

New People, New Historical Narratives
When the Mexican-Americans Came to Gonzales, Texas at the Turn of the 20th Century¹

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At the turn of the 20th century, the small central Texas town of Gonzales saw an impressive population increase consisting primarily of Anglo Americans from other parts of the United States and of Mexican Americans. The latter constituted a new ethnic community in a town of Anglo Americans and African Americans. The power relationship between these two communities followed the norms and practices of a southern racial hierarchy, and at least to some extent, the arrival of the Mexican Americans questioned the power logics of this relationship. The author argues that the activation in the first decades of the 20th century of a series of historical references to Texas' independence in public space was part of an Anglo American effort to maintain its economic, social and political power by integrating the newly arrived Anglo Americans and efficiently excluding the Mexican American community.

Keywords: Texas, ethnic communities, uses of history, national celebrations, 1900-1915

In 1825, a group of US immigrants founded Gonzales in central Texas on a land grant obtained from the Mexican government. At that time, central Texas was part of thinly populated northern Mexico and the immigrants (approx. 200 originally) apparently did not feel safe from the indigenous groups in the area (Rather, 1904: 130). Therefore, in 1831 the Mexican army lent the town a cannon for self-defence, but as the relationship between the Mexican government and the Texas population grew more and more tense over the first part of the 1830s, the Mexican army wanted its cannon back. In the fall of 1835, a Mexican garrison in nearby San Antonio asked the Gonzales mayor (*el alcalde*) to return the cannon. He refused to do so, and on October 2, 1835, Mexican troops confronted a group of Gonzales citizens just southwest of Gonzales, by the Guadalupe river. The citizens had brought the cannon, but also a white flag with which they defiantly urged the Mexican troops to “come and take it,” with reference to the cannon. After a short fight, the Mexican troops returned to San Antonio without the cannon.

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Only a few months after the Gonzales incident, the famous confrontation at *the Alamo* in San Antonio took place (March 1836) as well as the battle at San Jacinto (April 1836), which is considered the decisive battle in the militias' fight for Texas' independence. It has therefore been commonplace in popular Texas histories to refer to the Gonzales event as the beginning of the Texas revolution, as the *First Shot of the Texas Revolution*, and to Gonzales as *the Lexington of Texas*.³ This story seems to define Gonzales today (2008) in popular memory and history books, but also more specifically, through historical markers and practices that contribute to the shaping of public space and practices in Gonzales. When considering that it is a relatively small town of approximately 7000 inhabitants, Gonzales contains an impressive number of references to this historical event, including monuments, a memorial museum, flags in shop windows and an annual fair called *Come And Take It*. However, a quick historical study shows that the story about the *first shot* was hardly present at all in Gonzales before the turn of the twentieth century. The introduction of the story as *the* defining story of Gonzales, happened in between 1901 and 1912, with a first wave of new historical clubs and monuments.

Below I trace the story about Gonzales' role in Texas' independence as it became dominant in the town's public space within a very short period of time, and I discuss some of the reasons for its emergence and the consequences it had for life in Gonzales. My argument is that the redefining of Gonzales through the use of the narrative about the *first shot* and Texas independence was closely related to (changes in) the relationship between the town's ethnic communities, especially between the Anglo American and Mexican American populations.⁴ Even though the activation of new historical narratives and references was closely connected to general socio-economic and demographic changes in the region, the Gonzales example involved local factors and relations that made it unique. I therefore study Gonzales and its ethnic communities as a place of local, regional, national and transnational intersections as described below.

Theoretical framework and concepts

'We recognize space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny' (Massey, 2005: 9). Gonzales as a place is in this sense the result of local interrelations and processes (local actors, history, institutions and events), the regional development of agriculture, the national focus on history at the turn of the century, the transnational

³ See e.g. Patton & Rosenfield, Jr., 1928:157; Lord 1961:39; Connor 1971:104. The town's official website states on its welcome page, "Gonzales, where the fight for Texas Liberty Began" (Gonzales, City of, 2008). *The Lexington of Texas* refers to the battle at Lexington, Massachusetts, April 19, 1775, which is considered the first armed confrontation in the American war of independence.

⁴ With the term Mexican American I refer to all persons of Mexican descent in Gonzales at the time of the census taking, disregarding whether they were US or Mexican nationals, US born or Mexican born. The terminology is complex, but in this context I find this simple definition adequate. For a discussion of terminology, see for example Zamora et al, 2000: 2-3.

relations to Mexico, and so on. As these processes and factors changed over time, so did Gonzales and its ethnic communities. It also meant that the, say, Mexican American community of Gonzales at the beginning of the twentieth century shared many characteristics and interests with a Mexican American community in Houston or San Diego, while it also differed from these due to differences in local characteristics.

A sense of common history and of common origins are central to the definition of an ethnic community (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 19) and these senses are closely related to place, both to the place of origins and to the place(s) in which communities live. According to David Glassberg, ‘a sense of history locates us in society, with knowledge that helps us gain a sense of *with whom we belong*, connecting our personal experiences and memories with those of a larger community, region, and nation’ (Glassberg, 2001: 7). A sense of history is in this sense not only a question of with whom we belong, but also *where* we belong. This means that the historical narratives attached to a place through its historical monuments, places, names, celebrations etc., are decisive for a given ethnic community’s sense of belonging and more specifically, for its political, economic, social and cultural power in that place.

Any changes in the historical narratives can be seen as the consequence of changes in the power relationships between ethnic communities living there, and vice versa. A place is therefore ‘[...] a space invested with meaning in the context of power’ (Cresswell, 2004: 12), and the naming of the streets or the inauguration of an historical monument is hardly ever a conflict-free activity, but a way of manifesting power by making sure some people feel they belong and by excluding others. In this article I study Gonzales as a place invested with meaning through its ethnic communities’ activation of (historical) narratives and the ways in which these processes relate to belonging and power.

The analysis of Gonzales as a place will include three interrelated dimensions, namely the town’s *physical space*, *practices* within Gonzales, and the *narratives* about Gonzales. This is an analytical distinction as the three dimensions continuously interact. The inauguration of a new historical monument is necessarily the result of individual or group activities (practice), it changes physical space and it is most often a reference to a historical narrative that is already circulating in public space through the press, historical clubs, celebrations or the like. When the historical monument is there, it will further strengthen the narrative by its presence as well as shape future practice. The study of the ethnic communities and the relationship between them will in this way consist of an analysis of the communities’ practices and the references in physical space to these communities and their narratives.

Agricultural development, southern history and the narrative of progress

From 1890 to 1900, the population of Gonzales more than doubled, from 1641 to 4297 inhabitants (Vollentine, 1986: 94; US Census 1900). This was due to a series of factors related in one way or another to the agricultural development in the southwest of the United States at the time (e.g. Campbell, 2003; Montejano, 1987; Zamora, 1993). The use of the land changed considerably with the advent of the railroad and of new techniques for example of irrigation. This development changed an order of big cattle ranches and self-sufficient family farms into a primarily capitalist production of cotton, vegetables and corn. New people were drawn to Gonzales County, both farmers who bought or rented land in the region, and agricultural labourers who worked in the cotton or corn fields. The development in the countryside had a considerable influence on the town of Gonzales as it was the administrative, political and legal centre of the county. Due to the town's branch railroad connecting it to the main Texas railroad lines between the big cities and the coast, the town also played a commercial and industrial role in the new agricultural order. This included a considerable shopping centre, an annual county fair, and among other industries, a brickyard, a sawmill and from 1902, a cotton mill (*The Gonzales Inquirer (GI)* 1880-1912; Hanson, 1898).

An important number of Gonzales' new citizens worked in commerce or industry and had moved to town from other US states, Europe and Mexico. In 1900 the population was truly new: Of the town's adult population (i.e. older than 18 years), 68 percent were born outside of Texas (US Census 1900). Furthermore, and central to the argument in this article, there was a considerable change in the town's ethnic composition as a Mexican American community emerged for the first time in the history of the town. Until approximately 1890, Anglo Americans and African Americans constituted the entire population, at least according to the census lists, but then Mexican Americans started settling in Gonzales, constituting almost fifteen percent of the population in 1900 (US Census 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900).⁵

With few exceptions the promoters of the commercial and industrial development in Gonzales were Anglo American (Hanson, 1898; *GI* 1880-1912; US Census 1880, 1900 and 1910). This community had been economically and politically dominant since the founding of the town in 1825, and the relationship between the Anglo Americans and African Americans reproduced the racial hierarchy of Southern US states history. Texas was a former slave holding state, and as the rest of Texas, Gonzales had been part of the Confederacy during the Civil War. An important part also of the later arrivals had moved in from southern US states reproducing the already established social, racial hierarchy (Morowski, 2008: 7; US

⁵ In 1880 61 percent of the population was Anglo American and 39 percent African American. In 1900, 57 percent were Anglo Americans and 29 percent were African Americans (US Census 1880, 1900). As the Gonzales Census lists from 1890 do not exist, the total number of citizens in 1890 (1641) is from the *Gonzales Inquirer* and historical accounts (here Vollentine, 1986: 94), and the ethnic composition is an estimate based on the other census lists as well as on historical accounts about the general ethnic makeup of central Texas at that time (e.g. Montejano, 1987).

Census 1860, 1870; Rather, 1904: 163-167). Since shortly after the abolition of slavery in 1865, the relationship between the two communities had been defined by segregation and discrimination of the African American population similar to that of the US south and southwest in general (e.g. Campbell, 2003: 325).

The *physical space* of town – one of the three analytical dimensions – was organized according to this segregation as the African American population for the most part lived in a separate neighbourhood at the outskirts of town, close to the railroad station and depots, north of the town's original 49 blocks (figure 1). Here they had their own school, founded in 1878, and several churches – a Baptist and a United Methodist church from the 1870s, and a Methodist Episcopal church from 1901 (Morowski, 2008; Vollentine 1986: 126-133). The Anglo Americans lived in and around downtown Gonzales within the original city blocks, close to the county courthouse that housed both the county and city administration. The courthouse was placed in the exact centre, on block 25. Also the Anglo American churches, shops and schools were placed downtown. The county courthouse was surrounded by four public squares, and two of them – the ones on the east and south side (blocks 26 and 32 on figure 1) – had been leased to Anglo American churches since the 1850s (Vollentine, 1986: 124-134).⁶ Until 1910, the other two squares constituted Market Square (block 24 on the northern side) and Park Square (block 18 on the western side) (ibid.: 100). The segregation of neighbourhoods and institutions meant that the Anglo American and African American communities did not interact in everyday life, apart from in the clearly hierarchical workplaces. The segregated physical space was in this sense closely related to the second analytical dimension, *practices*.

Apart from the ethnoracially segregated every day practices, the activities that dominated Gonzales' public space at the time were efforts to expand, modernize and renew it, changing physical space not least in downtown Gonzales. These efforts were of course closely related to the population growth and the needs that came with it in terms of new buildings and streets, but it also included a modernization of already existing public space, for example by installing public electric lights, expanding the sewer system and building sidewalks.⁷ As part of this modernization process, the City Council tried to regulate the citizens' behaviour or practices, for example by issuing an appeal directed to 'the pride that each citizen entertains for his or her community' with specifications as to where to leave trash and how to keep the sidewalks clear and accessible (*GI*, June 29, 1899: 2). The City Council was also more direct, handing out fines to merchants that threw garbage in the street and by allowing the local businessmen to hire a night watchman to keep an eye on activities after dark (*Gonzales City Council Minutes*, Vol. 3: 315, Aug. 6, 1900 & Feb. 4, 1901, Vol. 3: 346). Also local initiatives such as the fundraising for a branch railroad (in the early 1880s) and for a cotton mill (around 1900), as well as the organization of a *Business Men's Club* from 1899, can be seen as practices and initiatives relating to

⁶ In 1904, there were eleven churches for the "white" population of Gonzales (*Daily Inquirer (DI)*, June 2, 1904: 3).

⁷ There are many examples and the ones mentioned here can be seen for example in *City Council Minutes* Vol. 2, s. 362, February 20, 1893, Vol. 3, s. 163-164, February 14, 1898; Vol. 3, s. 329, September 9, 1900.

the modernization of Gonzales' public space (e.g. *GI*, June 8, 1899: 5; April 26, 1900: 5).

In terms of *narratives* related to Gonzales as a place, a narrative of progress and civilization was very explicit from the end of the nineteenth century, not least in the *City Council Minutes* and in *The Gonzales Inquirer's* efforts to mirror and enforce the activities of expansion and modernization of the town described above. The narrative of progress was at least implicitly defined as an "Anglo" narrative in the sense that the town's political, industrial and commercial elite was Anglo American. Its ethnoracial character was occasionally (although not often) made explicit, as in this quotation from the *Inquirer*: 'But industrial art, like our race, is irrepressibly progressive' (*GI*, May 11, 1899: 1).

The Gonzales Inquirer was very active and direct in its promotion of this narrative of progress through local business portraits and continuous comparisons with other towns in the area regarding economic, commercial and technological advances. In the spring of 1899 the paper published detailed presentations of the town's major businesses from *Sunset Brick and Tile Company* to *A.J. Tadlock, Furniture Dealer & Undertaker* (e.g. *GI*, May 4, 1899: 1), and generally, the paper "educated" the population for example by explaining how a cotton gin worked (*GI*, August 20, 1887: 3). *The Inquirer* printed editorials in which the editors expressed opinions such as '*The Inquirer* would like to see the council inaugurate graded streets, especially in the business portion of the city. They look like an old Spanish town' (*GI*, April 13, 1899: 5), and used headlines such as "Industrial Gonzales it is. Fully equipped machine shops to be established, with practical men at the head" and 'Gonzales on the Boom' (*GI*, April 18, 1901: 1; August 15, 1901: 1). Hereby they strengthened the idea and narrative of Gonzales as a – civilized and modern – place of progress.

According to the narrative of progress, the past was negatively defined, as it was expressed clearly in quotes such as 'We live in the present and in anticipation of the future; the past is of little value, save as it prepares us for what is to come'. (*GI*, April 27, 1899: 3). The reference to 'an old Spanish town' mentioned above is another negatively defined reference to the past, more specifically to Texas' Spanish past. Gonzales' future depended on a rupture with the past, and this meant that explicit references such as historical monuments were entirely superfluous, if not counterproductive, when defining Gonzales' future progress and potential.

Summing up, until the end of the nineteenth century, the power relationship and interaction between the two major communities in Gonzales were expressed through the segregation of neighbourhoods and institutions as well as through work hierarchies and political power. The Anglo Americans were unquestioned as the community that truly belonged in Gonzales, while the African American community was marginalized both in physical space, through segregated practices and according to the dominating narrative of progress. Then a Mexican American community arrived, with no entirely clear position within the social and political order in Gonzales.

According to law, Mexican Americans were white, but in everyday practice Anglo Americans considered them a "mixed race" and discriminated against

them along the same lines as African Americans (e.g. Foley, 1997: 40). There was some leeway, however, which the ambiguity between law and practice pointed to. In the case of Mexican Americans in Texas, whiteness was not necessarily an either-or, but a question of degrees according to the actual colour of a person's skin, and due to his or her social and economic status.⁸ As will be argued below, this uncertainty or flexibility was expressed through the presence of at least part of the Mexican American community in downtown Gonzales through commerce and celebrations in 1900.

The lack of a clear racial distinction was further enforced by factors within the Mexican American community itself. Regarding the question of colour and race, part of the Mexican American population – primarily among the economically and socially well off – sought to enforce a categorization of themselves as white also in everyday practice and politics and not only according to law. One strategy was to support a basic black-white dichotomy by defining themselves in opposition to the African American population (e.g. *El Regidor*, October 13, 1904: 8; Clemente N. Ídar, *La Crónica*, 3 December, 1910; Foley, 1997). At the same time – and partially at odds with the wish for racial integration – the majority of Mexican Americans considered Mexico as their – only – native country, also after a long life or even generations living in Texas.⁹ The celebration of *16 de septiembre* was part of this national identification, and the reasons for it were complex and included the geographical closeness to Mexico, the continuous migration across the border, segregation of the majority in many areas and Anglo American discrimination.

All in all, the Mexican Americans constituted an ethnic community that differed from the African American community, both in their relationship to the Anglo American population and regarding the two communities' sense of national and ethnic belonging. The African Americans' choice of the abolition of slavery, with *Juneteenth*, as their most important historical celebration identified the community with United States as a central national reference, as opposed to the national Mexico reference of many Mexican Americans.¹⁰ In this sense, Mexican-Americans seemed to constitute a category in between black and white, at least at the turn of the century in central Texas. This *inbetweenness* was present in Gonzales in 1900.

The Mexican Americans and a plurality of historical celebrations

As opposed to the Texas border region and San Antonio, there had been only few Mexican Americans living in central Texas, prior to 1880, and none were registered as living in the town of Gonzales before 1900 (US Census 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900). In 1900, the relatively new Mexican American population of 15 percent lived in and

⁸ For discussions for and against this interpretation, see e.g. Montejano, 1987:4; Young 1994:228; Foley 1997:4; Stewart, K.L. and A. de León, 1993; Zamora, 1993.

⁹ This statement is based on Spanish language newspapers from the first twenty years of the century, and on interviews from the 1920s. See *El Regidor*; *La Prensa*; *Taylor*, 1919-1934 and Gamio, 1969.

¹⁰ *Juneteenth* is the celebration of the abolition of slavery in Texas, announced June 19, 1865 (Turner, E. H., 2007).

around the town centre, although to some extent limited to the south-western part, close to the river and one of the town's two industrial nodes (approx. blocks 1-4, 11-14, 15-17 and 27-28 on figure 1). The neighbourhood included the sawmill, the waterworks, a cotton gin and the brickyard. The majority of the Mexican Americans were either migrant workers or resident labourers who lived and worked segregated in much the same way as the African American population. From 1899, there was a "Mexican school" in the Mexican American neighbourhood, as well as a Presbyterian church from 1902 and a Mexican Baptist church from 1906 (on blocks 3 and 4). In 1899 the city established a separate cemetery north of town for the Mexican Americans (*GI*, October 20, 1898; March 9, 1899; June 15, 1899:6; Vollentine, 1986:126-132).

There was, however, a small group of Mexican Americans that stood out. Some owned or rented shops in the city centre and advertised in the Anglo dominated *Gonzales Inquirer*. A few were officials in the county administration, and there were examples of Anglo American shop owners who hired Mexican Americans as sales clerks (e.g. US Census 1900; Hanson, 1898; e.g. *GI*, July 12, 1900: 1; January 8, 1903: 5). Almost symbolically, the watchmaker in charge of the county courthouse clock in the exact centre of town was E.A. Gomez of Mexican descent (*GI*, February 19, 1903: 5). At the turn of the century, this small group interacted at least to some degree with the Anglo American population in Gonzales' public space through everyday practices and on the margin of a clear-cut hierarchy based on ethnicity or race.

Another example of Mexican American presence in downtown Gonzales around the turn of the century was the celebration of Mexican Independence, *16 de septiembre*. In 1900 the celebration included a parade around the courthouse and the main squares (*GI*, September 20, 1900: 5). The celebration was clearly ethnically defined, which could be seen in the press coverage with statements such as: 'The Mexican residents of this city are preparing for a grand celebration of their independence day' (*GI*, September 6, 1900: 6). This ethnic division and consciousness regarding historical celebrations worked two ways. An example is the following notice regarding *Fourth of July*: 'The Mexican colony of Gonzales, Texas, highly welcome the American people of the United States, and especially the citizens of Gonzales County, on this, the celebration of the 124th anniversary of the birth of their nation' (*GI*, July 5, 1900: 5).

The two celebrations were similar to each other on several points. Most conspicuously they both included parades that moved along the same route around the downtown squares, and they both referred to historical events of independence from European colonial powers. An important difference, though, was the fact that the *16 de septiembre* parade was headed not only by the Mexican flag and one of the local Mexican American dignitaries, but also by the American flag and the Anglo American county sheriff (*GI*, September 20, 1900: 5). In comparison, the *Fourth of July* parade did not involve the Mexican flag – although it did include a Mexican band (*GI*, July 5, 1900: 1). This difference established a power relationship, stating that the "Mexican Colony" was in Gonzales and celebrating *16 de septiembre* under the auspices and control of the (Anglo) American people and laws.

Still, the parades were a way of stating that both communities belonged in Gonzales as they both physically gave meaning to the central squares through the parades (Tuan, Y.F., 2007: 169), and as political acts, the parades built and maintained local power relations (Davis, 1986:5). From this perspective, the Mexican American population belonged in Gonzales in a way that the marginalized African American population did not. The presence of Mexican American shops and merchants in downtown Gonzales, the proximity of the Mexican American neighbourhood to downtown Gonzales (it was situated within the original 49 blocks) and the *16 de septiembre* parade were all signs that at least to some degree questioned a clear-cut segregation of the Mexican American community. In comparison, the African Americans lived outside the 49 blocks and their celebration of *Juneteenth* did not include a similar parade downtown, as it was held in the African American section north of the city centre (*GI*, June 22, 1899: 3 and Caldwell County Oral History Project 1976: NN).

Apart from these three celebrations, there was a fourth historically related practice, namely *Decoration Day*, which was celebrated each year, at least from 1898, in memory of the local Confederate soldiers who had died in the American Civil War (*GI*, April 25, 1898: 3; April 27, 1899: 7; April 19, 1900: 5 etc.). *Decoration Day* consisted in a memorial service in one of the town's Anglo American churches, followed by a procession to the cemeteries and the decoration of the relevant graves with flowers. The celebration of *Juneteenth* and of *Decoration Day* both referred to Southern US history and activated the same historical event – the American Civil War – but with different evaluations of its ending. In this sense, the two celebrations further enforced the two groups as distinct ethnic communities, with different historical conceptions and different roles in Gonzales.

The four historical celebrations represented practices that reproduced important parts of the ethnic communities' historical identities, but none of them had by 1900 left any permanent historical markers in public space, nor did they lead to much historical interest in the newspaper, in City Council activities or in other types of organizations. What defined the historical narratives in Gonzales at the turn of the century was in this sense the plurality of narratives and the way in which they referred to all three major ethnic groups as separate communities.

However, the lack of permanent markers changed within approximately ten years. By 1912, two historical narratives were explicitly present in Gonzales' public space, not only through parades, but also in monuments, institutions, and other permanent markers. These were the narrative of the Confederate past and the narrative of Texas independence with the latter as the most conspicuous: It was new in Gonzales and it rapidly became the dominant narrative in town. Within the same period of time, the Mexican American community became completely segregated regarding neighbourhoods and institutions, and their position in the low end of the social and economic hierarchy was thoroughly cemented. As the analysis will show, the emergence of a new historical narrative, the changes in physical space and the activities and practices in town interacted in complex patterns, shaping each other

over time and leading to the identification of Gonzales with the story about the *first shot* and Texas independence.

The new historical narrative of Gonzales' role in Texas Independence

In the first years of the new century, an explicit interest in history emerged in Gonzales. In 1901 a group of women founded a local chapter of the historical club *The United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC)*, and two years later, *the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT)* was formed (*GI*, November 7, 1901: 4; *Proceedings* 1903: 71). Immediately, both organizations started fundraising for historical monuments to be placed in Gonzales, and both monuments were unveiled in 1910 (e.g. *GI*, April 21, 1910: 3 and October 20, 1910: 6). The monuments were placed on Market Square and Park Square respectively, just north and west of the county courthouse (blocks 24 and 18 on figure 1) and over time the squares were renamed Confederate Square and Texas Heroes Square.

The actual unveiling of the Confederate monument was on April 14, 1910, but the grand event was the laying of the cornerstone the previous year on July 21, 1909 (*GI*, July 22, 1909: 1; April 21, 1910: 3). It was combined with the *Firemen's Celebration* and attracted 4-5000 people from the county and beyond who wanted to see the parade, the baseball game and participate in the *Firemen's Ball* at the Opera House (*GI*, July 22, 1909: 1). When the Texas Heroes monument was unveiled October 20, 1910, there was an elaborate ceremony including several speeches and a representative from the Texas Congress as well as people from the churches, the Business Men's Club and from the local and neighbouring chapters of the DRT (*GI*, October 27, 1910: 1).

With the monuments on the north and west side of the courthouse, the historical markers contributed to downtown by giving it an explicit and permanent historical meaning due to the historical narratives to which the monuments referred. With the Anglo American churches on the eastern and southern side of the courthouse, the county courthouse was now completely surrounded by Anglo American institutions and markers.

The Gonzales Inquirer followed the historical organizations' meetings and activities, but the fight for Texas independence, the *first shot* event, to which *DRT* referred, was the strongest and most visible of the two narratives both in the press and through smaller permanent references to it already established before 1910 (*DI*, April 28, 1903; *GI*, February 28, 1901: 7). This difference between the narratives was further emphasized on state level, as the Texas Heroes monument received a contribution of \$5000 from the Texas Senate, while the confederate monument was funded entirely by private means (Senate Bill No. 287, January 12, 1909 and e.g. *GI*, March 31, 1910: 7). The narrative of Gonzales and the *first shot* was reproduced through historical accounts in the paper, accounts that became more and more numerous, the closer to the 1910 unveiling of the Texas Heroes monument (e.g. *DI*, October 10: 1; October 20: 2; October 21: 3; October 27, 1910: 1). There was no

similar focus on Confederate history or the Civil War, neither in physical space nor in the newspaper.

Even though the narrative of Texas Independence was the most explicit of the two, the references to southern history continued to regulate the relationship between the Anglo Americans and African Americans, and with the UDC chapter and the confederate monument it had become visible in a way that it had not been when *Decoration Day* was the only explicit reference to the Confederacy. The sentiments and ideals behind the Confederacy were still very much alive in Gonzales, at least according to *The Gonzales Inquirer's* coverage of the laying of the cornerstone: 'when our flag went down, never to wave again, not one stain marred its whiteness, nor dimmed its brightness'. (*DI*, July 22, 1909: 1). This increased focus on the Confederacy referred to the general regional interest in confederate history of the time (see Kammen, 1993:101-131), but also to the local increase in the African American population of Gonzales from 620 to 1230 in absolute numbers (although its proportional size diminished from 39 to 28 percent. US Census 1880 and 1900).

Part of the success of the narrative of Texas independence was probably due to the fact that it fused with the narrative of progress. This was apparent for example in 1912 when Gonzales won a prize as 'the cleanest town in Texas of its size' (Editorial, 1912: 10). In the account of this event, *The Gonzales Inquirer* combined the narrative of progress' focus on modernization and civilization with the narrative of Texas independence when stating: 'Truly Gonzales, the Lexington of Texas, is coming into her own. Another victory has been won, and Gonzales, routing disorder, rubbish, [...] as she routed Santa Anna's Mexican soldiers in years long gone, won the \$300 prize and has taken her place as the cleanest town in Texas in her class' (*GI*, December 26, 1912: 1).

As a narrative of continuity, the historical narrative implied that events of the past explained and justified present and future values and activities in Gonzales. When combined with the narrative of progress, the economic, commercial, industrial and political importance of Gonzales was justified through references to the (Anglo) American citizens' actions in 1835. Furthermore, the narrative became an efficient tool in the regulation of the relationship between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans described below.

Why the need for a new and historical narrative?

According to many scholars of memory and uses of the past in the United States, the interest in history increased in the last decades of the nineteenth century (e.g. Glassberg, 2001; Kammen, 1993). The reasons for this interest were many, and most of them related in one way or another to the economic, technological and demographic development in the country. Industrialization and urbanization lead for example to the disappearance of traditional, rural life in some areas, which prompted an interest in historic preservation (Glassberg, 2001: 175). The emergence of many of

the historical clubs, including the DRT and UDC, played a central role in these preservation efforts, but in the case of Gonzales – as in Texas and other regions generally – the clubs’ efforts were also closely related to the considerable influx of immigrants within the same period of time.

In Gonzales, the Anglo American population increased from 963 to 2432 persons from 1880 to 1900 with people coming primarily from other U.S. states (US Census 1880, 1900). The historical clubs helped create a “White Americans’ regional and local history” integrating newly arrived white immigrants and efficiently excluding any non-white immigrant. According to David Glassberg, “Anglo” Californians from a variety of Northern European backgrounds assumed the power to define particular environments as “historic” for the rest of society, and came to identify themselves with a “white” pioneer heritage’ (Glassberg, 2001: 170. See also Kammen, 1993: 250). The story about Texas’ independence worked at least as well as the Californian “pioneer heritage” as a means with which to construct a white or Anglo community and category.

The basic dilemma in California and Texas was the same: On the one hand, the new Anglo/white community considered itself as the only people who rightfully belonged and therefore should have the political, social and economic power. On the other hand, in both regions agriculture needed the immigrants as cheap labourers. According to David Montejano, the most efficient way of making sure that the commercial farmers in Texas had a manageable and cheap workforce was to *racialize* the class structure by defining Mexican Americans together with the African Americans as docile and traditionalist, the exact opposite of the reigning idea of the time of the entrepreneurial and progressive Anglo Americans (Montejano, 1987). There were many means with which to keep Mexican Americans from gaining (social, political) power, among them were a separate and subfunded school system for Mexican American children, the maintaining of a high degree of job insecurity, and the use of violence and discrimination in general (e.g. Foley, 1997; Montejano, 1987; Zamora, 1993).

As the Mexican Americans did not readily fit into the southern black-white dichotomy, the activation of the historical narrative of Texas’ independence came to play an important part in the process of marginalization that took place at the turn of the 20th century in Gonzales. It became yet another way of excluding the Mexican American community from feeling that they truly belonged and more specifically, it removed and kept them from any real economic, social or political power.

The narrative of Texas independence and the *first shot* was very explicit when it came to the relationship between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans. According to this narrative, the Anglo Americans were the group that belonged in Gonzales, while it defined the Mexican (Americans) as the historical enemy who attacked Gonzales all those years ago and that the Anglos successfully confronted

and threw out.¹¹ The narrative of Texas independence was centred on a dichotomy of *Americans* against *Mexicans*, with the Americans defending their land and the Mexicans attacking it. It simplified and distorted historical events in the same way as did the overall narrative about the Texas independence at this time, including the story about *the Alamo*, and it was very effective in its construction of a power relationship between the two communities (see e.g. Brear, 1995; Flores, 2002).

The narrative defined the Mexican (Americans) as the foreigner and villain, but it also strengthened the Anglo American community across regions and national descent as Kammen and Glassberg argue. Race and ethnicity entered in this way into a peculiar relationship according to which the conception of an “(Anglo) American race” was opposed to the black African Americans and the racially mixed Mexican Americans. It meant that a white person who had arrived in Gonzales from New York or Ohio in 1898 became part of an ethnic community that built on a narrative about how the Texans defeated the Mexicans in 1835. As the narrative about Gonzales and the *first shot* became stronger and more visible in Gonzales’ public space between 1901 and 1912, the relationship of power and the social hierarchy between Anglo Americans and Mexican Americans became more and more similar to the black-white dichotomy between the Anglo Americans and the African Americans. The *inbetweenness* of the Mexican American community was disappearing fast.

The Mexican Americans of Gonzales, 1910-12

Until 1912 Gonzales County constituted one catholic parish and the town only had one catholic church, the St. Joseph’s in the Anglo American section of town east of the county courthouse (*Messenger*, April 2, 1971). By 1911, the church had become too small for a congregation that had been growing enormously, consisting of approximately 250-300 families, of which two thirds were of Mexican descent.¹² In 1911 the Diocese of San Antonio to which Gonzales belonged, decided to build a new church and at the same time segregate the Mexican American catholics. The old church building was moved (on logs, the story goes) from block 46 on the east side of town to block 11 in the Mexican neighbourhood in the western part (*Today’s Catholic*, December 20, 1985; *Correspondence*, August 1993). This highly symbolic event happened the same year, 1912, as the town celebrated its prize as the “cleanest town in Texas of its size”.

From 1901 to 1912, the number of Mexican Americans within commerce and administration diminished and the community became more socio-economically homogeneous (e.g. US Census 1900 & 1910). This mirrored the general

¹¹ See e.g. Stewart, K.L. and A. de León, 1993:94; Brear, 1995; Flores 2002 on this point about Texas in general and about San Antonio.

¹² *Annual Reports 1905 to 1906 and 1912*. The archdiocese of San Antonio Archives, San Antonio. The information is limited and the figures are an estimate based on 85 “white” and 219 “Mexican” families in 1905-06 and 173 “Mexican” families in 1912, after the parish had been divided.

proletarianization and segregation of Mexican Americans in Texas within the same period of time (Zamora, 1993: 197). With the new Mexican catholic church and the disappearance of Mexican Americans in downtown commerce and administration, the division in ethnically defined neighbourhoods became even more explicit, with the Mexican Americans in the south-western corner of Gonzales.

As mentioned before, the county courthouse was from 1910 surrounded by Anglo American history and institutions. After 1910, to get from the Mexican American neighbourhood to the county courthouse and the administrative offices placed in the exact centre of town, one had to pass by the *Texas Heroes Square* (block 18) and the monument that celebrated the event in which the Gonzales Americans threw out the Mexicans. Symbolically, the militia soldier on top faced south towards Mexico, and locally towards the Mexican American neighbourhood. On the other central square (block 24), north of the county courthouse, the Confederate soldier similarly faced north towards the foe of the civil war, the northern states, as well as towards the local African American neighbourhood north of downtown Gonzales. The African American and the Mexican American communities were now thoroughly segregated in terms of neighbourhoods and historical narratives as these were expressed through the downtown monuments. The changes in *physical space* and in *narratives* shaped future *practice*, and here the difference for the Mexican American population seemed the biggest, as some of its members had actually experienced at least some flexibility within commerce and administration when they first arrived in Gonzales at the end of the nineteenth century.

The new Mexican American catholic church was a conspicuous symbol of segregation, but it was also a sign indicating that the Mexican American population was in Gonzales to stay. New practices and institutions emerged, as some of the community's members formed a chapter of the Woodmen of the World (*Leñadores del Mundo*), *The Campamento Brazil 2457* and other local organisations (*La Crónica*, May 17, 1910:4). At least some Gonzales Mexican Americans participated in the growing protest in Texas against the segregation of Mexican American children in poorly funded "Mexican schools" and against discrimination generally. The Laredo-based Spanish-language newspaper, *La Crónica*, was very active in this protest and it highlighted Gonzales as one of the school districts that had a segregated and malfunctioning "Mexican school" (*La Crónica*, December 17, 1910: 1; *La Crónica*, January 12, 1910: 1). The protest received its most organized expression with the *Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, organized by *La Crónica* and held in Laredo in September 1911, with delegates from all over south and central Texas, including one from Gonzales (*Primer Congreso Mexicanista*, 1911: 6). There were no local Spanish-language newspaper in Gonzales, but at least some of the Spanish-language newspapers from San Antonio and Laredo circulated in town, making it probable that members of the Gonzales community were informed about, and possibly agreed with, the general debates at the time (e.g. *La Crónica*, September 3, 1910: 10; December 17, 1910: 1).

The increased discrimination and segregation strengthened a nationalist, *Mexicanist* narrative, leading for example the newspaper *El Regidor* to recommend the Mexican Americans that they kept their Mexican citizenship and stayed close to other Mexican Americans instead of interacting with Anglo Americans (*El Regidor*, November 25, 1909: 1). Over time, this *Mexicanist* perspective evolved into a narrative focusing on Texas' Mexican past and on the Mexican (Americans) as its rightful inhabitants, turning the narrative of Texas Independence on its head (Limón, 1974; Camejo, 1970).

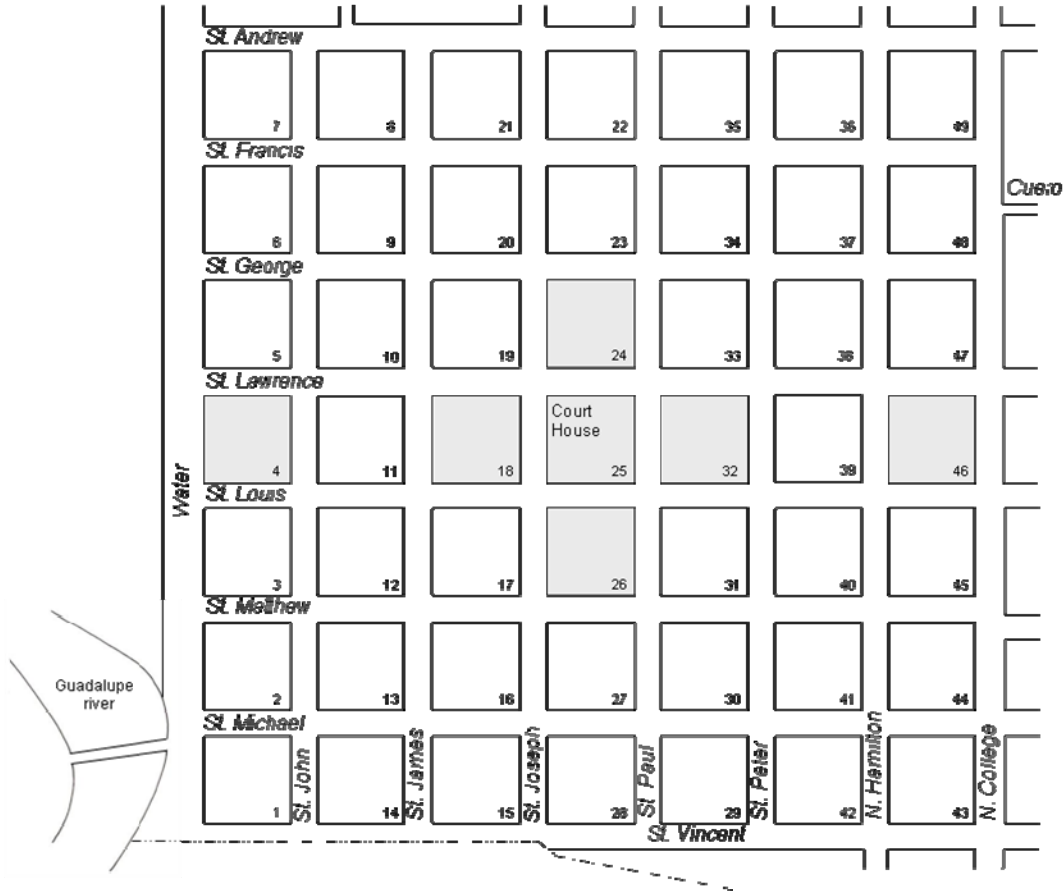
Concluding remarks

The analysis of the dynamics between physical space, the town's narratives and practices within public space has shown that the relationship between Gonzales' ethnic communities went through a process of strengthening the existing power hierarchy at the beginning of the twentieth century within a network of processes including a general national historical interest; the regional agricultural development; regional perspectives and ideas of race; the transnational relationship to Mexico and the particular organizations and histories relating to Gonzales as a town. All these factors and more were part of making the story about Gonzales as the place of the *first shot* of the Texas revolution such a successful one in the first part of the twentieth century. The examples of Mexican American challenges to this order on the other hand, showed that the maintenance of Anglo American dominance was a process that was hardly ever conflict free and that actively involved all ethnic communities in town.

In Gonzales today (2008) the neighbourhoods are not as ethnically segregated as they were in 1912, neither are there shops where the Mexican Americans or the African Americans are not allowed to enter. Due to federal law, the schools in Gonzales are no longer segregated, and since the 1980s, two of the four City Council members have almost continuously been African American and Mexican American.¹³ Gonzales is of course a very different place compared to what it was in 1912. However, the socioeconomic differences between the three ethnic communities are significant and there are still two catholic churches, one for the Mexicans and one for the Anglos. There is only one historical marker with reference to the African American community, a plaque at the former "Negro school" in the original African-American neighborhood north of downtown, and there are no historical markers that include the town's Mexican Americans as other than the historical enemy. Mexican independence, *16 de septiembre*, is celebrated in the catholic church and the only public festival that involves a parade around the downtown squares is the *Come and Take It* celebrated in the first weekend of October, including a solemn ceremony at the Texas Heroes Monument on the Sunday. According to these historical references, it seems that it is still only the Anglo Americans who truly belong.

¹³ *City Council Minutes*, Gonzales City Office, Gonzales. The proportion between the ethnic communities has changed considerably, with 13 percent African Americans, 33 percent Mexican Americans, 13 percent of other Latin American descent and 40 percent Anglo Americans.

Figure 1. By Inger Bjerg Poulsen



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