monument similar to those she had seen in Europe, the latter wanted to restore the exterior of the buildings to a state similar to its 1836 appearance.⁵² Driscoll formed a competing chapter of the DRT and continued to dispute with de Zavala over the future of the Alamo. De Zavala subsequently threatened to buy the chapel and tear it all down. Eventually, a judge named Driscoll's chapter the official custodians of the Alamo.⁵³

In 1910, Texas' new governor, Oscar Branch Colquitt, toured the property and decided to remove the DRT as official custodians of the Alamo, noting that they had done nothing to restore the Alamo.⁵⁴ Upset over Colquitt's decisions, Driscoll undermined him by using her influence as a major donor to the Democratic Party. The conflict between them became known as the Second Battle of the Alamo.⁵⁵

⁴⁴ Official Chart, "The Ballad of Davy Crockett: Full Official Chart History: Official Charts Company," *Official Charts*, n.d.

⁴⁵ Jane Bowers, "Remember the Alamo," *Second Hand Songs*, n.d.

⁴⁶ Gordon T. Trotter, "Texas Centennial Issue," *National Postal Museum*, n.d.

⁴⁷ Texas State Library and Archives Commission, "Flag and Seal Design by Peter Krag, Approved January 25, 1839," *Texas State Library and Archives Commission*, April 25, 2016.

⁴⁸ R Bruce Winders, "The U.S. Army Quartermaster Department at the Alamo, 1847–1861," *Official Alamo Medium*, May 31, 2017.

⁴⁹ Alamo, "Commerce and Preservation," *Alamo*, n.d.

⁵⁰ Jaime Bare, "The Alamo Legacy of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas," *Daughters of the Republic of Texas*, July 3, 2015.

⁵¹ Alamo, "Commerce and Preservation," *Alamo*, n.d.

⁵² James Olson and Randy Roberts, *A Line in the Sand the Alamo in Blood and Memory* (New York City, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 210.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

In 1931, Driscoll persuaded the state legislature to purchase the land between the Alamo Chapel and Crockett street.⁵⁶ During the Great Depression, money from the Works Progress Administration and the National Youth Administration was used to build a wall around the Alamo and a museum.⁵⁷ Upon their deaths in 1945 and 1955, Driscoll and de Zavala had their bodies laid in state in the Alamo Chapel.⁵⁸ The Alamo was designated a National Historic Landmark on December 19, 1960. In 1968, as San Antonio prepared to host the Hemisfair, also known as the World's Fair or International Exposition, the Long Barracks were roofed and turned into a museum.⁵⁹

In 1988, in response to the movie *Alamo the Price of Freedom*, Mexican American activists protested, arguing that the movie contained anti-Mexican rhetoric. Even after the movie was re-edited to address the complaints, the controversy had grown too large, leading to proposed legislation to move control of the Alamo to the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC).⁶⁰ State representative, Orlando Garcia, organised hearings into the DRT finances. Ultimately, the DRT agreed to make their financial records more open, and the hearings were cancelled.⁶¹ Shortly after, San Antonio representative Jerry Beauchamp proposed that the Alamo be transferred from the DRT to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. San Antonio mayor Henry Cisneros shelved the bill.⁶²

In 1994, Carlos Guerra, a reporter with the *San Antonio Express News*, began writing columns that expressed discontent with the DRT's management of the Alamo. Guerra claimed that the DRT kept the temperature too low within the chapel, thus degrading the limestone walls from the formation of water vapour.⁶³ Subsequently, State Senator Gregory Luna filed a bill to transfer oversight of the Alamo to the Texas Historical Commission.⁶⁴ By the following year, some advocacy groups urged the mission to be turned into a larger historical park, stating that the chapel should be restored to its 18th-century appearance and portrayed as reflecting its mission days rather than the Texas Revolution days.⁶⁵ Then Governor George W. Bush settled the dispute when he vowed to veto any legislation that would displace the DRT as caretakers of the Alamo.⁶⁶ Later that year, the DRT erected a plaque on the mission grounds to recognise that the site had once served as Indigenous peoples' burial grounds.⁶⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 221.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 225.

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 227-229.

⁵⁹ Susan Prendergast Schoelwer et al., *Alamo Images: Changing Perceptions of a Texas Experience* (Dallas, TX: DeGolyer Library and Southern Methodist Univ. Pr., 1985), p. 59.

⁶⁰ James Olson and Randy Roberts, *A Line in the Sand the Alamo in Blood and Memory* (New York City, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 301.

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 303-304.

⁶² Ibid, p. 304.

⁶³ Kelley Shannon, "Modern-Day Battle of Alamo Brews in Texas : History: The Traditionalists See the Shrine as a Symbol of Freedom and Bravery. but Revisionists Say It's Just a Big Lie Perpetuated by a 'Redneck Culture.," *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1994.

⁶⁴ James Olson and Randy Roberts, *A Line in the Sand the Alamo in Blood and Memory* (New York City, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2001), p. 307.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 309.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 310.

In 2010, the office of the Texas Attorney General received a complaint that the DRT had been mismanaging the site and the funds allocated for its management. An investigation concluded that the DRT had been mismanaging the Alamo, citing that the organisation failed to maintain the Alamo in good order and repair and misused state funds.⁶⁸ 2014, the Texas Legislature officially moved control of the Alamo to the Texas General Land Office (GLO) which was then led by Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush (nephew of former U.S. President George W. Bush).⁶⁹ The Alamo and the four other missions in San Antonio were named UNESCO World Heritage Site on July 5, 2015.⁷⁰

In 1939 by the Texas Centennial Commission.⁷¹ Originally, the state government had planned on making it a monument in Austin, but it was lost in a Capitol fire.⁷² The San Antonio local government declared that the cenotaph was meant to mark the spot where the 'slain defenders of the fortified mission were piled after the battle and burned in the great funeral pyre.'⁷³

The Alamo Today and Plans for Expansion

The Alamo has an annual operating budget of \$6 million, funded through sales in the gift store, private donors, and state funds.⁷⁴ In 2017, the Texas state legislature guaranteed ongoing funding.⁷⁵ Each year, the Alamo welcomes 1.6 million visitors, making it one of the most popular historic sites in the United States.⁷⁶ Today, one visiting the Alamo can stroll through the Church, the Long Barracks, the West Wall, the Palisade, the Courtyard, the Acequia, the Garden, the Main Gate, the Southwest Corner and Losoya House, and the Encampment. One can find a small museum inside the Long Barracks with paintings, weapons, and other artefacts from the Texas Revolution era.⁷⁷ The Wall of History, a mural portraying the 300-year history of the Alamo from its mission days to modern times, is also present in the garden.⁷⁸

Despite the success that the Alamo as a tourist attraction has had, the aforementioned Texas Land Commissioner, George P. Bush, announced in June 2018 that the GLO and the non-profit Alamo Endowment planned to quadruple the site to include a 40,000-square-foot museum, demolish up to four buildings in the Alamo Plaza, add documents and objects in the exhibit that would increase the collection by 500% – including a cache donated by British rock star Phil Collins,⁷⁹ preserve the fragile chapel, close surrounding streets to car traffic, and make additional efforts to modify the story of the Alamo in a way that is both 'moving and informative.'⁸⁰ This renovation plan was

⁶⁸ Manny Fernandez, "In Texas, Another Skirmish Brews at the Alamo," *New York Times*, December 1, 2012.

⁶⁹ Cassandra Pollock, "Fights over the Alamo Persist as George P. Bush Seeks Higher Office," *Texas Tribune*, November 2, 2021.

⁷⁰ Christoph Noelting and Frank Jordans, "World Heritage Status for the Alamo, Japan Industrial Sites," *Seattle Times*, July 5, 2015.

⁷¹ Texas State Historical Association, "Alamo Cenotaph," *Handbook of Texas Online* (Texas State Historical Association, n.d.).

⁷² Andrew Weber, "Wayback Wednesday: The Capitol Fire of 1983," *KUT Radio, Austin's NPR Station*, February 4, 2015.

⁷³ San Antonio.gov, "Alamo - San Antonio," *San Antonio.gov*, n.d.

⁷⁴ Scott Huddleston, "State Wants Alamo to Have Director," *San Antonio Express News*, September 1, 2011.

⁷⁵ Texas General Land Office, "Commissioner Bush, Alamo Leaders Praise Texas Legislature For Fully Funding The Alamo", *Texas General Land Office*, May 27, 2017.

⁷⁶ Frank T. Thompson, *Alamo* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2005), p. 108

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 121.

⁷⁸ Alamo, "Wall of History," *Alamo*, n.d.

⁷⁹ Alamo, "Generosity Beyond Compare," *Alamo*, n.d.

⁸⁰ Brian Kirkpatrick, "Texas Historical Commission Approves Alamo Expansion," *Texas Public Radio*, July 28, 2021.

dubbed the 'Alamo Plan.' The plan also includes moving the Alamo Cenotaph to a different location. The plan was estimated to cost \$450 million.⁸¹

On October 18, 2018, after public comments were received and heard from both sides, the City Council voted 9-2 in favour of the makeover of the Alamo Plaza.⁸² On February 19, 2019, the first steps were taken towards the renovation of the Alamo. This involved putting up signs prohibiting scooters, skateboards, and bicycles and opening an outdoor welcome centre.⁸³

An article by *San Antonio Express News* published in November 2020 noted that the Alamo Plan was stalled after being under fire for subjecting merchants in and near the Alamo Plaza to losses in revenue. They reported that merchants had lost about 70 per cent of their normal income. More than a dozen downtown business owners and managers signed a petition requesting the city to remove the fencing blocking the south end of the plaza.⁸⁴

This is not the first and only time that the Alamo Plan and the general Alamo Plaza have come under scrutiny. The multipurpose, generational, and historical nature of the site has called forth a medley of publicity, opinions, and complex narratives – all of which are at the heart of three main contestations: (1) contestations regarding the Cenotaph; (2) the Indigenous peoples burial site; and (3) the legacy of slavery.

The Cenotaph

Adjacent to the surviving buildings of the Alamo mission and towering 60 feet high is the Alamo Cenotaph, titled the Spirit of Sacrifice, which pays tribute to the individuals who died defending the mission in 1836. The Cenotaph, or empty tomb, was created by Italian-born sculptor Pompeo Coppini. The construction began in 1937 and was erected two years later.

The Cenotaph was created using grey Georgia marble and pink Texas granite. The monument depicts images of the Alamo garrison leaders and 187 names of known Alamo defenders.⁸⁵ On the east of the Cenotaph are the carvings of James Bowie and James Bonham and other defenders in the background, whereas the carvings of Davy Crockett and William Travis grace the west side. On the north side, a feminine figure symbolises the state of Texas, holding the shields of Texas and the United States.⁸⁶



Figure 3: 'The Alamo Cenotaph Heroes,' sculpted by Pompeo Coppini. Image by Batlise via Wikimedia Commons CC BY 4.0.

⁸¹ Scott Huddleston, "Bush Grilled on Alamo Transparency," *Associated Press News*, December 5, 2017.

⁸² Allie Morris, "Texas Senate Votes to Block Relocation of Cenotaph in Alamo Plaza," *San Antonio Express News*, May 7, 2019.

⁸³ San Antonio Express News, "Reimagining The Alamo," *San Antonio Express News*, March 23, 2021.

⁸⁴ Scott Huddleston, "San Antonio's Stalled Alamo Makeover Project Is Taking More Fire," *San Antonio Express News*, November 19, 2020.

⁸⁵ Amelia Williams, "Critical Study of the Siege of the Alamo and of the Personnel of Its Defenders: V. Historical Problems Relating to the Alamo," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1934): pp. 157-184.

⁸⁶ Texas State Historical Association, "Alamo Cenotaph," *Handbook of Texas Online* (Texas State Historical Association, n.d.).

In 2004, new evidence emerged suggesting 47 historical inaccuracies in the list of names of combatants. *San Antonio Express News* reported that many of the names were misspelt, omitted, or wrongly included. They stated that 'the Alamo plan calls for correcting the errors and adding the missing names with new interpretive signs.'⁸⁷

In 2014, engineers and conservators reported that rainwater had deteriorated the Cenotaph. 'Given the almost 60-foot height of the monument, even a small piece of stone detaching from the monument has the potential to cause injury,' Ivan Myjer of JQ Engineering wrote.⁸⁸ Thus, repairs, which require at least partial disassembly or removing the Cenotaph altogether, are needed. Repairs include replacing some Georgia marble, sealants, mortar, and interior aluminium anchors. A 2017 Alamo master plan report suggested more investigation of the Cenotaph, noting that a laser scan of the interior and high-tech modelling is needed to restore the monument.⁸⁹

In addition to the modifications that needed to be made on the Cenotaph, the Alamo Plan intended for the structure to be moved outside the ground of the original battle site and adjacent to the Merger Hotel in the square. Kate Rogers explained that to fully bring the experience of being there to live, the Plan wanted to replicate the physical structures of the original mission when it was first built in 1836, which did not have the Cenotaph.⁹⁰

Contestation over the Cenotaph

'This is a symbol of liberty, and it shall stay right here,' Jerry Patterson, Bush's predecessor who led the General Land Office for 12 years, spoke of the Cenotaph. Others who share similar sentiments to Patterson attended a rally led by a group known as 'This Is Texas Freedom Force' in February of 2018. Roughly 100 people gathered at the 60-foot granite monument. Many held signs and chanted, 'Not One Inch!' Two candidates challenging Bush's position as the Texas Land Commissioner, land surveyor Davey Edwards and retired firefighter Rick Range, pledged to keep the Cenotaph in place. Edwards cried out that on the first day of office, he would 'send armed Texas Rangers... to guard [the Cenotaph] 24 hours a day with orders to arrest anybody who even attempts to try and touch it.'⁹¹

Opponents of the Cenotaph's relocation argue that it is akin to digging up a grave. President of the Alamo Defenders Descendants Association, Lee Spencer White stated his concerns: 'It's like someone moving your grandfather's tombstone off the cemetery. I want that monument inside the footprint of the walls they defended.'⁹²

⁸⁷ Mark Dunphy, "5 Things to Know about the Alamo Cenotaph - and the Drama - Ahead of a Vote to Move It," *San Antonio Express News*, September 21, 2020.

⁸⁸ Ivan Myjer, "Cenotaph to the Heroes of the Alamo" (Arlington, MA, December 1, 2014).

⁸⁹ Scott Huddleston, "As Cenotaph Ages, Its Location in Alamo Plaza Is Subject of Debate," *San Antonio Express News*, August 13, 2018.

⁹⁰ Interview with the author.

⁹¹ Allie Morris, "Possible Cenotaph Relocation Slammed by Bush's Republican Primary Challengers," *My San Antonio News*, February 24, 2018.

⁹² Scott Huddleston, "As Cenotaph Ages, Its Location in Alamo Plaza Is Subject of Debate," *San Antonio Express News*, August 13, 2018.

Opposition came to a climax on May 7, 2019, when the Texas State Senate passed a sweeping bill related to preserving historical monuments that prevent San Antonio from relocating the Cenotaph. Senator Brandon Creighton, the Republican politician who authored the bill, said his bill sets up a process to ensure history is not erased and to protect the Cenotaph:

There are people and events throughout our state's rich history that deserve to be celebrated, and there are also people and events that should be condemned, but either way, as Texans, we should not hide from our history. While it is an emotional issue, I truly believe that all of our history, the good and the bad, are worthy of study and education.⁹³

The Senate gave the bill initial approval in a vote of 19-12, despite fierce objections from Democrats who warned that it could threaten millions of dollars in private investment in the Alamo Plan. Senator Borris Miles, a Houston Democrat, denounced the legislation: 'That's not something we should be proud of.'⁹⁴

The Cenotaph and Decision-Making

On May 20, 2019, the bill blocking the relocation of the Cenotaph died in the Legislature, paving the way for San Antonio to continue the Alamo Plan. City Councilman Roberto Treviño said in a statement: 'The State has recognized we are relocating the Cenotaph – not removing it.'⁹⁵ Despite this development, on December 27, 2019, 50 people walked with flags and signs that read, *inter alia*, 'Alamo Molester: Roberto Treviño' in defiance of the relocation of the Cenotaph.⁹⁶

On September 22, 2020, the Texas Historical Commission denied a request to relocate the Cenotaph in a 12-2 vote. The commission vote was needed to allow portions of the Alamo Plan to go through as previously approved by the San Antonio City Council and Texas General Land Office. Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick urged commission members not to allow the monument to be moved: 'So, let's think big. Let's make San Antonio big. Let's do this right. Let's not rush into something today and vote to move the Cenotaph. That's not what the people of Texas want.'⁹⁷ The stunning decision halted the \$450 million makeover of the mission and battle site. Major donors to the Alamo Plan dropped out after the Texas Historical Commission denied the city's request to move the Cenotaph in 2020.⁹⁸

On March 1, 2021, Patrick and Bush agreed. During a hearing in the Texas Senate, Bush said he and Patrick had meetings and were united on key pieces of the Alamo Plan, amongst which is leaving the Cenotaph where it stands. They concluded that the story of the 1836 Battle of the

⁹³ Allie Morris, "Texas Senate Votes to Block Relocation of Cenotaph in Alamo Plaza," *San Antonio Express News*, May 7, 2019.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Scott Huddleston, "Cenotaph Still Set to Move after Monument Bill Dies," *San Antonio Express News*, May 20, 2019.

⁹⁶ Scott Huddleston, "People with Flags and Signs Assembled Friday at the Alamo in Defiance of Plans to Move a 1930s Cenotaph Honouring Nearly 200 Men Who Defended the Mission-Fort in 1836," *San Antonio Express News*, December 27, 2019.

⁹⁷ Joey Palacios, "Texas Historical Commission Denies Request to Relocate Alamo's Cenotaph Monument," *Texas Public Radio*, September 22, 2020.

⁹⁸ Brendan Gibbons, "Wealthy Donors Give up on Alamo Redevelopment Plan," *San Antonio Report*, November 10, 2020.

Alamo would focus on the restoration efforts.⁹⁹ Kate Rogers decisively stated in an interview: 'We have committed to the people that we are going to do the restoration on the site. Even if we must dismantle it and put it back together in order to do the repairs, we will not take the stones anywhere. We are not moving the Cenotaph.'¹⁰⁰

The Indigenous Peoples' Burial Site

'All the tourists flocking to the Alamo are standing on the bones of our ancestors,' an elder in San Antonio's Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan Nation expressed in an interview with *The New York Times*.¹⁰¹ On October 11, 2019, the GLO reported that three human graves were discovered as they were installing moisture equipment inside the church portion of the Alamo.¹⁰² The remains appeared to be that of a teenager or young adult, an infant, and an older adult. This contributed to the ongoing dispute over the legacy of Indigenous peoples at the historic site, which sparked in 1989 and 1995 when remains were found in the main portion of the Church.¹⁰³

Upon news of the human remains, the Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan Nation called on San Antonio and Texas officials to reconsider the timeline for the Alamo Project. The group filed a federal lawsuit in September 2019 seeking to suspend the project until group members, many of them descendants of people who lived in the area, can have a voice in deciding what happens to any found human remains. The plaintiff alleged that the Alamo Trust and the City of San Antonio are ignoring federal laws that require 'the participation of next of kin and Indian tribes regardless of federal recognition.'¹⁰⁴

Subsequently, the GLO issued a news release announcing that the bones found would be handled in accordance with a 17-page human remains treatment protocol developed by them and the Alamo Trust in consultation with a committee composed of six representatives from federally recognized tribal nations.^{105 106} In this instance, the protocols around handling the human remains consider them individuals and not part of a greater cemetery. Tāp Pīlam has not received federal recognition as a Native American tribe.

Ramón Vásquez, the executive director of the group and a member of the Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan Nation, noted the group's intent is not to stop the renovations plan. Instead, they want the site to

⁹⁹ Jeremy Wallace, "Republicans Dan Patrick and George P. Bush Make Peace over Alamo Restoration," *San Antonio Express News*, March 1, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with the author.

¹⁰¹ Simon Romero, "Burial Ground under the Alamo Stirs a Texas Feud," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/25/us/alamo-burial-native-americans.html>.

¹⁰² Norma Martinez, "Human Remains Discovered at the Alamo Unearth Local Tribes' Frustrations over Cemetery," *Texas Public Radio*, October 15, 2019.

¹⁰³ "Evidence Of Burials Discovered In Monk's Burial Room And Nave Of Alamo Church," *Texas General Land Office*, December 13, 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Brendan Gibbons, "San Antonio Group Sues State over Alamo Native American Remains," *San Antonio Report*, September 10, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Scott Huddleston, "Native American Group Calls on Texas, San Antonio Officials to Slow down Alamo Plaza Makeover," *San Antonio Express News*, October 14, 2019.

¹⁰⁶ To learn more about the protocol, please visit: "Appropriate Treatment of Human Remains Encountered During Alamo Complex Investigations," *Alamo*, n.d.

fully reflect the entire history of Mission San Antonio de Valero.¹⁰⁷ Antonio Diaz, a Pamoque Indian who has ancestors buried at the Alamo, lamented in a press conference in front of the Alamo that the renovation will continue only to shine light on the battle, arguing that the caretakers of the site 'created their own narrative of the time frame and what matters to them.'¹⁰⁸

Burial Site and Decision-Making

In May 2019, in response to a request by the Alamo Defenders Descendants Association (ADDA), the Texas Historical Commission designated a large part of the Alamo grounds a historical Texas cemetery. However, the designation was largely symbolic. When ADDA filed another request later that month, the GLO attorney announced that a more formal cemetery designation would 'likely delay or obstruct Alamo preservation efforts.'¹⁰⁹ Moreover, they noted that the site would not qualify as a cemetery since there are no grave markers or headstones outside the church.¹¹⁰

On December 23, 2019, a federal judge dismissed the lawsuit but left room open for the Tāp Pīlam Coahuiltecan to make amendments to the suit, which they did in January of 2020, when they added two main components: Firstly, the plaintiff claimed that the Alamo is a cemetery that merits legal protection. Secondly, the plaintiff requested the right to worship inside the chapel.¹¹¹

The former addresses Tāp Pīlam's estimation that the portion of Coahuiltecan burials at the Alamo is 80 per cent. Meanwhile, the Alamo Trust submitted data to the Texas Historical Commission in 2020, placing it at no more than 47 per cent.¹¹² The latter addresses the decision that Alamo officials made in 2019 when they banned the tribe from entering the Church outside of public tours hours but allowed the tribe to hold its ceremony outside the Church, with a few members entering the site with the tourists afterwards.¹¹³

Despite efforts by the Indigenous group, in April 2020, the Alamo Trust and GLO announced a plan to exhume human remains at the Alamo, to which the Tāp Pīlam opposed.¹¹⁴ The Texas Historical Commission approved the plan to allow the preservation work after the announcement. They also agreed to let the GLO use DNA testing on the remains on a 5-0 vote.¹¹⁵

On June 17, 2020, the Texas Historical Commission recognised the Alamo's mission-era church as a 'verified cemetery' and supported plans to improve areas along the south and east boundaries. The commission denied proposals from two descendant groups to declare areas outside the

¹⁰⁷ Norma Martinez Martinez, "Human Remains Discovered at the Alamo Unearth Local Tribes' Frustrations over Cemetery," *Texas Public Radio*, October 15, 2019.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Brendan Gibbons, "Native Americans Groups Call for Ancestors' Alamo Burial Grounds to Be Official Cemetery," *San Antonio Report*, July 18, 2019.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Zavala, "Federal Judge in San Antonio Dismisses Tap Pilam Lawsuit over Ceremony, Human Remains at Alamo," *San Antonio Express News*, September 28, 2020.

¹¹² Scott Huddleston, "Dispute over Alamo burials, Native American worship may go forward after settlement talks break down," *San Antonio Express News*, December 4, 2020.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Scott Huddleston, "Texas Historical Commission Considers Whether to Allow Temporary Removal of Four Burials to Allow Preservation Work to Continue at Alamo," *San Antonio Express News*, April 20, 2020.

¹¹⁵ Scott Huddleston, "Alamo Burials to Be Exhumed to Help Save Historic Church," *San Antonio Express News*, April 26, 2020.

church an 'unverified cemetery,' which would have temporarily halted the \$400 million plaza renovation.¹¹⁶

In 2021, Texas' 8th Court of Appeals ruled in a lawsuit filed by the Alamo Defenders Descendants Association that the ongoing Alamo Plan was not an 'active threat to any human remains' at the site. The Texas Supreme Court denied the association's request for an injunction in April 2021.¹¹⁷

In late 2021, the lawsuits were dropped after mediation between the Alamo Defenders Descendants Association and the Tāp Pīlam people and Alamo Trust. Ramón Vásquez now sits on the Museum Planning Committee run by the Alamo Trust, which works with 'program manager, Gallagher & Associates, as well as historians, archaeologists, museum experts, and other community stakeholders to develop new exhibitions and programs that continue the Trust's work in telling the complete story of the Alamo.'¹¹⁸

Alamo Plaza: Defenders and Legacy of Slavery

Carey Latimore, a history professor at Trinity University and a member of the Alamo Citizens Advisory Committee, expressed in a *Texas Tribune* article: 'Sometimes we try so hard to create perfect heroes, and in trying so hard to create perfection, we force ourselves into a corner where it's difficult to accept the reality that people are not perfect.' Latimore spoke of how Texans were conflicted over how to remember the Alamo.

Despite suggestions from scholars around the state, in September of 2018, Texas mandated that schoolchildren be taught about the Alamo Defenders in 'heroic language.'¹¹⁹ In 2021, a Republican state representative introduced legislation to block the Alamo from mentioning slavery as one of the causes of the Texas Revolution.¹²⁰

In a controversial book published in 2021 titled *Forget the Alamo*, the authors Bryan Burrough, Chris Tomlinson, and Jason Stanford looked at the myths and realities of the Texas origin story, claiming that the Alamo's famed stars such as William Barret Travis, James Bowie, and Davy Crockett are inconveniently forgotten in the textbook as enslavers, 'con men,' and 'self-promoting fools.'¹²¹ The entire revolution led by Texas colonists, they noted, had the primary purpose of preserving slavery.¹²² While acknowledging that Alamo Plaza 'desperately needs a refresh,' the authors wrote that spending millions on a 'monument to white supremacy' is a 'grave injustice to a city that desperately needs better schools, jobs and services.'¹²³

¹¹⁶ Scott Huddleston, "State Commission Recognizes Alamo Church in Downtown San Antonio as a Cemetery," *San Antonio Express News*, June 17, 2020.

¹¹⁷ Scott Huddleston, "Dispute over Alamo burials, Native American worship may go forward after settlement talks break down," *San Antonio Express News*, December 4, 2021.

¹¹⁸ Alamo, "Museum Planning Committee," Alamo, n.d.

¹¹⁹ Carlos Sanchez, "Should Texas Schoolchildren Be Taught That Alamo Defenders Were 'Heroic'?", *Texas Monthly*, September 6, 2018.

¹²⁰ Simon Romero, "Texas Pushes to Obscure the State's History of Slavery and Racism," *New York Times*, May 20, 2021.

¹²¹ David Montgomery, "'Forget the Alamo' Depicts a Racist Heritage, Sparking Backlash," *Pew Charitable Trusts*, September 14, 2021.

¹²² Richard Webner, "Alamo Renovation Gets Stuck over Arguments about Slavery," *Texas Tribune*, May 10, 2021.

¹²³ David Montgomery, "'Forget the Alamo' Depicts a Racist Heritage, Sparking Backlash," *Pew Charitable Trusts*, September 14, 2021.

Contestation over Alamo Defenders as Enslavers

Forget the Alamo received mixed reviews, often fanfare from left-leaning outlets and criticism from their right-leaning counterparts.¹²⁴ On one hand, some Hispanic and Black leaders hail the book as a testament that their ancestor's place in Texas history has been ignored and misrepresented. Texas' National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) president, Gary Bledsoe, said the book generated a broad discussion that can give attention to Black residents who were a part of the Texas Revolution, including Hendrick Arnold, who fought in a key battle preceding the siege at the Alamo and Joe, an enslaved man and sole male survivor of the Alamo who produced a variety of information about what happened during the 13-day siege, and whose stories went on to inspire dozens of books and movies.¹²⁵ The latter man, Joe, despite Mexico's laws and status as a war hero, was promptly returned to slavery.¹²⁶

On the other hand, Texas State History Museum's Board cancelled a promotional event after Texas Lt. Governor Dan Patrick called the book a 'fact-free rewriting of Texas history.'¹²⁷ Former CEO of the Alamo Trust, Douglass McDonald, stated that 'people would rather fight about the Alamo than fight for the Alamo,' voicing that the book's arguments give more attention to those who 'disparage the Alamo than to the many of us who advance the full history of the landmark.'¹²⁸ Lee Spencer White, president and founder of the Alamo Defenders Descendants Association, calls 'Forget the Alamo' a 'hate book,' arguing that she traced her lineage to a man who died at the Alamo, Gordon C. Jennings. She fondly spoke of him as a 'common man' who did not enslave people and referred to the Alamo as her 'family cemetery.'¹²⁹

In May 2020, following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the Alamo Plaza became the scene of demonstrations. Protestors faced off against Alamo defenders' This is Texas Freedom Force,' some of whom wore body armour and carried weapons. The Cenotaph was spray painted with the words 'white supremacy, profit over people, the ALAMO.'¹³⁰

In addition to the story that the Alamo tells, contestations surrounding the Alamo's history of enslavement also involve the historic 1921 Woolworth Building that faces the Alamo Plaza. The building was a site of peaceful integration in 1960. Negotiations between religious leaders and business owners served as a means to avoid the violence that has impacted other cities. The peaceful desegregation made national news. Jackie Robinson, the first Black baseball player in the major leagues, visited the city that month and declared that 'San Antonians are setting examples for the whole nation.'¹³¹

¹²⁴ Kevin Roberts, "Don't 'Forget the Alamo.' Do Fight the Book's Revisionist, Fake History to the Last Man," *Texas Public Policy Foundation*, July 12, 2021.

¹²⁵ David Montgomery, "'Forget the Alamo' Depicts a Racist Heritage, Sparking Backlash," *Pew Charitable Trusts*, September 14, 2021.

¹²⁶ Katie Bender, "Joe, Survivor of the Alamo," *Austintexas.gov*, n.d.

¹²⁷ Kevin Roberts, "Don't 'Forget the Alamo.' Do Fight the Book's Revisionist, Fake History to the Last Man," *Texas Public Policy Foundation*, July 12, 2021.

¹²⁸ David Montgomery, "'Forget the Alamo' Depicts a Racist Heritage, Sparking Backlash," *Pew Charitable Trusts*, September 14, 2021.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Scott Huddleston, "'San Antonians Are Setting Examples' — Civil Rights History a Key Feature of Alamo Project," *San Antonio Express News*, August 27, 2021.

Decision-Making over Alamo Plaza and Legacy of Slavery

On November 19, 2020, Judge Nelson Wolff of Bexar County (where San Antonio is located) and San Antonio's Mayor Phil Hardberger and former member of the Alamo Citizen Advisory Committee Phil Bakke wrote to Mayor Ron Nirenberg and the City Council, urging them to keep Alamo Plaza a fully open space and to protect the Woolworth Building.¹³²

A public discussion hosted on August 27, 2021, invited scholars and residents to come together and discuss the Alamo's connection to civil rights. Carey Latimore claimed 'Slavery cannot be dismissed, but [he doesn't] think that it's the central reason for the Texas Revolution.'¹³³ Latimore recognised free Black Texans who were awarded for their service, such as Sam McCullough Jr. Latimore added that he hopes to see a broader conversation about the Texas Revolution and U.S. history overall, adding that 'part of the reason we are divided is that we don't share the whole story.'¹³⁴

Conversations about racism extend beyond the Alamo and seep into other parts of San Antonio. In September of 2021, the president of the University of Texas at San Antonio declared that the school is removing the slogan 'Come and Take It' from its buildings and rally cries at football games, noting that it is a racist and anti-Mexican phrase.¹³⁵ According to *Pew Trusts*, the phrase has increasingly been associated with White supremacy groups and was displayed during the January 6 insurrection in the U.S. Capitol.¹³⁶

Beyond San Antonio, Texas is also making decisions regarding its legacy of racism. The Republican-led Texas legislature passed, and Republican Governor Greg Abbott signed a law creating the 1836 Project. Launched September 1, 2021, the 1836 Project, as the *Texas Tribune* reported, is designed to promote the state's history to Texas residents through pamphlets given to people when they receive their driver's licence. It further awards students for their knowledge of the state's history. Abbott claimed that the project would 'promote patriotic education and increase awareness of Texas values.'¹³⁷ The project came during the nationwide push by Republican politicians to prevent the incorporation of critical race theory in school. Critics worry that the 1836 Project will limit how Texas educators can discuss current events and racism in the U.S.¹³⁸

¹³² Scott Huddleston, "San Antonio's Stalled Alamo Makeover Project Is Taking More Fire," *San Antonio Express News*, November 19, 2020.

¹³³ Brendan Gibbons, "Historian Says Slavery 'Cannot Be Dismissed' but Wasn't Main Cause of Texas Revolution," *San Antonio Report*, February 9, 2021, <https://sanantonioreport.org/carey-latimore-texas-revolution-slavery/>.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Kate McGee, "UTSA Stopped Displaying 'Come and Take It' Flag at Football Games and Now Faces Criticism from Its Board of Regents," *Texas Tribune*, September 14, 2021.

¹³⁶ David Montgomery, "'Forget the Alamo' Depicts a Racist Heritage, Sparking Backlash," *Pew Charitable Trusts*, September 14, 2021.

¹³⁷ Heidi Pérez-Moreno, "Texas' 1836 Project Aims to Promote 'Patriotic Education,' but Critics Worry It Will Gloss over State's History of Racism," *Texas Tribune*, June 9, 2021.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

Summary and Conclusions

On August 17, 2021, the Alamo broke ground on its first major construction project – the \$20 million Alamo Exhibit Hall and Collections Buildings, which will house items donated by the singer Phil Collins, items from the recently acquired Donald and Louise Yena Spanish Colonial collection, as well as those from the Alamo's own collection.¹³⁹ Most recently, in February 2022, an operator of tourist attractions Tomb Rider 3D Adventure Ride & Arcade, the Guinness World Records Museum, and Ripley's Haunted Adventure agreed to vacate their buildings to make room for the continued renovations of Alamo Plaza.¹⁴⁰

This case study calls attention to the complicated nature of the historic Alamo mission. With its multi-purpose nature over the years and its most recent designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Alamo and what it stands for continue to be the subject of debate. Further, the case sheds light on how narratives of an event, a location, and even people the site is involved with, are not singular but rather nuanced, thus creating conflict in how the Alamo should be remembered or even forgotten. Finally, the case delves into how legal specifications determine the decision-making processes that underlie such public spaces.

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¹³⁹ Scott Huddleston, "Works Starts on Alamo Exhibit Hall as Part of a Long-Term Project at the Mission and Battle Site," *San Antonio Express News*, August 17, 2021.

¹⁴⁰ Scott Huddleston, "Tourist Attractions to Vacate Alamo Plaza Buildings, Making Way for New Museum and Visitor Center," *San Antonio Express News*, February 9, 2022.

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About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter- ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

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Published by IHJR-EuroClio in December 2022
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To cite this publication:

Ngoc Tram Nguyen, "The Alamo. A complex historical legacy" A Contested Histories Occasional Paper XIII (December 2022), retrieved from [link].

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The Contested Histories Initiative receives support from the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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Co-funded by the
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