

Dates and Definitions for Major Eras in Texas History

(as outlined in the TEKS effective fall 2011)

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) effective in fall 2011, state the following:

“The student is expected to identify the major eras in Texas history, describe their defining characteristics, and explain why historians divide the past into eras, including Natural Texas and its People; Age of Contact; Spanish Colonial; Mexican National; Revolution and Republic; Early Statehood; Texas in the Civil War and Reconstruction; Cotton, Cattle and Railroads; Age of Oil; Texas in the Great Depression and World War II; Civil Rights and Conservatism; and Contemporary Texas;”

To aid in this task, the Texas State Historical Association has created the following material to assist teachers and students:

Why do historians divide the past into eras?

Historians apply periodization to historical events to create blocks of time that have similar characteristics in order to organize and present information about the past. The periods may be based on chronologic, geographic, or cultural distinctions and often overlap with one another. Debate often exists about when a given period begins and ends, which is a healthy aspect of the academic study of complex events.

Eras as designated in the TEKS:

Natural Texas and Its People (Prehistory-1528)-This era basically constitutes all of pre-history up to the point of contact with Europeans in 1528. This includes natural geologic history as well as what is known about American Indians from the archeological record.

Age of Contact (1528-1690)-This era deals with the interaction between European explorers and American Indians from the point of first contact in 1528 until the first efforts at establishing a permanent Spanish presence through missions in 1682 and 1690. This includes the encounters of Cabeza de Vaca and the numerous expeditions over the next 150 years that defined what the Europeans and American Indians understood about each other and Texas.

Spanish Colonial (1690-1821)-This era deals with the efforts of Spain to bring Texas under Spanish control and retain it from the establishment of the first missions and military posts in 1682 and 1690, through civilian settlement efforts, and culminating in the eventual loss of control with the establishment of the Republic of Mexico in 1821. This includes the establishment of missions, towns, ranches, and military posts in South, Central and East Texas, and the efforts of others to challenge Spanish authority over the region including, American Indians, France, the United States, and Tejanos.

Mexican National (1821-1836)-This era deals with efforts of Mexico to populate and retain Texas from the formation of the Republic of Mexico in 1821 through the Texas Revolution in 1836. This includes the development of Anglo and Mexican settlement, the establishment of local government institutions, and the events that led to the Texas Revolution.

Revolution and Republic (1835-1845)-This era deals with the Texas revolt against Mexican rule which began in 1835, the establishment and affairs of an independent Republic of Texas, and the eventual annexation of

Texas by the United States in 1845. This includes overlap with the Mexican national period in discussing the causes of the revolution, the events of the revolution, the issues facing the new Republic, and its decision to join the United States.

Early Statehood (1845-1861)-This era deals with the impact of Texas annexation in 1845 until its efforts to secede from the United States in 1861. This includes the Mexican War, resolution of the Texas boundary dispute as part of the Compromise of 1850, significant population and economic growth from immigration to Texas, and the involvement of the U.S. Army in frontier defense.

Civil War and Reconstruction (1861-1874)-This era deals with the reasons for seceding from the United States in 1861, the impact of the ensuing war, and the resulting efforts to reshape Texas following the war by the military, federal, and state governments. This includes the issues brought about by the growth of slavery in Texas, the individuals and events which demonstrate the social, political, and economic impact of the Civil War on Texas, and the events and actions that constituted efforts to reconstruct Texas following the war.

Cotton, Cattle and Railroads (1865-1900)-This era deals with the return to cotton driven agriculture after the Civil war in 1865, the rise of cattle during and after reconstruction, the development of railroads and the effects that the different enterprises had on each other and on life in Texas until the turn of the century. This includes systems utilized to return these industries to growth, the impact of expansion into West Texas, particularly on the remaining independent Indian peoples, and the various reform movements that resulted from the interactions.

Age of Oil (1894-1935)-This era deals with the vast range of oil discoveries beginning with Corsicana in 1894 through the East Texas Field development by 1935 and the impact that such discoveries had on the social, political, and economic development of Texas and the world. This includes major discoveries at Spindletop, the growth of Texas economic and political influence due to oil, the impact of the Mexican Revolution on Mexican immigration to Texas, the role of Texas and Texans in WWI, and the effects that oil revenue had on Texas society.

Texas in the Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)-This era deals with the effects of the Great Depression on Texas beginning in 1929 through to the role Texas and Texans played in WWII. This includes the efforts to improve the Texas economy, the impact of the Dust Bowl, and the economic and social changes brought about by WWII efforts, especially the role of the federal government in growing the Texas wartime economy.

Civil Rights and Conservatism (1945-1980)-This era deals with the movements for social change and equality that began after WWII in 1945 and continued into the 1970s as well as the political shift away from Texans' long-held allegiance to the Democratic Party, which became more liberal after World War II, to support for the increasingly conservative Republican Party by 1980. This includes efforts by Hispanics and African Americans to have equal access and treatment, the effects of national and state political controversies, and interdependence of the Texas economy with the nation and world.

Contemporary Texas (1980-Present)-This era deals with the events and issues facing Texans from 1980 to present. This includes the role of Texas politically and economically, the impact of recent conflicts on Texas, and the issues facing Texas in the present and future.