

TCU and May 24, 1841: The Broader Context (1-16-2020)

As described in the accompanying document, the May and July 1841 expeditions against Native Americans living in what became the Dallas-Fort Worth region were not isolated incidents. They were part of a larger campaign undertaken by the Republic of Texas to exterminate and remove Native Americans, take possession of their lands, and populate them with white settlers. These expeditions must be understood within this broader context, which is described below. Note the language used by Texans in their characterizations, as well as the attitudes underlying their systematic efforts to dislodge Native Americans and take possession of their lands.

Events and Attitudes Surrounding May 24, 1841:

- Native American peoples had inhabited what became known as north and east Texas for millennia prior to the coming of Europeans, Texans, and Americans. The Wichita and Caddo were among the earliest identifiable inhabitants of these regions.

The Wichita, or *Kirikir?i:s*, consisted of several bands of Caddoan-speaking peoples, including the Wichita, Waco, Tawakoni, Kichai (Keechi), Iscani, Taovaya, and others. Their traditional homelands spanned what is now Kansas to central Texas.

The Caddo were made up of at least three groups, the Cadohadacho (“Caddo” being a shortened form that was eventually applied to all three groups), Natchitoches, and Hasinai. Their traditional homelands encompassed land in what became the states of Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas. For the Hasinai, east Texas was their ancestral homeland and the Trinity River marked the western boundary of their traditional territory. They shared with other tribes the area between the Trinity and the Brazos Rivers as hunting grounds. (Carter, *Caddo Indians*, 4. 23, 295)

- By the 16th century, Europeans were traversing these lands, claiming ownership of them and their resources based on the Doctrine of Discovery. Developed beginning in the 15th century, the Doctrine asserted that when European nations “discovered” new lands the discovering country automatically gained property, governmental, religious, and economic rights over the non-Christian, Indigenous inhabitants. Operating under a settler-colonial form of Christianity, these “discoveries” were accompanied by intensive efforts to force Indigenous peoples to convert to Christianity and European ways. Whether by violence or forced assimilation, Indigenous peoples were to cease to exist, with Christianity authorizing, justifying, and carrying out this goal. In 1823, the U.S. Supreme Court in the case, *Johnson v M’Intosh*, affirmed that the Doctrine was an established legal principle of American law. The United States also practiced settler-colonial Christianity. (see, Robert J. Miller, *Native America, Discovered and Conquered* and *Discovering Indigenous Lands: The Doctrine of Discovery in the English Colonies*)
- By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, American policies and aspirations were forcing Native Americans who had lived for millennia east of the Mississippi River to move

west. As a result, groups of Cherokees, Kickapoos, Shawnees, Delawares, Alabamas, Coushattas, and others moved into north and east Texas. Additionally, an 1835 treaty with the United States required Caddos to give up lands in Louisiana and Arkansas, and to leave the boundaries of the United States within a year. Some moved into east Texas.

- When the Republic of Texas came into existence in 1836, it sought through peaceful and violent means to completely control and exploit the land, as well as all Native Americans, both those who had lived here for centuries and those who had been pushed out of their homelands in the east. Native Americans resisted and fought back to protect their families, cultures, and homelands. On December 20, 1838, Mirabeau B. Lamar, who had just been elected as the Republic's second president, described his intentions to the Texas Congress. Making a dubious claim—"Has not the white man for centuries furnished him (i.e., the Indian warrior) examples of clemency and kindness?"—Lamar showed he had no intention of doing so:

"As long as we continue to exhibit our mercy without showing our strength, so long will the Indians continue to bloody the tomahawk, and move onward in the work of rapacity and slaughter. And how long shall this cruel humanity, this murderous sensibility for the sanguinary savage, be practiced (sic) in defiance of its tested impolicy? Until other oceans of blood, the blood of our wives and children shall glut their voracious appetite? I would answer no. If the wild cannibals of the woods will not desist from their massacres, if they will continue to war upon us with the ferocity of tigers and hienas (sic), it is time we should retaliate their warfare. Not in the murder of their women and children, but in the prosecution of an exterminating war upon their warriors; which will admit of no compromise and have no termination except in their total extinction or total expulsion." (*Journal of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Texas*, Regular Session, Third Congress, November 5, 1838, pg. 174)

- On February 28, 1839, Lamar called for 300 volunteers to protect the Texas frontiers, explaining, "The fierce and perfidious savages are waging upon our exposed and defenceless (sic) inhabitants, an unprovoked and cruel warfare, masacreing (sic) the women and children, and threatning (sic) the whole line of our unprotected borders with speedy desolation." (Presidential Address on the Protection of the Frontier, February 28, 1839. Mirabeau B. Lamar Papers #361, pgs. 118-121. Texas State Library and Archives)
- On June 27, 1839, Lamar wrote to David G. Burnet, Albert Sidney Johnston, Thomas J. Rusk, I.W. Burton, and James S. Mayfield (*Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest 1825-1916*: vol. 1, pgs. 67, 69):

"Recent events of which you are already apprised, Convince me of the necessity of the immediate removal of the Cherokee Indians, and the ultimate removal of all other emigrant Tribes now residing in Texas, beyond Her Territorial limits; I have therefore appointed you Commissioners on the part of the Republic, to make the necessary arrangements for carrying this measure into effect . . . unless they Consent at once to receive a fair Compensation for their improvements and other property, and remove out of this Country, nothing Short of the entire distruction (sic) of all they possess, and the

extermination of their Tribe will appease the indignation of the white people against them.”

- On July 15-16, 1839, several hundred warriors under Cherokee Chief Duwal'li (Bowl or Bowles) fought the Texans near present-day Tyler and were defeated. The Texans pursued them, killing more than 100, including Duwal'li. They also burned Cherokee villages, forcing many across the Red River into the United States' Indian Territory.
- On February 4, 1840, the Fourth Congress of Texas approved Fannin county raising a company of mounted gunmen to be called the Fannin Guards and to report to the 4th brigade of militia. At the time, the county included land that later became Grayson, Collin, Cooke, Denton, Montague, Wise, Clay, Jack, Wichita, Archer, Young, Wilbarger, Baylor, Throckmorton, Hardeman, Foard, Knox, Haskell, Stonewall, King, Cottle, Childress, and parts of Hunt and Collingsworth counties.
- In March 1840, the Council House Massacre occurred. Comanche representatives were invited to San Antonio for talks on ending hostilities. Instead, the Texans decided to hold captive the Comanche delegation until the Comanches returned all their white captives. When the Comanches attempted to break free, a fight broke out in which Texans killed 35 Comanches, took 29 Comanche women and children as prisoners, and captured over 100 horses. (*Indian Papers of Texas and the Southwest 1825-1916*: vol. 1, pg. x)
- By 1841, Native Americans had been almost completely removed from east Texas. The Republic of Texas, however, recognized the land claims of the Alabamas and Coshattas in southeast Texas.
- On January 4, 1841, the Fifth Congress of the Texas Republic passed, “An Act Granting Land to Emigrants,” which offered hundreds of acres of land to each head of family and single male over 17 who was a “free white person” and who emigrated to Texas in 1840 and 1841. It also authorized the Republic’s president to make contracts with individuals who would recruit and settle families in Texas. By the end of 1841, a contract had been made with W.S. Peters and others to settle 600 families in a large area of land that included what would eventually become Tarrant county. Known as Peters Colony, it is estimated that by the early 1850s 10-12,000 people had been settled within it. (Calvert, et al, *The History of Texas*, pg. 90)
- Responding to the invasion of their lands, Native Americans raided and killed Texans living in Titus and Fannin counties in late 1840 and spring 1841. That spring, the Keechi living along Village Creek and the Trinity’s West Fork (about six miles east of the present city of Fort Worth) also raided settlements in Bowie and Lamar counties. (Bates, *History and Reminiscences of Denton County*, 8-9)
- On February 4, 1841, the Fifth Congress of the Texas Republic passed, “An Act to Encourage Frontier Protection,” authorizing settlers in the counties on the frontier borders, which included Fannin, Lamar, Red River, and Bowie, to organize one volunteer company in each county.

- **On May 4, 1841, Texans in the Red River counties began assembling to participate in General Tarrant’s first expedition. On May 14, the expedition got under way. On May 24, the Texans attacked the settlements along Village Creek. In mid-July, Tarrant made his second expedition into the area.**
- In October 1841, General Tarrant ordered Jonathan Bird to raise a company of troops, go to the Trinity River, and build a fort to protect the frontier of Fannin and Lamar counties. With about thirty men, Bird established a fort a few miles below an old Caddo village. (*Journals of the Sixth Congress of the Republic of Texas, 1841-1842*, vol. 2, pg. 356)
- On December 8, 1841, *The Weekly Texian* (Austin), reported that a contract had been entered into with W.S. Peters and others for the introduction of 600 families within three years to be settled on certain lands set aside for that purpose in Fannin county.
- By late 1841 Texans had grown tired of President Lamar’s expensive exterminationist policies and did not re-elect him. Nonetheless, as historian David LaVere noted, “Lamar had started something that could not be easily stopped.” (*Contrary Neighbors*, pg. 95)
- Within three years, the upper Trinity River area was filling with colonists. *The Civilian and Galveston Gazette* (June 29, 1844) printed a letter dated May 29, 1844 from “a friend,” who observed: “The efforts of the Colony contractors are filling this frontier country with a hardy and industrious people, and the prairies on the Trinity, where but yesterday roamed the Indian terrible in his ferocity, have to-day become the home of the peaceful and industrious colonist.”
- Texas joined the United States on December 29, 1845. As American settlers continued to push west, the United States established a line of forts along the Texas frontier to provide protection and strengthen its control over Native American lands. Fort Worth was established in 1849 as part of that effort. Tarrant county was founded later that year.
- In 1910 the city of Fort Worth gave TCU the land on which it is currently located. In a campaign that convinced TCU to relocate from Waco, the Fairmount Land Company donated 50 acres, called “the Forest Park site,” while other individuals donated smaller plots. (*Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*, June 2, June 5, June 25, and July 2, 1910)
- Many of the attitudes and language underlying the invasion and colonization of Native American lands persist. In 1972 the chair of TCU’s Centennial Commission said, “It (i.e., TCU) has seen its own surrounding area progress from Indian infested territory to an urban center.” (*Daily Skiff*, February 17) According to the Tarrant County Historical Commission’s current website, “The story of Tarrant County is the story of the taming of the West; of battles with Native Americans and cattle drives, of gunfights and gushers, as well as of plantations and packing plants.”

What does it mean for TCU to reside respectfully on Native American lands? Given this history, what responsibilities do we have as a university?