Sporting Activities in the American-Mexican Colonies of Texas, 1821-1835

by Jodella K. Dyreson
Department of History
Weber State University

One image of a developing colonial frontier depicts a work-weary people who struggled ceaselessly to survive and were thus deprived of opportunities for relaxation and pleasure. A contrasting image renders a raucous, frolicking culture free from the restraints of "civilization" where ne'er-do-wells passed their time drinking and playing cards. The settlers of the American-Mexican colonies in Texas, when Texas was part of the Republic of Mexico from 1821 to 1835, embodied both these extremes. However, the vast majority of American-Mexican sporting activities fell in the middle ground between those two extremes. Like those of most agricultural societies, American-Mexican sports had roots in work-related activities.

Historian Allen Guttmann's paradigm for modern sports examines the structure of athletics in industrial and post-industrial settings in illuminating ways. However, he and other historians who have followed his lead focus almost exclusively on male folk recreations that developed into modem male-dominated sports and were subsequently opened to female participation—fulfilling the egalitarian dynamic he perceives as intrinsic to modern sport.[1] Female folk recreations apparently evolved into things that historians working within the modernization paradigm do not consider sport-crafts, games, or pastimes. This focus on "pre-modern sport" and "manhood" has obscured the important similarities between the sporting and leisure activities of men and women.[2] Most importantly, the modernization paradigm for sport obscures the reality of everyday life for pre-industrial, agrarian societies. Nancy L. Struna, in her groundbreaking *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early America,* emphasizes that the lives of agrarian peoples were not dichotomized into modem and postmodern worlds of work and play. Struna declares that they were not people "who viewed

or experienced labor as we do, nor did they conceive of labor and leisure as separable realms of experience."[3] Generally historians, with the exception of Struna, have neglected the sports and recreations of these cultures. For example, William J. Baker, in *Sports in the Western World,* recognizes the important connection between work and recreation for pre-industrial societies, although he devotes only a brief paragraph to the phenomenon and emphasizes the impact of urbanization.[4] Thus, in sport history, the dominant pattern of inquiry has become modernization with the practices of earlier peoples considered "pre-modem sport" or 'folk recreations." Struna notes:

> Leisure and leisure sports, constructed by the colonial upper rank and borrowed and reframed in subtle ways by the early national urban middle class, persisted into the mid-nineteenth century, when they became the base for "modem" sports, the practices of white, male, urban, middle class men. In their time they too became the dominant and dominating type. The cultural myopia of historians notwithstanding, however, they were never the only type.[5]

Defining sport with only a modern focus constrains historians' abilities to explore the social universes of people who did not compartmentalize their lives into the neatly separate spheres of sport, leisure, and work

A comparison of hunting to quilting illustrates the futility of imposing a modern sport paradigm retroactively onto these cultures. Hunting required physical exertion in the form of walking and stalking, as well as specialized skills. Rules, in the form of local traditions, shaped hunting practices, and hunters, in turn, competed for spoils and status. Rough equality of participation among males, except for the exclusion of male slaves, characterized antebellum American hunting.[6] Historians have recognized hunting and other male amusements that were literally extensions of work as "sport."[7] Historians routinely refer to cockfighting and horse racing as "sports," albeit in a "pre-modern" form.[8] In part, those definitions seem to stem from a perception that cockfighting and horse racing were highly organized physical activities. However, most men participated in those sports in the less strenuous roles of spectators and gamblers.

In comparison to male "sports," the mostly female "pastime" of quilting required considerable physical stamina and exertion. If not as aerobic as hunting, quilting was nonetheless a physical activity Fine quilting required at least four stitches through multiple layers of material before pulling through the thread, as well as backbreaking postures, stamina for long hours, and strength to wrestle the quilt onto a floor frame. Just as local traditions provided rules for hunting, traditional customs provided rules for quilting, and quilters likewise competed for spoils and status. Moreover, quilting required a high degree of specialized skills, and a rough equality of participation among females, including to a limited extent female slaves, characterized antebellum American quilting.[9]

Thus, the female "folk recreations" of cultures such as the American-Mexican colonists in Texas were as much sports—in the pre-modern sense—as male amusements and leisure activities. Perhaps 'manhood," rather than physicality,

shapes scholarly definitions of pre-modern sports. Ideas of manhood were certainly important to these peoples, but why should contemporary historians subsequently brand some activities as "sport" and others as "crafts" if both equally meet the requirements for pre-modern sports? What accounts for the failure of historians to equate hunting and quilting as sports? One definite possibility is the historic emphasis by sports scholars on male-dominated activities for lines of inquiry; thus hunting, fishing, and horse racing are labeled as "pre-modern sports," whereas comparable female activities are not. But in addition, the modernization paradigm for sports fails to address the practices of earlier peoples for whom leisure, sport, play, religion, diet, clothing, housewares, families, politics, and work entwined seamlessly in their lives. These are, after all, the peoples who made up the bulk of human history before the industrial age arrived with its cloven world. Were there no sports before the modem age? If not, the field of sport history constricts itself into a suffocatingly narrow space. Or do we modems fail to understand earlier mindsets in our attempts to categorize aspects of culture? The activities and practices of men and women in American-Mexican Texas grew out of the physical and mental patterns that comprised their work lives. Thus, with this broad approach, sports in the American-Mexican colonies can include a variety of activities that would not later evolve into practices categorized as "modem sports."

Individuals, families, and communities provided the means through which these activities took place in American-Mexican society and cultures. Individual activities included hunting, fishing, crafts, sewing, and reading. Families could derive enjoyment from visiting, gardening, playing games, storytelling, and sharing newspapers. Community activities provided much-needed socialization in the form of parties, music, dances, drinking, and gambling. Their recreations revealed the cultural heritages from which they originated, the gender domains they occupied, and the conceptions of class structures with which they grappled. Significantly, their sports unveiled the violence to which they were constantly exposed. Yet sports did more than just reflect the patterns of American-Mexican cultures; these activities also helped create and celebrate community, forge individual identity, provide opportunities for competition, establish status, manifest creativity and artistry, and cultivate skills necessary for survival on Mexico's northern border.

The lengthy war for independence that Mexico fought with Spain from 1810 to 1821 seriously retarded the growth of Texas as a Mexican province. Only three major settlements survived by 1820—San Antonio de Béxar, La Bahía (Goliad), and Nacogdoches. Nacogdoches was the only extant settlement in the geographic area that would become the American-Mexican colonies. Only a handful of people, almost all of whom were Tejanos (Texans of Hispanic extraction), resided in Nacogdoches due to its destruction in the wake of filibustering attempts and military occupation. Native Americans occupied the vast territory between Nacogdoches and Béxar until colonists from the United States, under the leadership of Stephen F. Austin, crowded the native inhabitants westward in order to claim and inhabit cheap Mexican lands. By the eve of the Texas War for Independence in 1835, the population of the American-Mexican colonies,

excluding native Americans, probably exceeded 30,000. A majority of the new settlers came to Texas from the southern United States. Consequently, many of their sporting practices had a southern character. The new communities also existed both on the western margin of United States expansion and on the Mexican northern frontier. That fact meant both American and Mexican frontier cultural patterns potentially influenced their sports and amusements.

Personal leisure pursuits did not require organization on any grand scale or any extensive preparation, but they developed and honed necessary survival skills. Hunting and fishing fulfilled two needs for the settlers—sustenance and recreation. Sales of gunpowder filled the ledgers of mercantile establishments throughout the coloniesl.[10] After farmers gathered the harvest in the autumn, they spent winter months supplying the table with game. Prowess with firearms provided status for competent marksmen. Boys held shooting matches with a dollar per participant riding on the outcome in the San Felipe blacksmith shop of Noah Smithwick, an American-Mexican colonist whose reminiscences provide valuable information on the social and political history of the colonies. Hunters often used dogs to assist them in bagging such wild game as buffalo, deer, boar, squirrels, and sometimes cattle. Even those who purchased room and board, such as attorney and political leader William B. Travis, fished for pleasure. Although survival in the colonies required hunting and fishing, critics accused the male colonists of indolence, favoring hunting and fishing over working the land.[11]

In the way that men hunted for "recreation," expanding an activity intimately related to their working lives, women considered some of their own work to be "recreation." Women found recreation in their work-related activities of spinning cloth, quilting bed covers, fashioning clothes, and crafting needlework Creativity and artistry could be expressed in making the handcrafted items necessary for the home.

Hunting and quilting, as well as many other activities engaged in by women and men as individuals, could also be enjoyed in family or small-group settings. Because of the relatively small population, as well as the distances involved, the family served as a "little commonwealth" that provided opportunities for entertainment.[12] Entire families took pride in crops gathered, goods baked, and vegetable and flower gardens maintained. To while away the evening hours, families and their visitors might indulge in a game of whist, an early form of bridge. The infrequent visitor passing through the countryside provided excitement for an isolated family. Since the only regular mail route ran between San Felipe, the capital of Austin's colonies, and Béxar, the provincial capital, travelers conveyed letters to their destination. Great interest accompanied the reading of letters that arrived from parts distant to the family.[13] Visitors might also contribute as storytellers during the long evenings in which tall tales played a major role. The social historian William Ransom Hogan emphasizes the importance of the tall tale:

> It frequently was used to make light of the conflict of man with his environment: his attempts to subject the animals of the wilderness to his

> domination; his troubles raising crops; and his experiences in love affairs in a land where women were scarce. Pioneer privations would have been much more difficult to bear if a saving leaven of humor often had not rendered them funny.[14]

Bragging about shooting, fishing, or card-playing prowess could often expand into stories that testified more to the skills of the yarn spinner than to those of the sportsman. Tall tales that might have been related in a family setting sometimes found their way into frontier publications in the form of fish and animal stories. Newspapers, when obtained by literate members of a household, contained items of interest for the entire family, including serial stories, humorous anecdotes, cooking tips, and business announcements. Local newspapers also notified readers of community activities and celebrations. A shortage of books necessitated considerable sharing among literate colonists. Family, as well as individual, reading of the Bible, histories, or novels could enliven the evenings that followed long work days.[15]

Despite the rural nature of the colonies, individuals and families often gathered communally for entertainment and amusement. The presence of a considerable number of freemasons in colonial Texas increased the potential for fraternization. Communities turned out for the arrival of ships with their letter packets. Camp meetings held by itinerant preachers, forbidden by Mexican law, furnished spiritual nourishment, as well as a welcome break from the rigors of daily life.[16]

Colonists seized the opportunities provided by holidays, visiting dignitaries, and weddings to hold celebrations. The American-born colonists especially enjoyed the Fourth of July. Barbecues for entire communities often accompanied Fourth of July celebrations, with dances for the young people, quilting for the ladies, games for the children, political speeches for the interested, and music for everyone.[17] Dilue Rose Harris enjoyed the music at the Fourth of July celebration at Harrisburg in 1834. "The music was two fiddles, played turn about by three negro men. One negro man got an iron pin and clevis . . . and beat time with the fiddles. Another man beat a tin pan."[18]

Songs sung in the colonies ranged from dance tunes to familiar hymns to ribald ditties. Colonists sang such favorite hymns as "On Jordan's Stormy Banks," "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," and "When I Can Read My Title Clear." Two little girls once entertained visitors all evening long by singing selections from a hymn book While docked outside Velasco, Mary Austin Holley and her fellow passengers entertained themselves by singing "Pensez à moi" and other songs.[19] Robert M. Williamson, a prominent attorney with a bent toward showmanship, performed a minstrel song called "Coal Black Rose" as entertainment at stag parties in San Felipe:

> Rose, Rose; coal black Rose;
> I nebber see a nigger dat I lub like Rose.[20]

This song clearly illustrates racial attitudes among American-Mexicans.

Through song, American-Mexicans expressed the sometimes controversial identity of their communities. Noah Smithwick remembered one of the printable verses of "Mrs. Williams' Lament," a song popular among the early Texans:

> The United States, as we understand,
> Took sick and did vomit the dregs of the land.
> Her murderers, bankrupts and rogues you may see,
> All congregated in San Felipe.[21]

Smithwick, in his reminiscences, stated that the banishment of an indiscreet wife from the colony prompted a young man to immortalize the situation in verse. Citizens of San Felipe tarred and feathered him for his creativity. James Hatch, the grandson of Sylvanus Hatch who settled on the Lavaca River in 1827, argued that a wife who came to Texas very reluctantly, at the insistence of her husband, composed the comic verses in revenge while traveling there. The wife hired a young sailor to perform the song in San Felipe. Hatch's version differed in substance and form from Smithwick's, which probably reflects the phenomenon of made-up verses around the fireside and mischievously injected names.[22]

Dances also played a crucial role in American-Mexican communities. Smithwick attended a dance at the Varner place near Columbia:

> When we were all assembled and ready to begin business it was found that Mose, the only fiddler around, had failed to come to [sic] time, so we called in an old darky belonging to Colonel Zeno Philips, who performed on a clevis as an accompaniment to his singing, while another negro scraped on a cotton hoe with a case knife. The favorite chorus was:
>
> "O git up gals in de mawnin',
> O git up gals in de mawnin',
> O git up gals in de mawnin',
> Jes at the de break ob day,"
>
> at the conclusion of which the performer gave an extra blow to the clevis while the dancers responded with a series of dextrous [sic] rat-tat-tats with heel and toe.[23]

His account captures the atmosphere of folk music performed on makeshift instruments for athletic dancers by slaves, who were otherwise excluded from participation in their masters' amusements."

Slaves often played at the dances. The absence of drums probably indicates they were forbidden to slaves, a common prohibition in the southern United States to avoid their use for messages. The American-Mexican colonists in Mexican Texas used pianos, guitars, banjos, fiddles, jews' harps, flutes, and assorted rhythm-keeping instruments, although they were limited in quality and quantity. Rosa Kleberg played her piano, which had been damaged on the trip to Texas, to accompany a young people's dance. For his impromptu minstrel shows, Robert M. Williamson accompanied himself on the banjo.[25]

Balls with dinner and dancing provided opportunities for socialization and interaction among the settlers, especially the young people. The dancing often continued until daylight. The lack of public buildings meant that settlers held most balls and parties in private homes, although they issued pricey tickets and formal invitations for some. Jane Long, who settled in Texas during the Spanish period, often held dances at her boarding house in Brazoria.[26] Colonists in Texas mostly danced Spanish and Virginia reels, as the waltz generally was familiar only to European settlers and visiting Mexican officials.[27] Smithwick attended a dance following a wedding:

> It mattered not that the floor was made of puncheons. When the young folks danced [in] those days, they danced; they didn't glide around; they "shuffled" and "double shuffled," "wired" and "cut the pigeon's wing," making the splinters fly. There were some of the boys, however, who were not provided with shoes, and moccasins were not adapted to that kind of dancing floor, and moreover they couldn't make noise enough, but their more fortunate brethren were not at all selfish or disposed to put on airs, so, when they danced a turn, they generously exchanged footgear with the moccasined contingent and gave them the ring, and we just literally kicked every splinter off that floor before morning. The fiddle . . . [was] rather too weak to make itself heard above the din of clattering feet.[28]

In the early nineteenth century, dance approximated an athletic contest. In fact, dancing in Mexican Texas more closely corresponds to the definitions of modern sport than any other activity. Its secular nature, egalitarian competition, specialized roles for the participants, intricate rules of performance and etiquette, and the high level of communal organization resemble most of the criteria for Guttmann's model of modem sports.[29]

Colonists organized a grand dinner and ball held in San Felipe in September of 1835 to commemorate the arrival of Stephen F. Austin, recently released from political imprisonment in Mexico City. With an excellent turnout of more than sixty women in attendance, the dancing stopped only when the room had to be cleared for breakfast. Sometimes the dances became disorderly, especially at the Tejano fandangos in Nacogdoches. By the early 1830s, Tejanos and American-Mexicans tended to hold separate public dances in Nacogdoches. The potential for violence increased when the American-Mexican men attended the fandangos and attempted to dance with the young Tejano women. The *ayuntamiento,* the governing body for municipalities, attempted to control disturbances by fines, and taxes levied on those who held dances added to the coffers of the municipality.[30]

Because of the shortage of adult females, parents often permitted very young daughters to attend dances. The parents of Dilue Rose Harris allowed her to attend a ball held at her home in October of 1834 where the female partners consisted of six young women, three married women, and five little girls. Three of the little girls fell asleep in an outbuilding at four in the morning with the festivities still raging.[31]

As an alternative to underage female partners, bachelors in San Felipe held potluck stag parties at the home of Godwin Cotton, which featured singing, storytelling, and dancing. Robert M. Williamson, the life of many a colonial party, often performed. Cotton, Luke Lessassier, and Robert Peebles excelled as storytellers, while Noah Smithwick danced jigs to the "juba" patted by Williamson and his wooden leg. Williamson also performed comedy routines for these bachelor audiences, including ones on country school spelling lessons and on revival meetings, in which Williamson played all the parts. One time Smithwick had to repair Williamson's wooden leg, which broke as a result of a lively night of spirited revelry.[32]

Gatherings highlighted by drinking and gambling formed an integral part of male relaxation and enjoyment. Taverns, grog shops, and saloons existed throughout the colonies. Those establishments and the horse tracks typically found in American-Mexican settlements served as focal points for communal male amusements. A billiard hall and saloon was the first frame building in San Felipe. Sales of rum, brandy, cognac, ale, port, and especially whiskey filled the ledgers of mercantile establishments. A notorious imbiber once set fire to several of his own outbuildings while in a drunken fit; only his daughter's entreaties saved the family's house.[33] Smithwick remembered Nestor Clay as an occasional visitor to a San Felipe tavern:

> At which times he [Clay] was wont to imbibe rather freely; with the result that while he soon became unable to stand, his mental faculties seemed to expand in proportion to his loss of physical power.
>
> Educated, brilliant, a perfect master of English and an adept at retort, I have seen him sit and talk politics when he could not rise from his seat, and not a man among us could begin to hold his own against him.[34]

The *Texas Republican* reported in March of 1835 that a drunken colonist attempted to cross the mouth of the Brazos River at night during heavy winds. He was never heard of again. "So much for intemprance [sic]," observed the *Republican.*[35]

Officials worried over the debilitating effects of alcohol on the colonies. The *ayuntamiento* of Nacogdoches judged the numbers of drunken men "prejudicial to the population" and subjected any man or woman found drunk in the street to arrest, imprisonment, and fines. The *ayuntamiento* of San Felipe also passed laws governing public intoxication and closed the taverns at ten o'clock.[36] The priggish David Edwards complained that liquor seduced well-intentioned colonists into alcoholism and that mercantile stores should be rightfully termed "grog shops." The store of Roeder & Parmalee in Nacogdoches, which apparently served only American-Mexican patrons and excluded Tejanos, offered a congenial setting for drinking and playing billiards.[37] Most village stores provided opportunities to exchange news, sample a little whiskey, play cards, and shoot billiards.

Gambling and games of chance permeated the social life of the colonies even at dances and elections.[38] Historian William R. Hogan observes that the very presence of colonists in colonial Texas and the settlers' obsessive indulgence

in land speculation indicated that they possessed a gambling nature. The *ayuntamientos* of both San Felipe and Nacogdoches tried to control gambling within their jurisdictions by levying fines on the gamblers and the proprietors.[39] Noah Smithwick called Nacogdoches a "gambler's heaven" that preyed upon newcomers:

> Here there was a regular organization for roping in the greenhorn and relieving him of his cash. Several of its members afterwards took an active part in the revolution, one at least being a signer of the Declaration of Independence. This brave patriot having spotted a stranger who seemed to have deep pockets, steered him into a game and went out to look for another sucker. When he returned the game was over and the clique dividing the spoils. The steerer demanded his share. "Why you wasn't in the game," they contended. 'The h—l I wasn't; didn't I find him first?" and backing his claim with a pistol he secured his share. So unscrupulous were they that they didn't even wait till the victim was out of the room to divide. Taking in the situation, a fellow that had been thus robbed, said to them, "I think it's a d—d outrage for the government to send old John H. Murrill [a Robin Hood-type bandit] to the state's prison and let such fellows as you go free."[40]

Billiards was also popular, and colonists played sometimes in private homes, but usually in saloons. Villagers in San Felipe and Brazoria especially enjoyed billiards.[41] Amos Parker warned:

> Billiards is a pleasant and manly game enough; and good exercise for a sedentary man; and if indulged in only for amusement, is as innocent as any recreation whatever. It is a game much played in the middle and southern portions of the United States; and men of the first respectability are found at the table. But in this section of the country, it cannot be recommended as a safe place for recreation. It is generally used as a mere gambling apparatus; and a person meets with a class of society not the most civil, sober and peaceable.[42]

In addition to billiards, gambling at card games was common in the taverns.[43] Card games in the Texas colonies included poker, old sledge or seven-up, euchre, brag, monte, and the most popular—faro. If William B. Travis is any measure, men lost fair amounts of money regularly in such amusements. Poker, a resurrected ancient Persian game, came to North America via New Orleans. Brag, a popular form of stud poker, relied on bluffing and wild cards. Old sledge or seven-up was a form of All-Fours, one of the first card games to become popular in the United States. All-Fours and its derivatives were favorites of professional gamblers and date back to seventeenth-century England. The Spanish game monte, introduced to the American-Mexican colonists by Mexican troops, gave great odds to the house and spread to the southern and southwestern United States. According to Smithwick, Vicente Padilla ran a monte game in San Felipe. One clever fellow figured how to make tin pieces look like the money used in monte games. Some enterprising Mexicans invented three-card monte, only loosely connected to regular monte, as a tool for swindle. Texans introduced three-card monte into

New Orleans in the early 1830s. The game fell into such disrepute that the word "mountebank" came to mean a cheat or swindler. No other card or dice game in nineteenth-century America, including poker and craps, enjoyed more popularity than faro. Honestly played, faro gave a fair chance of winning to the player, one reason for its popularity."

In addition to card games, colonists gambled on horse races even though Mexican law prohibited organized gambling. In spite of the small population, eastern Texas had at least three tracks in the early 1830s with bets wagered into the thousands of dollars. The track at Columbia regularly held races in 1834 and 1835 with purses as high as a thousand dollars.[45]

Some contemporary observers accused Texas colonists of indolence rather than industry. Amos A. Parker pointed out the economic opportunities for prospective colonists but warned that the new colonist:

> may become as indolent and inattentive to business, as many of the inhabitants of the country. He may spend his time in hunting, at the race-course, and at the billiard table. *Here,* at the north, the great anxiety is, how we shall live-wherewithal we shall be clothed, and how we can turn a penny to "get gain;" *there,* the great concern is, how they shall employ themselves to kill time. *Here,* we struggle hard to live; *there,* they strive hard not to live. *Here,* we live in spite of nature; *there,* nature makes them live in spite of themselves.[46]

David B. Edwards, usually a harsh critic of Texans' lifestyles, maintained that the lack of churches removed the incentive for work, implying that church services provided opportunities to display the material fruits of labor. He also noted that the "lazy and careless" might be drawn to Texas since fellow colonists granted more respect to individualism and assistance in crisis than to industry.[47] Of course, although certain activities like hunting and fishing might have appeared to be leisurely, they played vital roles in the survival of the household. Continued problems with diseases that drained the body of energy contributed to an image of laziness. Perhaps such stereotypical assumptions of indolence presented by observers is the characteristic most shared by the South and by Mexico. Historically, both southerners in the United States and Hispanics of Spanish North America-and later, Mexico-have been branded "lazy,""slovenly,""idle," and "indolent." It is not surprising then that in Mexican Texas, where both groups converged, the inhabitants would be described in this fashion.[48]

Detractors branded Texas as a haven for criminals, vagabonds, and scoundrels. Several pioneers defended the character of the colonists while admitting that Texas society contained individuals skirting the law.[49] A visitor to Texas in 1831 met several men just arriving to settle:

> Among these strangers I found a number of very intelligent men: but I learnt [sic] that a portion of them had fled from justice, or as they chose to call it, from law, in their own country. It is a well known fact, that a considerable proportion of our countrymen who are found in Texas, are of this character. I saw at the breakfast table one morning, among those who were seated with me, four murderers who had sought safety in this

> country, and a gentleman assured me, that on one occasion, he had set down with eleven.[50]

The visitor continued to explain that individuals fleeing to Texas always represented themselves as unduly condemned, including a significant number of duelists. The frequent arrivals of fugitives from justice prompted settlers to inquire of newcomers what crime caused the flight into the colonies. For whatever reason, the dispossessed sought refuge in Texas.[51]

The American-Mexican colonies resembled the southern backcountry, which historian Elliott Gom describes as riddled with violent encounters.[52] They shared episodes of vigilante justice, duels, knife fights, and drunken frays. While sources for Mexican Texas do not record the eye-gouging, body-maiming brawls of Gorn's backcountry ruffians, in general, the same types of people populated Mexican Texas. There is also no evidence for the celebration of violence Gorn discovered, rather a basic assumption that life is inherently violent.[53]

Texas colonists did live in a violent world. Families hunted for survival. Weather wreaked vengeance on crops. Settlers slaughtered animals in the yard. Most individuals carried some kind of gun. The guilty received corporal punishment. Masters whipped slaves. Native Americans raided outlying settlements. Whites retaliated on every possible occasion. Drinking and gambling increased the possibility for violence over petty arguments. Cockfights provided some sanguinary entertainment. Death visited homes frequently through disease and childbirth. Work-related accidents maimed and killed many. Vigilantism substituted for malfunctioning systems of justice. Men served as soldiers in militia. In sum, an atmosphere of general violence surrounded settlers. Texas, as a frontier of Mexico and, to a very real extent, a frontier of the antebellum South, experienced the patterns of law and violence typical of both a frontier and a Southern society.[54]

Violence also frequented American-Mexican sports and amusements. In that sense, the leisure activities of Texans did not differ markedly from those of other frontier areas of Mexico and the United States. Yet, in spite of their sometimes violent nature, American-Mexican sporting activities served as important communal institutions. In harsh and hostile circumstances, the colonists still found time to take their "sports."

Most American-Mexican sporting traditions developed from labor patterns characteristic of an agrarian society. Men and women developed elaborate sports from their work. They practiced those sports as individuals, families, and communities. Some of their sports marked specific gender domains. Others, such as dancing, brought men and women together. Their games provided arenas for winning status, as well as enjoying respites from toil and drudgery, They raced horses and sewed, hunted and quilted, played billiards, sang songs, and danced some nights away. Their activities reflect the long duration of older traditions that, in the 1820s and 1830s, were poised to develop-in the distant urban centers of the antebellum United States-into the games that historians have identified as modem sports. In one important way, these early sports resembled modern sport: They provided a cultural matrix of rituals, patterns, and structures that

provided a means of constructing lasting communities and vital cultures.

1. Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record The Naturc of Modern Sports* (New York Columbia University Press, 1978), 15-55; Elliott Gorn and Warren Goldstein, *A Brief History of Modern Sports* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 47-97; Roberta J. Park, "From 'Genteel Diversions' to 'Bruising Peg': Active Pastimes, Exercise, and Sports for Females in Late 17th- and 18th-Century" in D. Margaret Costa and Sharon R. Guthrie, eds., *Women and Sport: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 1994), 27-43. Allen Guttmann in 'Cricketeers on the Green and Viragos in the Ring," chap. in *Women's Sports: A History* (New York Columbia University Press, 1991), 67-84, traces women's sports from "traditional" to "modern" forms paralleling urbanization and industrialization exclusively within a modem male paradigm, i.e., women participating in activities that evolve into sports that are identified by an overwhelming majority of male participants. Of course, Guttmann recognizes the existence of other-than-modem sports, but his modem paradigm has overshadowed other potential definitions of "sport." Richard D. Mandell in *Sport: A Cultural History* (New York Columbia University Press, 1984), 178-179, mentions horse races and blood sports in his chapter on "American Sport to the 1920s" and quickly moves to modem sports such as baseball.
2. Nancy Struna agrees that studies of pre-modern sport operate within a male paradigm in Nancy L. Struna, "Beyond Mapping Experience: The Need for Understanding the History of American Sporting Women," *Journal of Sport History* 11 (Spring 1984): 120-133. In "The Recreational Experiences of Early American Women," chap. in Costa and Guthrie, eds., *Women and Sport,* 45-62, Struna does expand the range of recreations practiced by women. She still emphasizes female participation in what were then primarily male activities, such as horse racing and tavern keeping.
3. Nancy L. Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 5.
4. William J. Baker, *Sports in the Western World* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1982), 107; Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Spectators* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 2-3, 24-26; Steven A. Riess, "From Pitch to Pun: Sport and Class in Anglo-American Sport," *Journal of Sport History* 21 (Summer 1994): 168. Riess confirms that U.S. historians have focused on the impact of industrialization upon the traditional male sporting world of "plebeian billiard halls, fire houses, gambling halls, and especially taverns."
5. Struna, *People of Prowess,* 198.
6. Guttmann provided the following criteria for modern sports: secularism, equality of opportunity to compete, and, in the conditions of competition, specialization of roles, rationalization, bureaucratic organization, quantification, and the quest for records. Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record.* On the importance of hunting in Southern male culture, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).
7. Although Rader terms hunting, fishing, and "other quasi-athletic contests" as "folk games" or "sportlike activities" rather than sports, his list only includes traditional male activities in Rader, *American Sports,* 26.
8. For examples, see Allen Guttmann, *A Whole New Ball Game: An Interpretation of American Sports* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 35-50, and Gorn and Goldstein, *Brief History, 3-46.*
9. For a technical account of the historic techniques of wadded quilting, see Averil Colby, *Quilting* (New York Scribner, 1971), appendix A. Scholars have only recently discovered quilting as a valuable source of social history. For example, Patricia Cooper and Norma

Bradley Allen's *The Quilters: Women and Domestic* Art (New York Doubleday, 1977), which was turned into a celebrated musical, is a collection of oral histories on quilting in West Texas and eastern New Mexico. Susan E. Bernick, "A Quilt Is an Art Object When It Stands Up Like a Man," in Cheryl B. Turnsey and Judy Elsley, *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1994) confronts the art-versus-craft controversy over quilting. Generally, the latest scholarship regards quilts as texts for postmodern interpretation that can illuminate the historic past of previously undocumented women.

10. Account of George Brewer with Joshua E. Martin, 1834-1836, Brewer Family Papers, Special Collections, Ralph W. Steen Library, Stephen F. Austin University, Nacogdoches, Texas; Receipt, Lyons &Watson to George Brewer, January 20, 1831, Brewer Family Papers; Day Book of Frost Thorn, Adolphus Sterne home, Nacogdoches, Texas; *Texas Republican,* July 5, 1834, October 25, 1834, December 13, 1834, February 14, 1835.

11. S.A.G. Bourne, *Observations upon the Mexican Province of Texas* (London: Williams and Samuel Grave, 1828), 15; *Noah Smithwick, The Evolution of a State or Recollections of Old Texas Days* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1983), 51, 53; W.B. Dewees, *Letters from an Early Settler of Texas* (Waco, Tex.: Texian Press, 1968), 25-26, 137; Robert E. Davis, ed., *The Diary of William Barret Travis* (Waco, Tex.:Texian Press, 1966), 154,172; A.A. Parker, *Trip to the West and Texas* (Austin, Tex.: Pemberton Press, 1968), 209, 212-213. W.B. Dewees claimed that the soil required little attention due to its richness.

12. See John Demos, *A Little Commonwealtb: Family Life in Plymouth Colony (New* York: Oxford University Press, 1970), for a related study in a different setting.

13. James M. McReynolds, "Family Life in a Borderland Community: Nacogdoches, Texas 1779-1861" (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1978), 241-242; Mattie Austin Hatcher, *Letters of an Early American Traveller: Mary Austin Holley, Her Life and Works 1784-1846* (Dallas, Tex.: Southwest Press, 1933), 115,117; *C.* Richard King, ed., *Victorian Lady on the Texas Frontier: The Journal of Ann Raney Coleman* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 45-47, Parker, *Trip,* 159; Annie Doom Pickrell, *Pioneer Women in Texas* (Austin, Tex.: The Steck Co., 1929), 141-142; Anonymous, *A Visit to Texas* (Austin, Tex.: The Steck Co., 1952), 208; Dewees, *Letters,* 136-137.

14. William Ransom Hogan, *The Texas Republic: A Social and Economic History* (1946; Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1969), 162.

15. Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 94, 103, 105; Jodella D. Kite, "A Social History of the Anglo-American Colonies in Mexican Texas, 1821-1835" (Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1990), 155-160.

16. 'The Whartons of Old Brazoria," Guy Morrison Bryan Papers, Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, Center for American Studies, University of Texas, Austin, Texas; James D. Carter, "Freemasonry and Texas History," *Soutbwestem History Quarterly* 56 (January 1953): 400-406; Hatcher, *Letters,* 115; George R. Nielsen, ed., "Lydia Ann McHenry and Revolutionary Texas," *Southwestern Historical Association* 74 (January 1971): 395; J.H. Kuykendall, "Reminiscences of Early Texans, III," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 7 (July 1903): 52; George Bernard Erath, *The Memoirs of Major George B. Erath, 1813-1891* (Waco, Tex.: Heritage Society of Waco, 1956), 18; Davis, ed., *Travis Diary, 53;* Dilue Rose Harris, "The Reminiscences of Mrs. Dilue Rose Harris, I," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 4 (October 1900): 99, 102, 104; [Joshua James], *Journal of a Tour in Texas* (n.c.:Wilmington Emigration Society, 1835), 5.

17. King, ed., *Victorian Lady,* 27, 33-34, 44-45, 52, 61-62, Harris, "Reminiscences," 102-104, 110-111, 122-126; Henry Austin to Mary Austin Holley, September 10, 1835, Eugene C. Barker, ed., *The Austin Papers* (3 vols.; Vols. I, Il, Washington, D. C., 1924-1928; Vol. III, Austin, 1927), III, 120; Invitation to a Dinner and Ball, July 19, 1832, in Robert Bruce Blake, Research Collection and Supplement, 93 vols., Special Collections, Steen Library, Vol. XIII, Book G, 54; Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 74, 90, 93-94, 105,111; J.P. Bryan, ed., *Mary Austin Holley: The Texas Diary, 1835-1838* (Austin,Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1965), 27; John Huff to John W. Moore, June 22, 1829, Samuel May

Williams Papers, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas; Ammon Underwood journal, Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, Center for American Studies, University of Texas, Austin; *Texas Republican,* February 14, 1835; Hogan, *Texas Republic,* 114-115. Generally, slaves viewed Fourth of July celebrations with mixed emotions because, although it often meant a holiday from field work, they considered slaveholders' festivities in honor of liberty and freedom to be hypocritical See Leonard Sweet, "The Fourth of JuIy and Black Americans in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Negro History* 61 (July 1976): 256-275.

18. Harris, "Reminiscences," 110. A clevis and pin were used at the end of a cart tongue or plough beam to attach the trace chains or tugs of a team.
19. Harris, 'Reminiscences," 102; Mary A. Polley Baylor Reminiscences, Barker Center; Gilbert Chase, *America's Music: From the Pilgrims to the Present,* 3rd rev. ed. (Urbana, III.: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 192-195; Hatcher, *Letters,* 29, 91.
20. Smithwick, *EvoIution,* 49.
21. Smithwick, *Evolution,* 55.
22. Smithwick, *Evolution,* 54-55; "More Ballads and Songs of the Frontier Folk," by J. Frank Dobie in J. Frank Dobie, ed., *Follow de Drinkin' Gou'd* (Dallas, Tex.: Southern Methodist University Press, 1965), 155-159.
23. Smithwick, *Evolution,* 28.
24. See David K. Wiggins, "Sport and Popular Pastimes: Shadow of the Slavequarter," in *Sport in America: From Wicked Amusement to National Obsession,* ed. David K. Wiggins (Champaign, III.: Human Kinetics, 1995), 51-68, for an account of American slaves' leisure activities that would be roughly equivalent to those of slaves in colonial Texas. The ambiguous legal status of chattel slavery in Mexican Texas meant that references to slave activities are minimal, although they are sometimes mentioned when connected to whites' amusements.
25. Rosa Kleberg, "Some of My Early Experiences in Texas," *Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 1 (1897-1898): 298; Lota M. Spell, *Music in Texas: A Survey of One Aspect of Cultural Progress* (Austin, 1936), n.p., 34; Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 93; Hatcher, *Letters, 29; Smithwick, Evolution,* 25-28, 49; Day Book of Frost Thorn; Hogan, *Texas Republic,* 182; Harris, "Reminiscences," 103, 123, Chase, *America's Music,* 61. Several sources mention the playing of a clevis and pin for keeping the beat. At least three professional musicians lived in Nacogdoches in 1835. One violinist, José Thomas, was the son of the free black Maria Nieves and a white man. Besides these three musicians, others in Nacogdoches were paid for playing at dances. See Census Report of Nacogdoches, 1835, in Carmela Leal, *Translations of Statistical and Census Reports of Texas, 1782-1836, and Sources Documenting the Black in Texas 1603-1803* (San Antonio, Tex.: Institute of Texan Cultures, 1979), Roll 3; Day Book of Frost Thorn; Account [1829], in Blake, Vol. XII, Book E, 94. Masters used slaves as both laborers and performers. Slaves acting as entertainers for whites' amusement created one of the few mutual meeting places for the two cultures. Masters allowed slaves to throng together for singing and dancing, for they were not seen as threatening in those contexts. See Roger D. Abrahams, *Singing the Master: The Emergence of African American Culture in the Plantation South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).
26. King, ed., *Victorian Lady,* 27, 33-34, 44-45, 52, 61-62; Harris, "Reminiscences," 102-104, 110-11, 122-126; Henry Austin to Mary Austin Holley, September 10, 1835, in Barker, ed., *Austin Papers,* III, 120; Invitation to a Dinner and Ball, July 19, 1832, in Blake, Vol. XIII, Book G, *54;* Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 74, 90, 93-94, 105, 111; Bryan, ed., *Holley Diary,* 27; John Huff to John W. Moore, June 22, 1829, Williams Papers; Ammon Underwood journal; *Texas Republican,* February 14, 1835; Hogan, *Texas Republic,* 114-115.
27. Ethel Mary Franklin, ed., 'Memoirs of Mrs. Annie P. Harris," *Southwestern Historical Association* 40 (January 1937): 240; Harris, "Reminiscences," 103, 110, 126; Ammon Underwood journal.

28. Smithwick, *Evolution,* 25. A puncheon floor was made by splitting logs in half and placing the flat side up to fashion the floor.

29. Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record,* 15-55. Although dealing with a different time period and setting, Roberta J. Park discusses the athletic, physical nature of dancing in Park, "From 'Genteel Diversions'" in Costa and Guthrie, eds., *Women and Sport,* 34.

30. McReynolds, "Family Life," 223-225; Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 168; William Physick Zuber, *My Eighty Years in Texas* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1971), 23; Anonymous, *Visit,* 217, Minutes of the *ayuntamiento* of Nacogdoches, May 28, 1835, in Blake, Vol. XXII, 233; Taxes paid for dances, 1830-1834, in Blake, Vol. XII, Book F, 10.

31. Franklin, ed., "Annie Harris," 239-240; Harris, 'Reminiscences," 103, 114-115.

32. Smithwick, *Evolution,* 44-45, 49; Duncan W. Robinson, *Judge Robert McAlpin Williamson: Texas' Three-Legged Willie* (Austin, Tex: Texas State Historical Association, 1948), 23-26.

33. Anthony R. Clarke to Stephen E. Austin, January 2, 1825, in Barker, ed., *Austin Papers,* II, pt. 2, 1010; Article of Agreement, September 12, 1834, Edwards Papers, Special Collections, Steen Library Parker, *Trip,* 214-215; *Texas Republican,* July 1834, October 25, 1834, November 1, 1834, December 13, 1834, January 3, 1835, April 11[?], 1835, May 2, 1835; Receipt, Lyons &Watson to George Brewer, January 20, 1831, Brewer Family Papers; Account of George Brewer with Joshua E. Martin, 1834-1836, Brewer Family Papers; Bill, Steamboat *Bravo* to Col. [Monroe?] Edwards, January 25, 1833, Edwards Papers; Day Book of Frost Thorne; Smithwick, *Evolution,* 48; Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 91; King, ed., *Victorian Lady,* 72-73.

34. Smithwick, *Evolution,* 47.

35. *Texas Republican,* March 14, 1835.

36. Eugene C. Barker, *The Life of Stepben F. Austin, Founder of Texas 1793-1836* (Austin, Tex.: Texas State Historical Association, 1949), 135; Minutes of the *ayuntamiento* of Nacogdoches, January 9, 1831, in Blake, Vol. XXII, 2-3; Minutes of the *ayuntamiento* of Nacogdoches, January 10, 1835, in Blake, Vol. XXII, 217; Barker, "Government of Austin's Colony," 249.

37. David B. Edwards, *Tbe History of Texas* (Austin, Tex.: Pemberton Press, 1967), 80; Frank W. Johnson, *A History of Texas and Texans,* Eugene C. Barker and Ernest W. Winkler, eds., (5 vols.; Chicago and New York American Historical Society, 1914), 1: 151; McReynolds, "Family Life," 223.

38. Barker, *Life of Austin,* 135; Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 89, 112, 128, 130-131, 137, 168; George Pollitt to Leonard Duboy, August 2, 1829, in Blake, Vol. XII, Book E, 168. Travis bet a pair of boots that Williamson would win the alcalde election. He later let the loser off the hook George Pollitt won from Leonard Duboy six barrels of flour, a very valuable commodity in the virtually wheatless colonies.

39. Hogan, *Texas Republic,* 128; Barker, "Government of Austin's Colony," 249; Minutes of *the ayuntamiento* of Nacogdoches, January 9, 1831, in Blake, Vol. XXII, 2-3; Minutes of *the ayuntamiento* of Nacogdoches, January 10, 1835, in Blake, Vol. XXII, 216-217; Minutes of the *ayuntamiento* of Nacogdoches, May 28, 1835, in Blake, Vol. XXII, 234.

40. Smithwick, *Evolution,* 51-52.

41. Anonymous, *Visit,* 217; Parker, *Trip,* 209, 212; King, ed., *Victorian Lady,* 46; Hogan, *Texas Republic,* 128.

42. Parker, *Trip,* 214.

43. George L. Crocket, "Phillip A. Sublett" in Blake, Vol. LXII, 370; *Texas Republican,* July 5, 1834; *Texas Republican,* October 25, 1834; Day Book of Frost Thorne; Account of George Brewer with Jesse [Alford], 1832-1834, Brewer Family Papers; Order from George Robinson to [John W.] Moore, June 9, 1829, Williams Papers.

44. Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 11, 15, 42, 50, 68-69, 91; Johnson, *Texas and Texans,* 1: 151-152; Smithwick, *Evolution,* 51; Robert K. DeArment, *Knights of the Green Cloth* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 395-396; Herbert Asbury, *Sucker's Progress: An Informal History of Gambling in American from the Colonies to Canfield* (New York Dodd, Mead & Co., 1938), 50-56. Asbury states that he found no published use of the term "poker" rather than the French *"poque"* until 1836. Travis referred to playing "poker" in his diary of 1833 to 1835 on several occasions. Casinos rarely include faro now because of the difficulty for the house to make a profit honestly.

45. Davis, ed., *Travis Diary,* 14-15, 53, 74, 110, 123; Asbury, *Sucker's Progress,* 3-19; DeArment, *Knights,* 395; Richard Sasuly, *Bookers and Bettors: Two Hundred Years of Gambling* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982), 67; Parker, *Trip,* 150-154; McReynolds, "Family Life," *225;* Hogan, *Texas Republic,* 128; *Texas Republican,* July 5, 1834, October 25, 1834, April 11[?], 1835, June 27, 1835, September 26, 1835.

46. Parker, *Trip,* 213.

47. Edwards, *History of Texas,* 78-79, 179.

48. For the connection between such stereotypes of Hispanics and the Black Legend, see David J. Weber, "'Scarce More than Apes': Historical Roots of Anglo American Stereotypes of Mexicans in the Border Region," in David J. Weber, ed., *New Spain's Far Northern Frontier: Essays on Spain in the American West, 1540-1821* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 180-197. One example for the American South is David Bertelson, *The Lazy South* (New York Oxford University Press, 1967).

49. Parker, *Trip,* 208-210; Edwards, *History of Texas,* 178-179; Baylor Reminiscences.

50. Anonymous, *Visit,* 214.

51. Anonymous, *Visit,* 181, 214-215; Nathaniel Townsend to Father, August 22, 1830, Townsend Papers, Barker Center, Mark E. Nackman, *A Nation within a Nation: The Rise of Texas Nationalism* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975), 12.

52. Elliott Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review* 90 (February 1985): 18-43.

53. Among the several critical, unflattering observers of Mexican Texas culture, not one reported the rough-and-tumble fighting of the nature described by Gorn.

54. The dual themes of lawlessness and violence pervade the writing on both the American frontier and the antebellum South. W. Eugene Hollon, in *Frontier Violence, argues* that frontier lawlessness resulted from, rather than caused, a violent American society. John Hope Franklin, in *The Militant South,* blames the issue of race and African slavery for producing a violent South. Dickson Bruce sees "passion" as the driving force behind southern actions. Bertram Wyatt-Brown in *Southern Honor* points out that a notion of honor affected all aspects of ethics and behavior in the Old South.

    As defined by Wyatt-Brown, honor was a combination of self-esteem, the public image of that self-esteem, and the assessment of that image by the community; in other words, honor meant reputation and belonging within the order of society. If self-worth was calculated according to the perception of integrity by others, a besmirchment of character in public did not constitute a trifling matter. The law could change to fit circumstances; honor could not. Rather than being solely an individual matter, community mores maintained the hierarchical nature of honor. Criminal justice, therefore, was a neighborhood function. A faulty legal apparatus and lack of judicial facilities only compounded the potential for extralegal procedures practiced by a community. Communities controlled societal behavior through gossip, ostracism, derision, and vigilantism. Thus, honor prevented as well as caused violence in Southern society. See W. Eugene Hollon, *Frontier Violence: Another Look* (New York Oxford University Press, 1974), 9-10; John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800-1861* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1956), 33-61; Dickson D. Bruce, *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1979), 8-13; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New* York Oxford University Press, 1982), 14, 362-366, 447.