

The Life and Leadership of Samuel Houston

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"I would give no thought of what the world might say of me, if I could only transmit to posterity the reputation of an honest man." - Sam Houston¹

Leadership is defined as influence on people, in fact, it is the essence of significantly impacting people, to strive willingly and enthusiastically through strong character. Samuel Houston served as Texas' foundation during its time of great need. He fought for majorities and minorities, the rich and the poor, and those from both Texas and America. Houston brought Texas together and united it with America through guidance, knowledge, and, most importantly, his character. He not only stood for a republic and a nation, but inspired many along the way. Houston was a true leader for Texas.

Born on March 2, 1793, the fifth of nine children, Samuel Houston grew up being independent. Living on a farm for much of his childhood, he was oblivious to his responsibilities with farming and preferred to roam the uncharted woods as opposed to helping with the dreary chores. In the early 1800's, Houston's father, a general in the militia, decided to move the family to Tennessee. Unfortunately, in the fall of 1806, the major died before the family made it to Tennessee. Being one of the "young men" in the family, Houston took on the responsibility of safely moving his mother and siblings all the way.

In Tennessee, the family bought a general store. Houston was required to work in the store as a clerk. He disliked this job so much that he started running away for days at a time. Houston met the Rogers brothers who were part of a nearby band of

Cherokee during one of these disappearances. At the peak of his stubbornness, he decided to join the more seemingly carefree Indians and their way of living. When asked why he moved, Houston simply said, "I preferred measuring deer tracks to tape - that I liked the wild liberty of the Red men better than the tyranny of my brothers."² Soon, he was accepted into the group and caught the eye of the well-known Cherokee Chief, Oolooteka. Oolooteka took to thinking of Houston as his son, naming him the "raven". Houston learned and followed the cultures of the Cherokee for three years before returning home.

On March 1, 1813, Houston joined the army. His family wanted Houston to start as an officer using his father's name. Houston demonstrated his sense of fairness and utmost integrity when he told his family, "I want to earn my rank not by name, but by fighting bravely with purpose, just as other soldiers did."³ In 1814, Houston fought in his first battle, Horseshoe Bend. Fighting in Alabama, Houston was struck by an arrow in the leg. Despite his wounds, during this same battle, he volunteered to charge at the Indians. Houston was shot by bullets three more times and fought with all his might until he collapsed. Houston's heroic battlefield action earned the admiration of his general in the war, Andrew Jackson.

The battle sparked Houston's loyalty to America and his feelings of nationality. The war of 1812 ended before he was well enough to fight again. Being a voluntary militia man and not wanting to leave the army, his new home, Houston sent many letters to congressman and the secretary of war pleading to stay. In 1815, Houston received news that he had been put into the regular army. Andrew Jackson, remembering

Houston's noble war efforts, promoted him to first lieutenant. While in the army, Houston made many enemies who were envious of his partnership with Jackson. They accused him of trading slaves, and giving whiskey to the Cherokee. Although cleared of these charges, Houston was still resentful and left the army in 1818.

Houston developed a liking to law and politics and started studying law in Nashville, Tennessee. Eager to start practicing, Houston finished the eighteen-month law program in just six. In the December of 1818, Houston passed an exam that then allowed him to officially practice law. Soon after, he got elected as the public lawyer for Davidson County, Illinois. With his success coming quickly, his popularity also grew. In 1823, Houston was elected to the U.S House of Representatives. At the same time, his friend Andrew Jackson was elected into the Senate. Aware of Jackson's plans to run for presidency, Houston decided to run for Tennessee Governor. His plans were to lead the state's support for Jackson. In the hopes of increasing his popularity, 'He wore fancy vests, colorful Cherokee hunting shirts, silk stockings, and shoes with large silver buckles.'⁴ Although many of his enemies critiqued his style, Houston was not scared to stand out and believed that one must stand out in order to reach one's highest potential.

On January 22, 1826, Sam Houston married Eliza Allen for what seemed to be for popularity and politics. Their relationship was extremely unhappy and Eliza left Houston merely three months into their marriage. In 1827, he was elected the Governor of Tennessee and continued supporting Jackson, who became President that same year. The news of Houston's ruined marriage soon spread all over Tennessee. Citizens

began to feel embarrassed and angry that their Governor had not behaved with etiquette. With Houston's reputation ruined, he returned to the Cherokee.

With the Cherokee, Houston began to realize the unjustness that they were facing. He quickly became active in Cherokee affairs. He helped keep peace between the various tribes in the Indian territory. He secluded himself from white company for three years. He was, in addition, given tribal Cherokee citizenship. For a while, Houston believed that he was finally where he wanted to be in life. Alas, after two years of tranquility and no action in his life, Houston felt like it was in his destiny to achieve something larger. In 1831, Sam Houston received news that his mother was dying. He immediately returned to Maryville to be with her.

After his mother's death in 1832, Houston decided to continue his political career in Washington D.C. Soon after arriving in D.C., Houston had a strife with Stanbury, a refined congressman of society. Strangely, this put the spotlight on Houston making people love and adore him more than ever. The political world was waiting to welcome him again.

In December of 1832, Sam Houston was sent to Texas by Andrew Jackson to make peace treaties with the nation and watch the political situation with the settlers. On entering Texas, he realized that the Texans needed liberty and a just leader. Becoming the commander of a small unit of military in Nacogdoches, Houston reported back to Jackson on the raw potential he saw in Texas. The following November, Houston began leading Texas to independence. He wrote up a "Declaration on the Causes of Texas

taking up arms". In December, Houston and his Texan volunteers fought a large Mexican force at San Antonio in which more than 1,000 Mexican soldiers surrendered.

Houston apprehended that the Mexicans would probably return the next spring to strike again. Texans wanted to use the Alamo as a military base. Sam Houston realizing its vulnerability ordered Colonel James Neill and Colonel James Bowie to "...remove all the cannon and other munitions of war to Gonzales and Copano, blow up the Alamo, and abandon the place..."⁴. The temporary Texas government secretly ordered Neill and Bowie to disregard Houston's order. The men agreed to defend the Alamo despite Houston's warning. In March of 1836, Santa Anna led his troops back to San Antonio. True to Houston's words, the Texans were unable to defend the Alamo. Within weeks at Goliad, Fannin's forces were found by Santa Anna, and killed.

Houston decided that it was in his fate to make Texas free again. He devised a plan, the Runaway Scrape, to make Santa Anna follow him East. On April 21, 1836, Santa Anna had cornered Texan troops near the San Jacinto. Santa Anna, satisfied and overconfident, allowed his men to take an afternoon nap. Houston pounced on this opportunity. Crying "Remember the Alamo", the 800 Texans attacked the sleeping Mexican forces and took Santa Anna and his men as prisoners. Although the Texans wanted Santa Anna killed, Houston was unrelenting and said, "Texas, to be respected must be polite. Santa Anna living, can be of incalculable benefit to Texas; Santa Anna dead, would just be another dead Mexican."⁵ Santa Anna then willingly signed the treaty

of Velasco which paved way for Texas' independence, and Sam Houston was crowned a Texas hero.

Houston decided to run for President of the new republic. On September 5, 1836, Houston was elected into office and was Texas' first official President. Now known as Texas' hero, Houston's presidential victory was no surprise. After his success, Houston declared that, "Texas will again lift its head and stand among the nations....It ought to do so, for no country upon the globe can compare with it in natural advantages."⁶ With Mirabeau B. Lamar winning as vice President, the two began to make Texas, a nation to remember. Houston worked hard to run the country - creating a complete government, clearing Texas of war debt, stopping Santa Anna from terrorizing Texan border, and giving the Cherokee permanent land. Houston realized that the weakness of Texas was its small size and he wished to make it a state. Although Houston was now the President, he still had enemies, one of them being his closest colleague, Lamar. Lamar disagreed and opposed Houston's work on annexing Texas to the United States.

"Houston's worst fears for Texas came true when Lamar became President. Lamar immediately began to change the way that Houston had done things....Lamar demanded that all Indians leave Texas or face death."⁷ By 1839, the Texans had fought and beaten the Cherokee in Texas. Despite Lamar's actions, Houston yet again proved to be a great leader by not giving up on Texas. Returning to Tennessee he began to convince the people to invest money in the Texas republic. That summer, Houston decided to pay a visit to his old friend Andrew Jackson to discuss Texas statehood.

In 1841, during the new Texas presidential campaign season, many of Houston's enemies immediately started trying to damage his campaign. They claimed he was a coward because he had not executed Santa Anna, among other things. Despite these accusations, determined to make his dream of annexing Texas a reality, Houston persevered. He remained popular with his voters and in September was elected President of Texas again. Working to repair the damage caused during Lamar's term, Houston worked day and night promoting Texas statehood. At end of his term Houston returned to his home near Huntsville, Texas, to practice law and settle down with his wife, Margaret Lea, whom he had married in the meantime. On December 29, 1845, the U.S congress voted to annex Texas due to Houston's hard work. Houston's role as a leader was not done yet.

In 1846 in the first Texas state legislature meeting, Sam Houston was chosen as one of the Texas senators to go to Washington D.C. As a senator, Houston realized that a pressing issue in America was sectionalism. He believed that neither the North nor the South were to blame completely, but it was a combination of the Northern and Southern extremists. Houston expressed his sentiments by simply saying, "A nation divided against itself cannot stand."⁸ Houston supported the Northern states and many Texan's criticized Houston's anti-slavery position. They said that because 25% of the South was made of slaves, he was dooming the state, he had fought so hard to salvage. Houston though, stood firm. "Because the Entire South is wrong, should I be wrong too?"⁹, he asked in one of his many eloquent speeches. Nearing his 66th birthday, Houston

decided that it was a good time to end his career as a senator. In 1859, Houston gave his final senate speech.

Once again Houston returned home with the prospect of retiring from politics and settling down. At home though, he saw that much of Texas favored secession. Houston knew that secession would be a disaster, and he could not just sit and watch his dear Texas fall. By summer a tired and old Houston decided to run for Texas Governor. His goal was to lead the state away from ruin. Houston told his fellow Texans, "Preserve the union and you preserve liberty."¹⁰ Houston was an extremely powerful speaker. Many people claimed that the only two things that would draw a crowd in Texas were a circus and Sam Houston. Though many Texans still supported slavery, Houston's confidence and eloquence was influential and he received 60 percent of the votes to win the election. This now made him the first person to ever be Governor of two different states.

Against Houston's wishes, Texas seceded from the United States on February 1, 1861. The political forces that brought about Texas's secession were also powerful enough to replace her Unionist Governor. The Confederacy that Texas had joined now required all of its government officials to swear support to the Confederacy. Houston stated, "I love Texas too well to bring civil strife and bloodshed upon her."¹¹, and gave up his position as Governor. After leaving the Governor's mansion, Houston and his wife moved to Cedar Point, Texas. Continuing to closely following the war news, Houston helplessly watched as the confederacy suffered defeat in the battle of Vicksburg and the Battle of Gettysburg. Houston believed that all he had feared for

Texas was coming true. At the age of 70, with the stress and exertion of watching the confederate losses catching up to him, Houston contracted pneumonia.

Sam Houston died on July 26, 1863. His last whispered words were, "Texas....Texas.....Margaret"¹². Houston was buried with a simple and small piece of gray granite with Andrew Jackson's words, "The World will take care of Houston's fame".¹³

From the moment Houston first set foot on Texas soil, he has put all his efforts into helping Texas develop as a territory, republic, and later, a U.S state. Houston is given credit for the success of Texas' fight against Mexico. Houston's strong character and leadership made up for his many human flaws. He was an exceptional speaker, whose words led people to success. His words and actions reveal an honest man, who was an inspiration to Texas. Houston's life was long and memorable. Starting off as an irrepressible and rebellious farm boy, Houston bloomed into a renowned hero of Texas, true to his dreams of leadership and service. Houston really was a beloved and affectionate Husband and friend, devoted patriot and courageous soldier, and most importantly a preeminent leader to all of Texas.

Endnotes

- ¹ Quote from Sam Houston regarding his moral character.
- ² Quote by Sam Houston from the book, "Sam Houston: Texas Hero" by Susan Gregson
- ³ Quote by Sam Houston about his character
- ⁴ Quote by Sam Houston regarding the alamo from the article, "Alamo Myths and Misconceptions" by Dr. R. Bruce Winders
- ⁵ Houston's sentiments regarding defending the alamo
- ⁶ Quote by Houston in "The new republic of Texas" by Ted Gresham
- ⁷ Quote from Houston found in the book, "Sam Houston: Soldier and Statesman By Tracey Boraas"
- ⁸ Quote from the book, " Sam Houston" By James L. Haley
- ⁹ Quote of Houston from the book, "Sam Houston's Texas" By Sue Flanagan
- ¹⁰ Quote from the book, "Sam Houston's Republic" By Lynne Basham Tagawa
- ¹¹ Quote by Houston from the article, "Sam Houston and Secession by Donald R. McClarey
- ¹² Quote by Houston, Houston's last words.
- ¹³ Quote by Jackson, Houston's tombstone word.

Annotated bibliography

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I used this article to understand the relationship between Houston and the alamo
5. "Sam Houston." *Sam Houston - New World Encyclopedia*, www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Sam_Houston."
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6. ""The Raven"." *The Raven | TSLAC*, www.tsl.texas.gov/exhibits/indian/early/page2.html."
I used this article to understand the profound relationship of Houston with the Cherokee Indians.

2.Secondary Sources

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2.Bruhl, M. De. *Sword of San Jacinto: a Life of Sam Houston*. Random House, 1993.

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3.Lester, C. Edwards. *The life of Sam Houston: the hunter, patriot, and statesman of Texas: the only authentic memoir of him ever published*. J.E. Potter, 1867.

Using this book I was able to get an accurate summary of his life, to write the rough back bone of my essay.

4.Alter, Judy. *Sam Houston: a leader for Texas*. Children's Press, 1998.

This book being one for children, helped me understand each topic with simplicity

5.O'Neal, Bill. *Sam Houston: a study in leadership*. Eakin Press, 2016

I used this book to get one of my quotes for my essay.