

SPEECH OF COLONEL AUSTIN

*Delivered on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, 1835, at a public dinner in Brazoria,  
given in honor of his return to Texas.*

I cannot refrain from returning my unfeigned thanks for the flattering sentiments with which I have just been honored, nor have I words to express my satisfaction on returning to this my more than native country, and meeting so many of my friends and companions in its settlement.

I left Texas in April, 1833, as the public agent of the people, for the purpose of applying for the admission of this country into the Mexican confederation as a state separate from Coahuila. This application was based upon the constitutional and vested rights of Texas, and was sustained by me in the city of Mexico to the utmost of my abilities. No honorable means were spared to effect the objects of my mission and to oppose the forming of Texas into a territory, which was attempted. I rigidly adhered to the instructions and wishes of my constituents, so far as they were communicated to me. My efforts to serve Texas involved me in the labyrinth of Mexican politics. I was arrested, and have suffered a long persecution and imprisonment. I consider it my duty to give an account of these events to my constituents, and will therefore at this time merely observe that I have never, in any manner, agreed to any thing, or admitted any thing, that would compromise the constitutional or vested rights of Texas. These rights belong to the people, and can only be surrendered by them.

I fully hoped to have found Texas at peace and in tranquility, but regret to find it in commotion; all disorganized, all in anarchy, and threatened with immediate hostilities. This state of things is deeply to be lamented; it is a great misfortune, but it is one which has not been produced by any acts of the people of this country: on the contrary, it is the natural and

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inevitable consequence of the revolution that has spread all over Mexico, and of the imprudent and impolitic measures of both the general and state governments, with respect to Texas. The people here are not to blame, and cannot be justly censured. They are farmers, cultivators of the soil, and are pacific from interest, from occupation, and from inclination. They have uniformly endeavored to sustain the constitution and the public peace by pacific means, and have never deviated from their duty as Mexican citizens. If any acts of imprudence have been committed by individuals, they evidently resulted from the revolutionary state of the whole nation, the imprudent and censurable conduct of the state authorities, and the total want of a local government in Texas. It is, indeed, a source of surprise and creditable congratulation, that so few acts of this description have occurred under the peculiar circumstances of the times. It is, however, to be remembered that acts of this nature were not the acts of the people, nor is Texas responsible for them. They were, as I before observed, the natural consequences of the revolutionary state of the Mexican nation; and Texas certainly did not originate the revolution, neither have the people, as a people, participated in it. The consciences and hands of the Texians are free from censure, and clean.

The revolution in Mexico is drawing to a close. The object is to change the form of government, destroy the federal constitution of 1824, and establish a central or consolidated government. The states are to be converted into provinces.

Whether the people of Texas ought or ought not to agree to this change, and relinquish all or a part of their constitutional and vested rights under the constitution of 1824, is a question of the most vital importance; one that calls for the deliberate consideration of the people, and can only be decided by them, fairly convened for the purpose. As a citizen of Texas I have no other right, and pretend to no other. In the report which I consider it my duty to make to my constituents, I intend to give my views on the present situation of the country, and especially as to the constitutional and natural rights of Texas, and will, therefore, at this time, merely touch this subject.

Under the Spanish government, Texas was a separate and distinct local organization. It was one of the unities that composed the general mass of the nation, and as such participated in the war of the revolution, and was represented in the constituent congress of Mexico, that formed the constitution of 1824. This constituent congress, so far from destroying this unity, expressly recognized and confirmed it by the law of May 7<sup>th</sup>. 1824, which united Texas with Coahuila *provisionally*, under the especial guarantee of being made a state of the Mexican confederation, as soon as it possessed the necessary elements. That law and the federal constitution gave to Texas a specific political existence, and vested in its inhabitants

special and defined rights, which can only be relinquished by the people of Texas, acting for themselves as a unity, and not as a part of Coahuila, for the reason that the union with Coahuila, was *limited*, and only gave power to the state of Coahuila and Texas to govern Texas for the time being, but *always subject to the vested rights of Texas*. The state, therefore, cannot relinquish those vested rights, by agreeing to the change of government, or by any other act, unless expressly authorized by the people of Texas to do so; neither can the general government of Mexico legally deprive Texas of them without the consent of this people. These are my opinions.

An important question now presents itself to the people of this country.

The federal constitution of 1824 is about to be destroyed, the system of government changed, and a central or consolidated one established. Will this act annihilate all the rights of Texas, and subject this country to the uncontrolled and unlimited dictation of the new government?

This is a subject of the most vital importance. I have no doubts the federal constitution will be destroyed, and a central government established, and that the people will soon be called upon to say whether they agree to this change or not. This matter requires the most calm discussion, the most mature deliberation, and the most perfect union. How is this to be had? I see but one way, and that is by a general consultation of the people by means of delegates elected for that purpose, with full powers to give such an answer, in the name of Texas, to this question, as they may deem best, and to adopt such measures as the tranquility and salvation of the country may require.

It is my duty to state that general Santa Anna verbally and expressly authorized me to say to the people of Texas, that he was their friend, that he wished for their prosperity, and would do all he could to promote it; and that, in the new constitution, he would use his influence to give to the people of Texas a special organization, suited to their education, habits, and situation. Several of the most intelligent and influential men in Mexico, and especially the Ministers of Relations and War, expressed themselves in the same manner. These declarations afford another and more urgent necessity for a general consultation of all Texas, in order to inform the general government, and especially general Santa Anna, what kind of organization will suit the education, habits, and situation of this people.

DMTC It is also proper for me to state that, in all my conversation with the president and ministers and men of influence, I advised that no troops should be sent to Texas, and no cruisers along the coast. I gave it as my decided opinion, that the inevitable consequence of sending an armed force to this country would be war. I stated that there was a sound and correct moral principle in the people of Texas, that was abundantly sufficient to restrain or put down all turbulent or seditious movements, but that this

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moral principle could not, and would not unite with any armed force sent against this country; on the contrary, it would resist and repel it, and ought to do so. This point presents another strong reason why the people of Texas should meet in general consultation. This country is now in anarchy, threatened with hostilities; armed vessels are capturing every thing they can catch on the coast, and acts of piracy are said to be committed under cover of the Mexican flag. Can this state of things exist without precipitating the country into a war? I think it cannot, and therefore believe that it is our bounden and solemn duty as Mexicans, and as Texians, to represent the evils that are likely to result from this mistaken and most impolitic policy in the military movement.

My friends, I can truly say that no one has been, or is now, more anxious than myself to keep trouble away from this country. No one has been, or now is more faithful to his duty as a Mexican citizen, and no one has personally sacrificed or suffered more in the discharge of this duty. I have uniformly been opposed to have any thing to do with the family political quarrels of the Mexicans. Texas needs peace, and a local government: its inhabitants are farmers, and they need a calm and quiet life. But how can I, or any one, remain indifferent, when our rights, our all, appear to be in jeopardy, and when it is our duty, as well as our obligation as good Mexican citizens, to express our opinions on the present state of things, and to represent our situation to the government? It is impossible. The crisis is such as to bring it home to the judgment of every man that something must be done, and that without delay. The question will perhaps be asked, what are we to do? I have already indicated my opinion. Let all personalities, or divisions, or excitements, or passion, or violence, be banished from among us. Let a general consultation of the people of Texas be convened as speedily as possible, to be composed of the best, and most calm, and intelligent, and firm men in the country, and let them decide what representations ought to be made to the general government, and what ought to be done in future.

With these explanatory remarks I will give a toast—*The constitutional rights and the security and peace of Texas—they ought to be maintained; and jeopardized as they now are, they demand a general consultation of the people.*