HERE'S THE TRUTH ABOUT 1836

The fight for Texas independence was NOT about slavery

Texas history is complicated.

Texans have a lot to be proud of in our history . . . with a few exceptions.

The authors of *Forget the Alamo*, *The Rise and Fall of an American Myth*, claim their intent is to start a discussion. Co-author Chris Tomlinson has said of the book “This is an argument, it’s not a textbook. We’re making a case for a point of view. You may disagree with that point of view, I respect that."

If the authors “respect” those who disagree with that point of view, they certainly haven’t shown that respect.

They accept offers to discuss their book, except invitations to events where those with differing opinions will be participating. They describe such events as “ambushes”. They declined four invitations to participate in panels unless they could pick the other panelists.

So far, they’ve declined attendance at the Texas Tribune's Tribfest, a forum sponsored by the University of Texas History Department, a second invitation to the Bullock Museum, and a panel sponsored by the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

The common denominator to all these declined events was the panels would also feature participants, including noted and published historians, who disagree with their books premise, i.e. that the Texas Revolution was about slavery.

The purpose of this website is to expose the falsehoods about the Texas Revolution emanating from many sources, not just the “Forget the Alamo” book. My goal is to enumerate egregious factual errors - and the errors of omission - that belie the motivations of those who believe that the Texas Revolution of 1836 was all about slavery.

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LEFT OUT OF THE BOOK

These are five important facts about the Texas revolution that the authors of *Forget the Alamo* chose to ignore because it did not support their narrative.

1) Per the Texas Declaration of Independence, Slavery was not a cause for seeking independence

When writing about the causes of the Texas Revolution, it would seem obvious for a researcher to review and refer to the six general and fourteen -- 20 in total -- specific causes for rebellion listed in the March 2, 1836, Texas Declaration of Independence. Any 7th grade student in Texas assigned to write on the causes of rebellion would've likely started with that document . . . but the authors of *Forget the Alamo* apparently chose not to read it (or even worse, read it and ignored it). There is no discussion anywhere in the book about the 1836 Texas Declaration of Independence. Really?

Not one of the 20 listed causes mentioned slavery. If slavery were a cause, I guess it didn't rank any higher than 21.

The authors should address this inconvenient fact, not ignore it. They failed to even mention it.

2) Seven non slave Mexican states besides Texas were in rebellion at the same time and for the same reasons

There were seven other Mexican states (Zacatecas, Yucatan, Tabasco, Nuevo Leon, Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Nueva California) in rebellion at some time during the same period (1835 - 1846). These states WERE NOT slave holding states. In fact, Santa Anna had brutally suppressed a rebellion in Zacatecas, killing thousands, not many months before he began his march into Texas. The multi-state rebellion would indicate there were multiple significant reasons for revolution — reasons that were shared across Mexico, including in Texas – and slavery wasn't one of those reasons.

3) Texians and Tejanos willing to remain a Mexican state until the "Siete Leyes" proclamation of 1835

Santa Anna's enactment in late 1835 of "Siete Leyes" (Seven Laws) nullified the federal constitution of 1824 that had given power to the states, disbanded state legislatures, and replaced elected governors with appointed ones. This was not well received and was considered the last straw by many Mexican citizens. Texians and Tejanos, as did citizens of other Mexican states, initially fought for a return to the constitution of 1824. In fact, one of the Texas battle flags was a Mexican tri-color that featured "1824" in the center white panel. Another battle flag- this one flown at the Alamo - was also a Mexican tri-color with two stars in the center white panel representing Texan's demand to separate the state of Coahuila y Tejas into two independent Mexican states.

Surprisingly, you cannot find the words "Siete Leyes" -- the common cause for all Mexican states in rebellion, including Texas -- anywhere in the book, *Forget the Alamo*. One would think a book about the cause(s) of the 1836 Texas rebellion would include lengthy discussion

4) Most Texas prominent slave owners opposed rebellion

The majority of prominent Texans who identified with the “Peace Party,” the faction in pre-war Texas that from 1832 - 1835 opposed war and wanted to maintain Texas as its own state within Mexico, were slave owners. Prominent among this group were Stephen F. Austin, Thomas J. Chambers, David G. Burnet, and Josiah Bell. Ironically, Austin, as the book notes, was a slavery supporter, who opposed war and independence until late 1835.

The authors would have us believe the war was overwhelmingly about slavery, notwithstanding that many of those who opposed the war were themselves slave owners.

5) Most Texas rebels weren't slave owners

The vast majority of Texas combatants were not slave owners. As a matter of fact, 60 of the Alamo defenders were from northern states and foreign countries that had outlawed slavery. Would they have been willing to die for those of the slave owner/planter class? In fact, one of those who fought at Gonzales and later died at the Alamo was Amos Pollard, a well educated physician who came to Texas from Massachusetts. Pollard was an ardent abolitionist who corresponded with the prominent abolitionist of the day, William Lloyd Garrison, who published Pollard’s letter in the Abolitionists pamphlet “The Liberator”. If 1836 was to defend and maintain Texas slavery, it’s highly unlikely a dedicated abolitionist would have died on March 6, 1836 fighting for a cause he abhorred.

IN THE BOOK . . . BUT WRONG

Take a look at these examples of how the authors of *Forget the Alamo* have twisted or misquoted other academic works to support their suppositions

Reimagining Racism for Lorenzo de Zavala

As detailed by the Copano Bay Press, the authors also describe the experiences of Lorenzo de Zavala, the staunch Federalista and arch enemy of Santa Anna, who would soon become the provisional Vice President of the Republic of Texas.

They say that de Zavala was shunned by white men and struggled to cope with their racism. On page 109, they write:

> *"A year before, he (Zavala) was hobnobbing with the king of France; now, when he walked in a room, white men grew silent. He had never experienced such abject racism, and struggled to address it."* 7

According to chapter note 7, the source material will be found in W. S. Cleaves' 1932 article in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* titled, "Lorenzo de Zavala in Texas," page 34 to be precise.

Below you will see the quote from page 34 of that article, and you will note that it says the opposite of what our authors claim.

> *"It is probable, judging by later events, that Dr. Miller's attitude toward Zavala was not general among the other settlers, though it is evident that his influence was feared by those who were not ready to espouse openly a break with Mexico. On the other hand, Zavala seems to have been held in high esteem by the major part of the settlers. This would seem to be upheld by the regularity with which he was elected to the popular consultations and the good will with which his activity in those meetings was accepted. Indeed, it seems that Zavala's advice was to have considerable effect in pointing out the course that the Texans were to take. The effect of his activity is apparent."*

It is a complete fabrication that Lorenzo de Zavala was subjected to "abject racism" by his counterparts in the Texas revolution. In fact, the passage referenced in the footnote actually said he was" held in high esteem". The authors lied.

If he was the victim of such racism, why was he allowed to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence, why was he elected as ad interim vice president of the new republic and why was he chosen as one of the members of the peace commission to escort the captured Santa Anna to Mexico City?

Rape? Really?

Copano Bay Press also analyzed the claim on page 141 of *Forget the Alamo,* the authors claim Texas soldiers at San Jacinto raped Mexican camp followers.

> *"The Texians massacred hundreds of men, while other pillaged Santa Anna's camp and raped Mexican women who were camp followers. One of the U.S. Army deserters later wrote that he used his pistol to force a group of Texians to free several women they seemed ready to rape, and turned them over to Seguin's men for protection."* 17

Note 17 references Bill and Marjorie Walraven's excellent *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* article from 2004 titled, "The Sabine Chute: The U.S. Army and the Texas Revolution." The applicable pages are 579 and 580 in volume 107 of that journal.

> *"E.F. Sparks had a similar experience when a woman jumped out of the bulrushes. A regular was threatening to kill her with his bayonet. 'I told him if he killed her, I would kill him. He asked if I was in earnest. I said I was. Then three other women came running to us, crying and begging that I would protect them too. Captain Juan Seguin and his men came by, and Sparks left the women in their care."*

This account quoted by the Walravens is well known to all serious students of San Jacinto. As you can see, there is no mention of rape on the cited pages. The authors lied again.

Should have read more than the title!

During a Texas Public Radio interview on Thursday July 1st, and in response to questions asked on other attribution errors, *Forget The Alamo* co -author Chris Tomlinson stated: "…if people want to use these errors as an opportunity to dismiss the entire book" they should read "Randolph Campbells book, written in 1991, An Empire to Slavery, …that book will convince you".

Wrong again Chris. Here's what Campbell wrote in his book on page 48:

> *"Slavery did not play a major role in the developments from the passage of the anti-immigration law of April 6, 1830 until the outbreak of fighting in the fall of 1835. The institution was not a primary issue in the disturbances of 1832 or the events of late 1835, and Mexico took no action threatening it directly or immediately during these years. Instead, the immediate cause of the conflict was the political instability of Mexico and the implications of Santa Anna's centralist regime for Texas. Mexico forced the issue in 1835, not over slavery, but over customs duties and the generally defiant attitude of Anglo-Americans in Texas."*

Torget Me Not

Also during the same Texas Public Radio interview on Thursday July 1st, Tomlinson also cited Andrew Torget's book, "Seeds of Empire" as proof the war was all about slavery.

In “Seeds of Empire”, on page 174, Torget wrote:

> *“No menacing new threat to slavery or colonization had emerged during 1835 and 1836 that pushed the people of Texas into revolution. In explaining their actions, the revolutionaries pointed instead to Santa Anna’s overthrow of the federalist system under the constitution of 1824 as the prime mover toward war. With the rise of centralism in the form of dictatorship in Mexico City, they insisted there could be no future for Anglo colonies or Tejano villages under a Mexican government that did not support their rights under federalism. As late as the first months of 1836, many rebels in Texas, both Anglos and Tejanos, wanted nothing more than the restoration of the 1824 constitution – it was not until the arrival of Santa’s Anna’s army on Texas soil that the revolt against centralism became widely embraced as a fight for independence. The destruction of the federal political system in Mexico during the rise of Santa Anna dictatorship was, without a doubt, the pivotal event in the outbreak of the Texas rebellion.”*

Again, the authors ignored what was actually written and wrote what the source surely must have been thinking. That's not historical research.

<u>They Should Be Thanking Phil Collins</u>

The authors of *Forget the Alamo*, Chris Tomlinson, Jason Stanford and Brian Burroughs need to brush up on their fact checking skills.

In the article "Come and Fake It" in the June 2021 issue of *Texas Monthly*, they erroneously assert that as Texas Land Commissioner I agreed “to display a collection in its entirety without authenticating every item," claiming that I obligated the Alamo to display items that may have had questionable provenance.

This is demonstrably false.

Under the agreement I signed on behalf of the General Land Office with Phil Collins there, is no requirement to display every single item of his donated collection. In fact, in the October 29, 2014 contract, Collins granted to me and my successors acting on behalf of the Texas General Land Office complete discretion to display or not display any particular item.

In the relevant provision on page 1 of the agreement, Collins stipulates: “By signing this deed, I understand and agree that the location, retention, cataloging, preservation, and disposition of the Donated Materials by the Alamo will be conducted in its discretion, in accordance with General Land Office and Alamo policy and other applicable law. Common discretionary uses by the Alamo include, but are not limited to, exhibition, display, digitization for preservation and access purposes, and making works available for research and scholarship.”

In “Come and Fake It,” my agreement to build a state-of-the-art museum is repeatedly mischaracterized. Tomlinson demands, for example, that state experts must “set out which of the artifacts rock singer Phil Collins donated are legitimate before the General Land Office spends another penny on a new museum to house them.”

No. They. Don't.

Even without the Collins collection, we didn't have room to display all the Alamo-related artifacts we already had at the Alamo. We needed a museum then and we need a museum now — even without the 207 items in Collins collection.

Were there questions about the provenance of some of the items in the Collins collection? Of course there were! The authors present this as some "aha" moment, but I learned that some items had questionable provenance when I read Collins' own book, "The Alamo and Beyond, A Collector's Journey," long before we agreed to accept his generous donation.

The authors raise issues on about a dozen artifacts. Let's assume their doubts are well founded on the entire dozen (they are not) and then let's add in another dozen for good measure. That makes twenty-four "tainted" gifts, and leaves us with 183 that are not. Therefore, the smart thing to do is "just say no" to the 183?

Really?

In the forward of Collins' book, historian and author Stephen L. Hardin states that the provenance of some items is subject to question and notes that "the acceptance of questions and criticisms is a legitimate part of the historians method."

Collins himself comments on the unclear origins of items multiple times throughout the book — using phrases like "it is possibly thought to be" or "would possibly have belonged to" or "William Travis's Sword Belt from the Alamo?" Yes, on page 173 in big bold letters above the picture of the sword belt is a question mark. Where was that acknowledgement by the "Come and Fake It" authors? Lost, no doubt, in their rush to sell a narrative, the facts be damned.

I hate to rain on the authors' parade of startling revelations (actually I don't), but the idea that the General Land Office and/or Commissioner Jerry Patterson were duped by Phil Collins or anyone else is just false. Collins is as much a benefactor to Texas as were the citizens of Cincinnati, Ohio when they gifted Texas with the Twin Sisters cannon that helped carry the day at San Jacinto.

Texas thanks you Phil Collins!

Speaking of the Twin Sisters cannons used by the Texans at the Alamo, the authors' go-to archeologist, Tom Nuckols, makes yet another of the book's demonstrably false assertions when he claims we don't know what caliber the cannon-balls were.

"(Collins) says he has cannon-balls shot by the Twin Sisters at San Jacinto," Nuckols writes. "Nobody knows what caliber those cannons were!" Well, yes we do.
The overwhelming majority of historians know they were of 6 pound caliber. President Sam Houston and Texas Secretary of War Thomas Rusk said they were 6 pounders. President David

J. Burnet did as well. Ben McCulloch and John Ferrell, who were actually in the San Jacinto artillery detachment, said they were 6 pounders and Texas Army ordnance reports after 1836 all list them as 6 pounders.

Were the cannon-balls from San Jacinto? With only one battle there, one can conclude a cannon-ball documented to have been found at San Jacinto comes from that battle. Was it fired from the Twin Sisters? Since Texas had 2 cannons and Mexico had one, yes it probably was. If the cannon-ball was found in the Mexican position it was likely fired by the Texans and vice-versa. Add the fact that the single Mexican cannon is thought to have fired only 3 times, a reasonable person would conclude a Twin Sisters attribution is well-founded.

Upon reading their description of the Phil Collins donation, I assumed they simply did not have the benefit of examining a copy of the original Land Office agreement with Collins.

But they did. And they chose to ignore it. That is not an error of sloppy journalism. That is an error of questionable integrity.