

Would today's GOP back Sam Houston?

Contributed by Will Lutz
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Most Americans know about the brave group of Texans who met 176 years ago on March 2 at Washington-on-the-Brazos to demand their God-given freedoms from a despot named Santa Anna, who was almost as unpopular in Mexico as in Texas.

But on college campuses nationwide, students learn a different narrative. They have to sit through diatribes on so-called institutional racism. If Sam Houston is discussed at all, he is portrayed in a negative light, with the manifest destiny and/or Texas Independence usually dismissed and discussed mainly in racial terms. Now -- in the 21st Century -- we're in a fight for the heart and soul of the next generation. Will Texas Republicans stand up for the values of Sam Houston, or will decide meekly not to rock the boat, passively giving away what William Barret Travis and Davy Crockett died to protect? Two decades ago, the University of Texas at Austin used to sponsor a festive celebration of Texas Independence. Then, in 1994, when I was a student, a left-wing group known as MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán) protested and tried to shout down the celebration. Then-President Robert Berdahl decided to cancel the March 2nd celebration on campus in 1995. (UT didn't cancel the March 2 fundraisers the Ex-Students Association holds statewide, however.) So the Young Conservatives of Texas exercised their First Amendment Rights and held the celebration themselves. After that, Berdahl brought back a watered-down on-campus celebration, largely so the administration could control the content. Berdahl thankfully left Texas in 1997 and accepted the chancellorship of an institution that better reflects his values -- the University of California - Berkeley. Since then, little has changed in the UT Tower. A few years ago, some UT professors tried to create a Program in Western Civilization and American Institutions. The campus left balked because the program portrayed Western Civilization and America in a positive light. UT President William Powers, Jr. supported the decision of his liberal arts dean, Randy Diehl, to cancel the program, replace it with a generic great books program, and remove the words "American" and "Western" from the center title. While not much changed in the Tower, a lot has changed down the street. Texans now have a governor, Rick Perry, who understands and will stand up for the values of Sam Houston. Working with the Texas Public Policy Foundation, he's leading a campaign to reform higher education, to deliver better value for Texans' hard-earned tax dollars. And several legislators objected to Diehl's attack on the Western Civilization Center, most notably Reps. Lois Kolkhorst of Washington County and Wayne Christian of Shelby County. Who shows up to fight governor Perry and TPPF? Robert Berdahl. After his retirement as Chancellor at Berkeley, Berdahl became president of the Association of American Universities. He wrote a nasty letter opposing higher education reform to then-Texas A&M System Chancellor Mike McKinney. This letter has been seized on by liberal Democrats in the Texas Legislature in their attacks on Perry. That's why the May 29 primary matters so much; it will determine what kind of Republicans will govern. For example, some Republican senators object to Senate Higher Education Chairwoman Judith Zaffirini's (D-Laredo) nonstop attacks on Perry, TPPF, and their conservative reform agenda, while others remain silent or tacitly support her misbehavior. Will Texas Republicans give more of Texans' money to the campus left or support efforts to turn UT into another Berkeley? Or will they -- as Sam Houston advocated -- "Do right and risk the consequences"? One day, I hope our state universities will once again honor and reflect the values of those who signed the Texas Declaration of Independence. Until then, I invite all Texans, as the Declaration says, to do something else out-of-style in academia. Let us "fearlessly and confidently commit the issue to the decision of the Supreme arbiter of the destinies of nations." Amen.