

Texas Political Culture

Shaping Culture: The Economy

Just as historical experience shapes culture and politics, so does the economy. Texas culture and politics have been strongly influenced by the original economic reliance on agriculture and natural resources. Farming and ranching, particularly the cattle industry, have played an important role in Texas history and political culture. But beyond the cowboy lore of campfires and trail drives, an economy dominated first by cotton and later by oil shaped Texas political culture to its core.

In the 19th century, cotton was king. The cotton economy rested on the shoulders of African-American labor in east and central Texas, while in south Texas and the High Plains Mexican-Americans harvested the fields, shaping race relations in Texas. Texas political culture developed in concert with traditional values that would preserve the unequal distribution of power between Anglo landowners, poor Anglo tenant farmers, and African- and Mexican-American workers. Dominated by wealthy landowners, an economy focused on a cash crop grown for export created limited demand for government services apart from the railroad required to transport the crop to market.

In 1901 oil was discovered near Beaumont, and in 1930 a massive field was discovered in east Texas. Texas became the world's leading oil producer. As the century progressed, oil and natural gas became the state's dominant industry. Gushing oil fueled the state's pioneer spirit, as roughneck laborers left home to work the fields and independent explorers, known as wildcatters, struck black gold. The wildcatters' story both exemplifies Texas political culture and highlights the tensions within it. On the one hand, wildcatters personify the belief that if government would just get out of the way, wealth would accrue to the deserving and the benefits would trickle down to the rest of society. On the other hand, wildcatters also believed that large eastern oil companies, such as Standard Oil Company, had to be kept out of Texas oil fields. They believed it was the state government's responsibility to ensure the rules benefited wildcatters, not large corporations. More generally, by grabbing a large share of state revenue from oil production taxes, the state government was able to finance itself without imposing heavy tax burdens on individuals and small businesses. Also, the wealth of natural resources in Texas softened the blow during economic crises such as the Great Depression, and

consequently weakened pressure for government economic intervention that gained more traction elsewhere.

Economic Regions of Texas

Once a land of cattle, cotton, and oil, Texas now boasts a highly diversified economy that is well integrated with the national and global markets. This activity illustrates the dynamic and complex economy of the Lone Star State.

Interactive Activity: Economic Regions of Texas

Illustrates Texas' diverse economy. Texas map is divided into twelve economic regions and identifies the main economic activity for each region. For example, the economic activity of the South Texas Border region is agriculture and manufacturing while the Capital region is home to many high-tech companies.

Additional Resources

Websites

[The Texas Economy](http://www.thetexaseconomy.org/)

<http://www.thetexaseconomy.org/>

Maintained by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, this website provides the latest news, trends, and analysis on issues affecting the state's economy. The "Comptroller's Weekly Economic Outlook" highlights changes in key Texas economic indicators including jobs, housing, consumer confidence, and tax collections.

[Economic Development and Tourism, Office of the Governor](http://governor.state.tx.us/ecodev/business_research/)

http://governor.state.tx.us/ecodev/business_research/

This state agency pursues business expansion and relocation prospects with the goal of developing job creation and export opportunities for Texas. The website contains in-depth analysis of key Texas industries, a searchable database of thousands of foreign companies with operations in Texas, and more than 3,000 links to primary data sources covering economic, demographic, and industry data.