

We are all familiar with the heroic image of Davie Crocket standing tall in his coonskin cap on a pile of adobe rubble, swinging his musket, "Old Betsy", knocking down Mexican *federales* at the Alamo. With other adventurers, Crocket had come to San Antonio to defend the rights of American settlers against an oppressive Mexican dictator. Texans had chased the Mexican Army out of San Antonio in 1835, but the following spring a large force under General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna moved north to regain the territory. While Texas General Sam Houston worked in the eastern part of the territory to raise an army of volunteers, Col. William Travis went to San Antonio to rally local supporters and delay Santa Anna's advance. He selected an old fortified Mission known as "the Alamo" as his base of operations.

In late February, Santa Anna arrived before the Alamo with his army and demanded the surrender of the Texans. Answered by a cannon shot, Santa Anna prepared for a siege. Early on the morning of March 6th, the Mexican Army attacked. Though the Texans fought bravely, sheer weight of numbers eventually overwhelmed them. Crocket, Bowie, Travis and 186 others died defending the Alamo. However the battle had also caused over a thousand casualties in the Mexican Army.

Santa Anna rested his force for two weeks before continuing his march into Texas. During this time Houston raised his Army and prepared for battle. On April 21, Houston launched a surprise attack on Santa Anna's force at San Jacinto and destroyed their Army. The pompous General Santa Anna was captured and humiliated. The sacrifice of the Alamo bought the future and modern Texas was born, or so goes the popular understanding at the Alamo today.

The anniversary of the victory at San Jacinto has become a Texas holiday. The focus of the holiday is a commemorative service at the Alamo which kicks off a week long fiesta in San Antonio. The first celebration of the fiesta occurred in 1891, almost sixty years after the fall of the Alamo. Holly Beachley Brear, an

Last April, I had the chance to tour San Antonio, Texas. The highlights were visits to the string of old Spanish Missions along the San Antonio River and Lyndon Johnson's boyhood home, both maintained by the US National Park Service. My visit also co-incided with the opening of the Fiesta San Antonio and the associated commemorative service at the Alamo run by the Daughters of the Texas Republic. The history presented at the Alamo struck a couple of chords and reminded me of the Yukon.

The service at the Alamo is a solemn affair with a distinct line between the sacred and profane, or between the past and the opportunities of the present. During my visit, the tribute parade included two portly gentlemen dressed as soldiers of the American Revolution, complete with powdered wigs, magnificent brocaded uniforms and drawn swords. In their turn they respectfully marched to the green in half-step and laid their wreath with the others. However, after taking only five more steps, they were approached by two fawning young women sparsely clad in halter-tops and shorts who wanted pictures. They two men sat down, and with the girls on their laps, grinned for the camera.

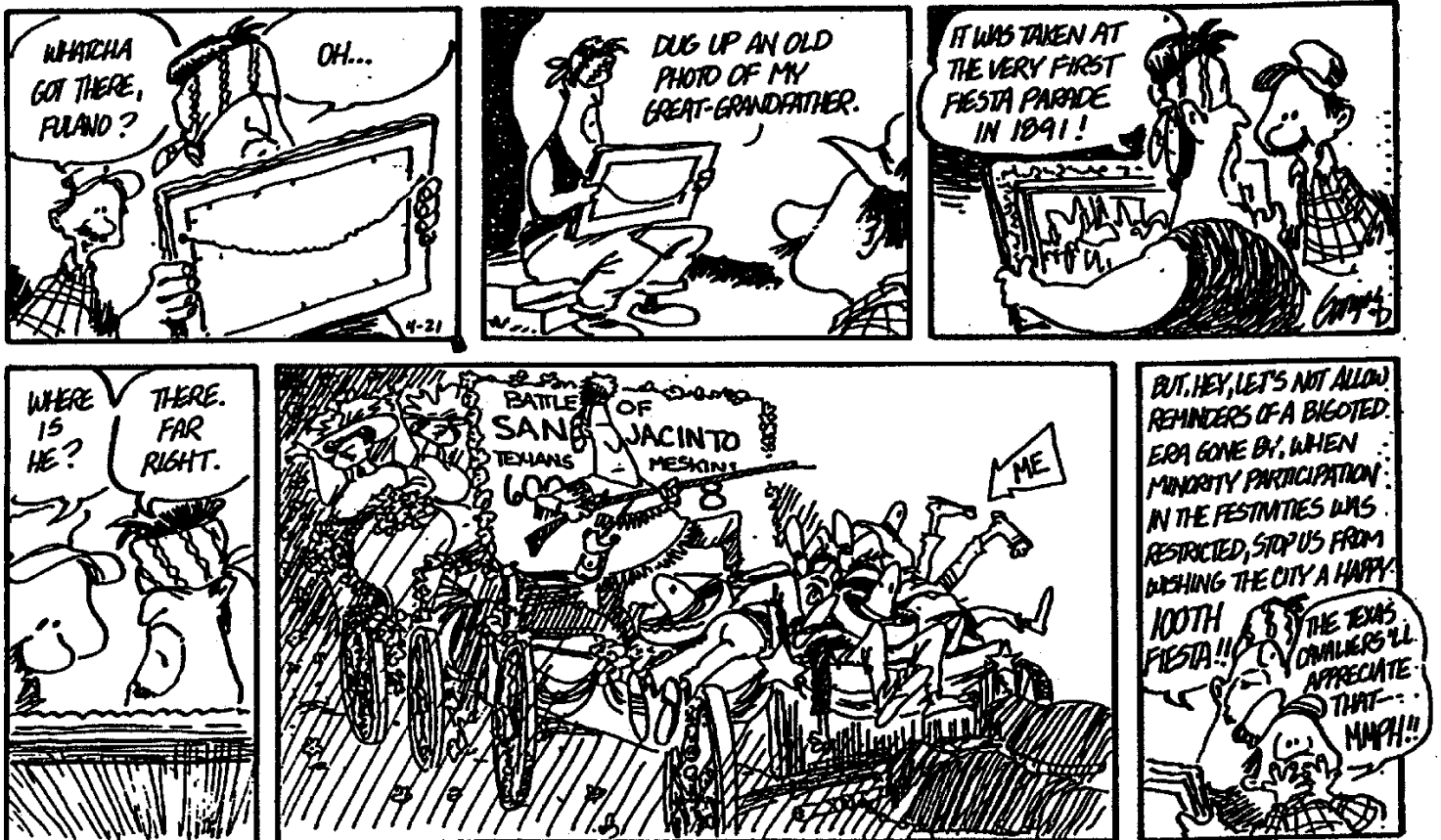
anthropologist studying the Alamo, ascribes the origins of this historical pageant fiesta to two ideas: "a sacred text chronicling the nation's divine mission and as a practical guidebook of moral instruction on how local residents should behave in the present." Thus the fiesta created a direct link to the Founding Fathers of the American Republic, legitimizing the present day leadership and encouraging them to look to the development opportunities of the future. It was the annual revitalization and re-justification of the American dream of Manifest Destiny and continuing material progress.<sup>1</sup>

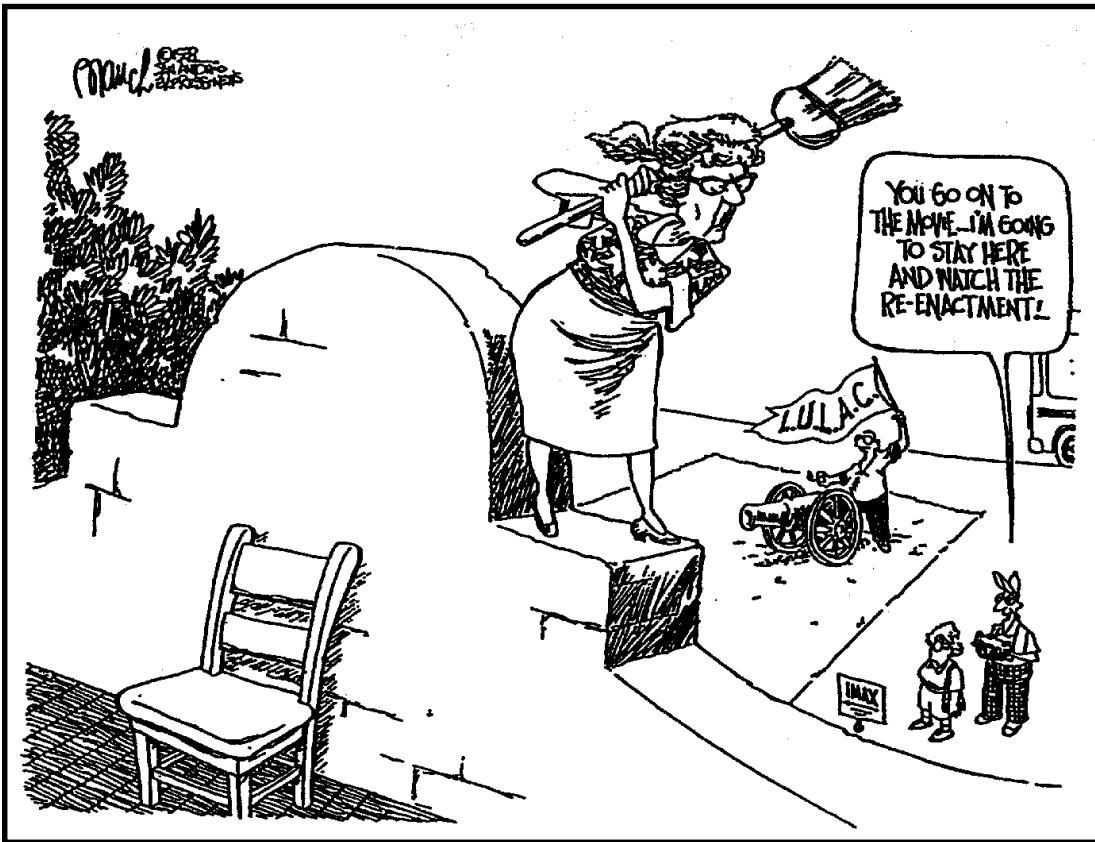
Today the Alamo is managed and interpreted by a group of prominent Anglo women of San Antonio, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT). Since their founding in 1891, the DRT has made the Alamo a central feature of the Fiesta. On the anniversary of the Battle of San Jacinto, the green space in front of the Alamo becomes the forum for the remembrance of the connection "with the heroic cause of liberty."<sup>2</sup> The names of the 189 fallen are solemnly read out to the gathered audience. This is followed by a long funereal parade of military, community and other organizations wishing to acknowledge the sacrifice of, and cement their own identity to, the fallen. Each group leaves a floral tribute on the green and the Anglo values of the community are reinforced.

While seemingly a community event, the Alamo is actually one of the cultural divides of San Antonio. Over half of the city's population is Hispanic, that is, in the eyes of the DRT and Alamo participants, related to the Mexican attackers or the bad guys. This denial of their right to exist as full partners in the life of their city has led many Hispanics to begin to protest that they were actually here first. The first Spanish Missions were established in east Texas over three hundred years ago. Spanish settlers following the Missions mixed with the native Coahuiltecan and began farming and ranching. A Spanish agricultural society was well established by

## Nacho Guarache

BY LEO GARZA





A cartoon by John Branch illustrating the conflicts between the Anglo DRT and the Hispanic LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens). The movie noted is the IMAX production "Alamo - The Price of Freedom" shown just around the corner from the Alamo.

the time American settlers were invited to help settle the land about 1800. In the eyes of the contemporary Hispanic population, the American latecomers fomented trouble, rebelled against lawful authority and stole Spanish lands and placed them in Anglo hands.

The subsequent submerging of the legitimate Hispanic cultural legacy of the region is only now being challenged and resisted. According to Brear, the Hispanic community has responded in a number of ways. Some, by working with the Anglo business community for economic development projects, place issues of ethnic identity in a clearly secondary role behind the necessary presentation of a wholesome attractive community. In other cases, the Hispanic community has established parallel organizations to celebrate their heritage alongside that of the later Anglo settlers. At the Fiesta San Antonio, the Texas Cavaliers appoint a festival King Antonio at the Alamo to preside over the Anglo portions of the fiesta, while the Hispanic community elects their own Rey Feo who is crowned by the local priest at a ceremony in the San Fernando Cathedral. More dramatic resistance takes place by regular challenges and protests to the DRT's representation of Texas history at the Alamo.

Brear concludes her review of the Alamo's role in San Antonio by examining the responsibilities of those who research and present cultural identity. She emphasizes that a cultural identity is a constructed stereotype prepared as a synthesis of the many voices within a single group. Stereotypes are meant to be expressions of group completeness and homogeneity and are used to extend the power of the group through either reinforcing their dominant social position or to challenge the existing power hierarchy. "Identity is an external image projected against other, identity is **not** an innate quality."<sup>3</sup> Professional researchers and presenters of culture have an obligation to dissemble the stereotypes and to examine the basic values underlying the positional attitudes which often lead to inter-group conflict.



These conflicts, usually compounded by unequal power relationships, generally demand an appreciation and loyalty to one's own identity and the denigration of others, thus perpetuating unhappy relationships between mainstream society and the unrepresented. The resistance of these unrepresented groups to the power of mainstream society challenges existing notions of identity and heritage. Often this resistance instigates a fear of cultural diversity, a fear that assumes a threat to the stability of mainstream society. Edward Said recommends that we reject this fear;

What does need to be remembered is that narratives of emancipation and enlightenment in their strongest form were also narratives of integration not separation, the stories of people who had been excluded from the main group but who were now fighting for a place in it. And if the old and habitual ideas of the main group were not flexible or generous enough to admit new groups, then these ideas need changing, a far better thing to do than reject the emerging groups.<sup>4</sup>

The Alamo and its role in defining San Antonio's cultural splits highlights a problem shared by the Yukon. The Yukon First Nation Umbrella Final Agreement of the land claim sets out a formula for addressing the economic, political and social realities of our shared future. But the question of how Yukon First Nations can regain their place in the history of the Yukon, alongside the almost exclusively white story of the discovery of gold and twentieth century economic development, remains a puzzle for us to solve.

## Notes

This paper relies upon the incisive and sympathetic analysis by Holly Beachley Brear, a San Antonio born woman, now a professor at George Mason University in Virginia, in her book **INHERIT THE ALAMO: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine** (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1995).

1. Quotes from David Glassberg, **American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century** (Univ. of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1990) in Brear, p. 18.
2. **Daughters of the Republic of Texas - Organization, Eligibility for Membership, Achievements**, brochure, n.d.
3. Brear, p. 157.
4. Edward Said, **Culture and Imperialism** (New York, 1993) p. xxvi. Emphasis in original.

David Neufeld  
Yukon & western Arctic Historian  
Parks Canada  
Whitehorse, Yukon  
867-667-3913  
dneufeld@yknet.yk.ca

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