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Voices of Independence

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The preambles to the United States and Texas Declarations of Independence both express a belief in natural rights and the need for self-government, while differing in tone and audience. Both the United States and Texas sought freedom from oppressive rule—Britain in the case of the U.S., and Mexico in the case of Texas—highlighting a shared desire for self-determination. The United States Declaration of Independence (written in 1776) begins with the famous words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...," and the Texas Declaration of Independence (written in 1836) begins with, "When a government has ceased to protect the lives, liberty, and property of the people..."

First and foremost, both the United States and Texas Declarations of Independence emphasize the belief in the authority of the people, the establishment of a just and free government, and securing the blessings of liberty. The United States preamble states, "...all men are created equal, they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness..."(Rappaport). It affirms natural rights by stating that everyone is created equal and has "unalienable rights," which include "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". Similarly, the Texas preamble states, "When a government has ceased to protect the lives, liberty, and property of the people..."(Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History). It also explains that the government exists to "protect the lives, liberty, and property of the people." These are the fundamental natural rights that should be guaranteed to all people. These rights should not be privileges; they should be entitled to all people. This illustrates that the belief in natural rights comes from people and nature rather than from rulers or laws.

Building on this idea, both preambles emphasize on the demand for self-government by stating that governments exist to protect these rights and derive their power from the consent of the governed. Therefore, if a government refuses or does not give the people these rights, the people have the right to take charge of it or institute a new one. The United States preamble states, "that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute a new government" (Annotated Preamble). It argues that when a government becomes an "instrument of oppression under unjust rulers," it no longer has the right to rule or loses its legitimacy. The Texas preamble supports this idea by emphasizing that the Mexican government failed to protect people's rights, so it no longer had the right to rule. Both documents show that the governments must remain accountable to the people, and if they fail to do so, the people have the right to fight back and make a change.

While both preambles justify independence, they differ in who they are addressing and how they present their message. The United States preamble was not just for Britain; it was directed toward an international community or a global audience. "On the other hand, the Declaration was a diplomatic document, directed to the powers of the earth to secure their military and commercial support from the colonists' cause against Great Britain" (The Declaration of Independence's Influence around the World). This quote shows that the Declaration and its preamble were intended not only for Americans, but for other foreign governments. The phrase "powers of the earth" was written to encourage recognition from other countries and support the new United States. In contrast, the Texas preamble targets more of a

local audience, focusing on the specific grievances against the Mexican government. It describes how Mexico had abandoned its constitutional principles and become a military dictatorship under Santa Anna. The language is strong and direct, showing the need for Texans to protect their lives, liberty, and property. “After the delegates signed the original Declaration, five copies were made and dispatched to the designated Texas towns of Bexar, Goliad, Nacogdoches, Brazoria, and San Felipe. One thousand copies were ordered, printed in handbill form” (TSLAC). This distribution strategy shows that the document, including its preamble, was meant to rally Texans and nearby supporters to join their cause, not to appeal to a global audience.

Despite their differences in tone and audience, both preambles express the same goal: a deep belief in natural rights and the need for self-government. The United States preamble focuses more on universal principles like life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Texas preamble highlights specific grievances against the Mexican government. Ultimately, both preambles affirm that the right to independence and self-rule is fundamental to human freedom and the legitimacy of government.

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