

= To the People of Texas & All Americans in the World =

To the People of Texas & All Americans in the World is an open letter written on February 24 , 1836 , by William B. Travis , commander of the Texian forces at the Battle of the Alamo , to settlers in Mexican Texas . The letter is renowned as a " declaration of defiance " and a " masterpiece of American patriotism " , and forms part of the history education of Texas schoolchildren .

On February 23 , the Alamo Mission in San Antonio , Texas had been besieged by Mexican forces led by General Antonio López de Santa Anna . Fearing that his small group of men could not withstand an assault , Travis wrote this letter seeking reinforcements and supplies from supporters . The letter closes with Travis 's vow of " Victory or Death ! " , an emotion which has been both praised and derided by historians .

The letter was initially entrusted to courier Albert Martin , who carried it to the town of Gonzales some seventy miles away . Martin added several postscripts to encourage men to reinforce the Alamo , and then handed the letter to Launcelot Smithers . Smithers added his own postscript and delivered the letter to its intended destination , San Felipe de Austin . Local publishers printed over 700 copies of the letter . It also appeared in the two main Texas newspapers and was eventually printed throughout the United States and Europe . Partially in response to the letter , men from throughout Texas and the United States began to gather in Gonzales . Between 32 and 90 of them reached the Alamo before it fell ; the remainder formed the nucleus of the army which eventually defeated Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto .

Following the end of the Texas Revolution , the original letter was delivered to Travis 's family in Alabama , and in 1893 , one of his descendants sold it to the State of Texas for \$ 85 ( \$ 2 @, @ 239 today ) . For many decades it was displayed at the Texas State Library ; the original letter is now protected and a copy is on display under a portrait of Travis .

= = Background = =

The Mexican Constitution of 1824 liberalized the country 's immigration policies , allowing foreigners to settle in border regions such as Mexican Texas . People flocked to the area ; an 1834 census estimated the Texas population at 7 @, @ 800 Mexicans and 30 @, @ 000 English @-@ speaking people primarily from the United States . Among the immigrants was William Barret Travis , an Alabama native who had variously worked as a teacher , a newspaper publisher , and a lawyer . An avid reader , Travis often devoured a novel in a single day . His taste ran primarily to romantic adventure and history , especially the novels of Sir Walter Scott and Benjamin Disraeli and the historical works of Herodotus . Historians have speculated that Travis 's choice of reading material may have affected his behavior ? Travis was known for his melodramatic ways .

In May 1831 , Travis opened a law office in Anahuac , Texas . Almost immediately , he and his law partner , Patrick Jack , clashed with the local military commander , Juan Davis Bradburn . Their subsequent actions were instrumental in causing the May 1832 Anahuac Disturbances . According to historian William C. Davis , Bradburn " overreacted and made heroes of two local malcontents whose actions their own people otherwise had not been much inclined to sanction " . Bradburn was forced to resign his post and flee Texas .

The Anahuac Disturbances coincided with a Mexican civil war . Texians aligned themselves with proponents of federalism advocating a stronger role for state governments , in opposition to a centralized government that set most policies at the national level . The federalists prevailed , and their favored general , Antonio López de Santa Anna , was elected president . In 1835 , Santa Anna began consolidating power ; in response federalists launched armed rebellion in several Mexican states . Travis , an ardent foe of centralism , led an attack on Anahuac in June 1835 and forced the Mexican garrison to surrender . Many Texas settlers thought Travis 's action was imprudent , and he was forced to apologize . Although the Mexican government issued a warrant for his arrest , local authorities did not enforce it .

Texians became increasingly discontented with the government as Santa Anna positioned himself as a dictator . In October , the Texas Revolution began and delegates appointed a provisional

government . Travis was commissioned lieutenant colonel in the new regular army and asked to raise a cavalry company . He participated in the Siege of Béxar , where he proved to be " an impulsive , occasionally insubordinate , officer " .

By the end of 1835 , Texians had expelled all Mexican troops from Texas . Believing the war ended , many Texians resigned from the army and returned home . In January , the provisional government essentially collapsed ; despite a lack of authority for any branch of government to interfere with other branches , the legislature impeached Governor Henry Smith , who in turn disbanded the legislature . No one in Texas was entirely sure who was in charge .

Even as Texian governmental authority declined , rumors flew that Santa Anna would personally lead an invasion of Texas to quell the rebellion . Despite this news , Texian army strength continued to dwindle . Texas settlers were divided on whether they were fighting for independence or a return to a federalist government in Mexico . The confusion caused many settlers to remain at home or to return home . Fewer than 100 Texian soldiers remained garrisoned at the Alamo Mission in San Antonio de Béxar ( now San Antonio , Texas ) . Their commander , James C. Neill , feared that his small force would be unable to withstand an assault by the Mexican troops . In response to Neill 's repeated requests for reinforcements , Governor Smith assigned Travis and 30 men to the Alamo ; they arrived on February 3 . Most of the Texians , including Travis , believed that any Mexican invasion was months away .

= = Composition of the letter = =

Travis assumed command of the Alamo garrison on February 11 , when Neill was granted a furlough . On February 23 , Santa Anna arrived in Béxar at the head of approximately 1500 Mexican troops . The 150 Texian soldiers were unprepared for this development . As they rushed to the Alamo , Texians quickly herded cattle into the complex and scrounged for food in nearby houses . The Mexican army initiated a siege of the Alamo and raised a blood @-@ red flag signalling no quarter . Travis responded with a blast from the Alamo 's largest cannon .

The first night of the siege was largely quiet . The following afternoon , Mexican artillery began firing on the Alamo . Mexican Colonel Juan Almonte wrote in his diary that the bombardment dismounted two of the Alamo 's guns , including the massive 18 @-@ pounder cannon . The Texians quickly returned both weapons to service . Shortly after , Travis wrote an open letter pleading for reinforcements from " the people of Texas & All Americans in the World " .

To the People of Texas & All Americans in the World :

Fellow citizens & compatriots ? I am besieged , by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna ? I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man . The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion , otherwise , the garrison are to be put to the sword , if the fort is taken ? I have answered the demand with a cannon shot , & our flag still waves proudly from the walls . I shall never surrender or retreat . Then , I call on you in the name of Liberty , of patriotism & everything dear to the American character , to come to our aid , with all dispatch ? The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & 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 & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country ? Victory or Death .

William Barret Travis

Lt. Col. comdt

P.S. The Lord is on our side ? When the enemy appeared in sight we had not three bushels of corn ? We have since found in deserted houses 80 or 90 bushels & got into the walls 20 or 30 head of Beeves .

Travis

= = Distribution = =

Travis entrusted the letter to courier Albert Martin , who rode through the night to cover the 70 miles

( 110 km ) to the closest town , Gonzales , as quickly as possible . During his journey , Martin added two postscripts . The first relayed Martin 's fear that the Mexican army had already attacked the Alamo and ended " Hurry on all the men you can in haste " . The second postscript is more difficult to read , as the letter was later folded along one line of text . The paper has since partially frayed along the fold , obliterating several words . The gist of the message , however , is that the men at the Alamo were " determined to do or die " , and Martin intended to gather reinforcements and return as quickly as possible .

In Gonzales , Martin turned the letter over to Launcelot Smithers . When the Mexican army arrived in Béxar , Smithers had immediately set out for Gonzales . Travis may have sent him as an official courier , or he may have journeyed there on his own to warn the townspeople . Smithers added his own message under Martin 's , encouraging men to gather in Gonzales to go to the relief of the Texians at the Alamo .

Before departing Gonzales , Smithers gave a letter to Andrew Ponton , the alcalde ( or mayor ) of the town . This second letter may have actually been the reason Smithers travelled to Gonzales , or it might have been a paraphrased version of the letter Martin had delivered . The copy read :

To All the Inhabitants of Texas :

In a few words there is 2000 Mexican soldiers in Bexar , and 150 Americans in the Alamo . Sesma is at the head of them , and from best accounts that can be obtained , they intend to show no quarter . If every man cannot turn out to a man every man in the Alamo will be murdered .

They have not more than 8 or 10 days provisions . They say they will defend it or die on the ground . Provisions , ammunition and Men , or suffer your men to be murdered in the Fort . If you do not turn out Texas is gone . I left Bexar on the 23rd at 4 P.M. By order of

W.V. [ sic ] Travis

L. Smithers

Ponton sent the Smithers copy of the letter to Colonel Henry Raguet , the commander of the Committee of Vigilance and Safety in Nacogdoches . Raguet kept the letter he received and sent a copy , with his additional comments , to Dr. John Sibley , the chairman of the Committee of Vigilance and Safety for Texas Affairs in Natchitoches , Louisiana .

Smithers rode hard and delivered Travis 's letter to San Felipe de Austin in fewer than 40 hours . In a hurriedly organized meeting , town leaders passed a series of resolutions pledging assistance to the Alamo defenders . The results of the meeting were printed in a broadsheet alongside a reproduction of Travis 's letter . After distributing all 200 copies of their initial print run , newspaper publishers Joseph Baker and Thomas Borden made at least four other reproductions of the letter , resulting in more than 500 additional copies . Their final printing included a message from Governor Henry Smith urging the colonists " to fly to the aid of your besieged countrymen and not permit them to be massacred by a mercenary foe . ... The call is upon ALL who are able to bear arms , to rally without one moment 's delay , or in fifteen days the heart of Texas will be the seat of war . " On March 2 , the letter was printed in the Texas Republican . It appeared in the other major Texas newspaper , the Telegraph and Texas Register , three days later . The letter was eventually reprinted throughout the United States and much of Europe .

= = Texian response = =

This letter was one of several that Travis sent during the siege of the Alamo . Each carried a similar message ? the Mexican army had invaded Texas , the Alamo was surrounded , and the Texians needed more men and ammunition to wage a successful defense . No assistance was forthcoming from the Texas government . By this point infighting had rendered the provisional government completely ineffective , and delegates convened on March 1 at the Convention of 1836 to create a new government . Most of the delegates believed that Travis exaggerated the difficulties he faced .

Many Texas residents disagreed with the convention 's perception . As the message spread across Texas , settlers left their homes and assembled in Gonzales , where Colonel James Fannin was due to arrive with the remaining Texian Army troops . On February 27 one group of reinforcements impatiently set out on their own ; as a result 32 additional Texians entered the Alamo . Research by

historian Thomas Ricks Lindley indicates that an additional 50 or 60 men reinforced the Alamo on March 4 .

Almost all of the Texians were killed at the Battle of the Alamo when the Mexican army attacked on March 6 ; Travis was likely the first to die . Unaware that the Alamo had fallen , reinforcements continued to assemble ; over 400 Texians were waiting in Gonzales when news of the Texian defeat reached the town on March 11 . Earlier that day , General Sam Houston , newly reappointed commander of the Texian Army , had arrived in Gonzales . On hearing of the Alamo 's fall , Houston took command of the assembled volunteers . The following month , this hastily organized army defeated Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto , ending the Texas Revolution .

This letter may have influenced the election of David G. Burnet as interim president of the new Republic of Texas . After reading one of the broadsheet versions of the letter , Burnet rushed to join Travis at the Alamo . After stopping at Washington @-@ on @-@ the @-@ Brazos to recruit reinforcements from the men assembled at the Convention of 1836 , Burnet became so " inspired by their deliberations " that he remained as a visitor . The convention declared independence from Mexico on March 2 , but delegates feared for the safety of the new country 's officers . Speaking privately with many of the delegates , Burnet professed his willingness to serve as president of a new republic , even if that made him a target of Santa Anna . The most popular delegates were absent from the convention on other business for the war effort . In the absence of interest in the position from most of those remaining , Burnet was nominated for president and defeated the only other candidate , Samuel Carson , by a 29 ? 23 margin .

= = Preservation = =

After the Texas Revolution ended , the original draft of the letter was given to Travis 's family in Alabama . Several prominent Texians are known to have visited Travis 's estranged wife shortly after the hostilities ended , but historians are unsure which of these men might have delivered the letter . Travis 's daughter Susan ( aged five at the time of his death ) passed the letter down to her descendants ; it eventually reached her great @-@ grandson , John G. Davidson . In February 1891 , Davidson lent the letter to the Texas Department of Agriculture , Insurance , Statistics , and History . Two years later , Davidson offered to sell the letter to the state of Texas for \$ 250 ( \$ 6 @,@ 584 today ) . This represented half of the annual sum allocated for collecting historical manuscripts , and the state was hesitant to agree . After negotiations , Davidson agreed to accept \$ 85 ( \$ 2 @,@ 239 today ) for the letter , and on May 29 it officially passed into state ownership .

For many decades , the letter was publicly displayed , usually in a locked glass case with other manuscripts and artifacts from the Texas Revolution . At times , it was arranged alongside the Travis family Bible and a copy of Travis 's will . In 1909 , the letter was moved to the Texas State Library and has since left that building only twice ; it was among 143 documents loaned to the Committee on Historical Exhibits for the Texas Centennial Exposition in 1936 , and it returned briefly to the site of the exposition in 1986 . The original letter is no longer on permanent display . In its place is , in the words of Michael Green , former reference archivist for the Texas State Library Archives Division , " an exacting , one @-@ of @-@ a @-@ kind facsimile " . Directly over its display case is a portrait of Travis .

Four copies of the original broadsides are known to survive . One was placed for auction in 2004 , where it was predicted to reach a price of over \$ 250 @,@ 000 .

= = Return to the Alamo = =

In October 2012 , the Texas General Land Office announced plans to display the famous Travis Letter in the Alamo from February 23 to March 7 , 2013 . This will mark the first time the iconic letter has returned to the Alamo since it was written by Travis . The display was free and open to the general public .

= = Reception = =

Travis ' letter is regarded as " the most famous document in Texas history " , but its widespread distribution allowed an impact outside the relatively isolated settlements in Texas . Historians place the letter in a broader context , " as one of the masterpieces of American patriotism " or even " one of the greatest declarations of defiance in the English language " . It is rare to see a book about the Alamo or the Texas Revolution which does not quote the letter , either in full or part . The letter also appears in full in most Texas history textbooks geared towards elementary and middle school children . The postscripts , however , have rarely been printed . Despite its asserted impact , minimal scholarship exists on the letter itself .

Almost from the moment of his arrival in Texas , Travis had attempted to influence the war agenda in Texas . As he realized the magnitude of the opposition he faced at the Alamo , the tone of Travis 's writings shifted from perfunctory reports to the provisional government to more eloquent messages aimed at a wider audience . With limited time and opportunity to sway people to his way of thinking , Travis 's success , and perhaps his very survival , would depend on his ability to " emotionally move the people " . His previous work as a journalist likely gave him a good understanding of the type of language that would most resonate with his intended audience . Travis used this particular letter not only as a means to publicize his immediate need for reinforcements and supplies , but also to shape the debate within Texas by offering " a well @-@ crafted provocation " that might incite others to take up arms . He chose " unambiguous and defiant " language , resulting in a " very powerful " message . The letter represented an unofficial declaration of independence for Texas . Its word usage evoked the American Revolution and Patrick Henry 's famed cry of " Liberty or Death ! " .

Critics have derided the letter for its emotionalism , noting that it appears to show " a preoccupation with romance and chivalry " not uncommon to fans of Sir Walter Scott . In particular , they point to Travis 's asserted determination to sacrifice his own life for a lost cause .