

## History is His Story

The Bible has several stories of women of ill-repute. For reasons we can only guess, Rahab, likely an important member of the cult prostitutes of Jericho, decided to throw in with the Israelites. She became the great grandmother of King David. Ruth, the Moabite, seduced (Well, is there a better word for it when you crawl under the blanket with a drunk man?) Boaz and became the grandmother of King David. Then, 9 generations earlier, there's that strange story of Tamar in Genesis 38. In a society that took pains for marital fidelity, these are almost embarrassing stories to be included in scripture. Their lesson: It doesn't matter what sordid life you've led or what morals you break, God desires sinners who turn to Him.

**Emily D. West**, a free woman of color from New York, signed an indentured servant contract with James Morgan to be his housekeeper in Galveston Bay, Texas in 1835. While West and other of Morgan's servants were in transit in 1836, the Mexican cavalry arrived in New Washington, Tejas, looting the town and seizing many of its inhabitants, along with the traveling servants. General Antonio López de Santa Anna then set fire to the town, killed many of its people, and West was forced to accompany the Mexican cavalry as they left New Washington.

Santa Anna was a brilliant military man. With 4000 soldiers he had come to put down a Texian rebellion with brutal force to scare the immigrants into submission or force them to leave. Texas had 30,000 Texians, mostly American immigrants and 7000 Tejanos, Mexican nationals. The Texians had agreed to become Catholic and be Mexican citizens, but when Santa Anna, the dictator, took away federalism thus abolishing the state of Tejas, as well as most human rights, they rebelled. Santa Anna's brother, Cos, had been installed as local military commander and was run out of the state. So Santa Anna also had vengeance on his mind when he massacred all those who surrendered at Alamo and Goliad. Sam Houston, with only 900 untrained militiamen could not engage the crack general so he retreated again and again in a game of hide and seek with the Mexican army. This drew heavy criticism from his men, but Houston had little choice. Santa Anna had such huge advantage that he split his forces into two armies. General Urrea took charge of the utter destruction of small Texian communities as Santa Anna pursued Houston. And under the Santa Anna tent was Emily West.

Now comes myth and speculation. Did Houston plan the battle at San Jacinto or did his men force his hand? Nor do we know the extent of Emily West's contribution to the demise of Santa Anna. (History Channel's *Texas Rising* is inaccurate in depicting her as his mistress—he already had another mistress.) What we do know is that another slave contacted Houston at San Jacinto River telling him that West was saying the time was ripe for counter attack. Urrea's troops had been marching for two days without sleep and were arriving. Likely Emily used another slave for her messenger. Santa Anna camped at a place that was grassy, but flanked by forest and swamp. An Englishman, William Bollaert, staying with Santa Anna's contingent wrote that "a Mulatta Girl [Emily] belonging to Col. Morgan was closeted in the tent with G'l Santana." Whatever the extent of her dalliance, the Texans under Houston attacked over a grassy knoll hidden in tall grass and trees. In 18 minutes they overwhelmed the drunk and sleepy camp (April 21, 1836). In two hours occurred one of the most one-sided victories in history, 300 Mexicans were killed, 1650 captured, while 11 Texians died. Houston was wounded. Santa Anna retreated to the swamp and tried desperately to direct soldiers having 3 horses shot out from under him. Hastily he put on a corporal's uniform but was rounded up and exposed inadvertently by the Mexican soldiers. In the end, Emily West held his custom firearm, having shot at him and missed. Bargaining for his life amid the vengeful Texans, Santa Anna wrote a letter telling all Mexican authorities to leave Tejas. Then he was taken into custody to Washington, DC, where he had to guarantee Texas independence. US ambassador Joel Poinsett (who we remember as the importer of a flower of Mexico we love at Christmas) said to Santa Anna, "you have gotten what you deserve." Santa Anna returned to Mexico to find out that he was no longer recognized as Presidente and Mexico didn't accept his surrender of Texas. But with USA's protection, they were powerless. Santa Anna went on to take control of the Mexican government 4 more times as a dictatorial President, but the people grew tired of him and exiled him 3 times. Interestingly he was a wealthy planter and the first to introduce chicle to the USA, the base for chewing gum.

Houston went on to become the President of the Republic of Texas and then Governor of the state. He was anti-slavery, and wanted to stay out of the Civil War, but was removed forcibly from office by Confederates. In 1863 there were only 4 people at his funeral. 2 years later, Texans mourned that they should have listened to him.

Emily's notification to Houston surely ranks as one the most successful espionage events in our history. In Tejas, she went under the surname of Morgan as most slaves did even though she was free.

Morgan got her a passport and passage back to NY via his private yacht. A lot of legend began to surround her and a folk song arose to honor her around 1850, "The Yellow Rose of Texas". The song is written from the perspective of an African-American singer who refers to himself as a "darky," longing to return to "a yellow girl" (that is, light-skinned, or bi-racial women were nicknamed "high yeller".) Whatever the truth, Emily West lived until 1891, was an instrumental member of her church in Harlem and known as a particularly kind and charitable woman, a beloved Christian sister.