

**THE ISLAND THEY CALLED HOME:  
THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE KARANKAWA**

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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## ABSTRACT

The Island They Called Home:  
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### Literature Review

In the examination of primary source documents pertaining to the Karankawa of Galveston, there exists few sources. The literature is sparse and contains bias from the early Europeans who were first to discover the Texas Gulf Coast region. Taking this into consideration, the use of this literature must be cautious, I support theories with archaeological evidence or content analysis.

Early ethnographic observations recorded in the *Chronicle of the Narvaez Expedition* by Alvar Nunez Cabeza da Vaca (1528) paired with similar recounts by early French sailor Simars de Bellisle (1719) are primary sources of observations of pre-settler Texas Gulf Coast natives. These texts consider the life and societal structure the natives had prior to any major interruption by Europeans, therefore making these observations valuable to the determination of the key factors that may have led to the disappearance of the natives. Neither Ballisle nor de Vaca were murdered by the natives they encountered, their personal accounts, while different, ended in survival and a return to home unharmed. The accounts of these two men are the best ethnographic observations we have on the Karankawa. Even though de Vaca and Ballisle

occupied Galveston several hundred years apart, both reported a community of intelligent natives who faced many struggles from the harsh terrain they inhabited. This theme is consistent throughout texts up to 1821CE when Jean Lafitte clashed with the natives on Galveston as recorded by Lyle Saxon (1989). Taking into count the observations made by different parties spanning hundreds of years, observations such as a strong will to fight and the perseverance through tough conditions, all parties observed few indicators that would be evident of a declining native population. Concurrently, there exists few indicators that would suggest the natives were suffering from a disease or illness that would be a threat to their population, nor would they be easily overcome by poor weather or crop yield.

Literature exists beyond 1821CE, however, the narrative changes quickly. In 1821CE, land in the Texas Gulf Coast region is divided into separate tracts for Texas families, the execution of the settlement will be led by Empresario Stephen F. Austin. Upon arrival to the region, Austin meets with natives at the mouth of the Colorado River and exclaims in his journal the two sides “parting apparently good friends” (Austin 1821). This narrative quickly changes to one of a much different intent, Austin later declares “...there will be no way of subduing (the natives) but for extermination” (Austin 1821).

Scholars such as Dirk Moses (2008) and Ben Kiernan (2007) who study colonialism link the act of colonial settlement to genocide, suggesting there is inherently a relationship between the two. It is after 1823CE that the steepest decline of native population occurs, a campaign of native removal enacted by Austin, chases the indigenous people out of their homes and denies them sanctuary. Many are killed, and children are taken into slavery. In 1838 *a Houston Telegraph and Texas Register* states, “... the poor (Karankawa) appear humbled... by performing the most menial offices” and in the 1840s Phillip Power remembers “(the natives)

roamed the country either singly or in pairs begging for food” (Himmel 1999). Literature such as articles and written recollections further support the theory that the natives saw the worst causalities after the arrival of Texas Settlers, which correlates to Moses and Kiernan’s theory of settler genocide.

Spain would also make an attempt to assimilate the Karankawa people during an effort to colonize Tejas. The records left behind by the missions and Spanish government clearly outline the Spanish policy in which the Karankawa were treated under, which had many strong indicators of a peaceful attempt at cultural assimilation (Wolff 1969). Records describe events and engagements with the Karankawa during this time frame, however, no resolute reason has been given as to why today there exist no Texas Gulf Coast natives; even though, other tribes saw brutal removal policies in most of the United States and survived, the Texas Gulf Coast Native people did not. Currently there exists factors delaying the acquisition of more information: development of archaeological sites, misuse of archaeological material culture, no recognized living tribal members, and most importantly the lack of an indigenous narrative.

The literature supports that under Spanish policy the Karankawa were able to maintain cultural identity. Indicators in the literature suggest it isn’t until they are forced by the violent “extermination” policy set forth by Stephen F. Austin, that the native people of Galveston and the surrounding region would have to abandon their cultural heritage.

### **Thesis Statement**

This research focuses on the period of colonial settlement in modern day Texas during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this time frame indigenous people of Galveston saw increased pressure from settler movements. The political construct of borders enforced by Stephen F. Austin is the catalyst for a violent anti-native removal policy that alienates the indigenous people

known as the Karankawa. The extinction of indigenous people is an important topic in the field of colonial settler genocide. Renewed attention to the topic recently surfaced in Australia and Canada because of their cruel assimilation policies and Texas is no exception to such practices; particularly those aimed at the eradication of its indigenous populations. I analyze multiple causes for the extinction of the Karankawa alongside the policies set forth by Austin and Spain during the settlement of Texas. Austin's arrival positively correlates to the time frame in which the Karankawa began to experience the harshest treatment and living conditions that contributed to the deaths of many. I evaluate the archaeological findings to understand what the final years of life for the Karankawa were like and determine what role the arrival of Stephen F. Austin had on the extinction of the Karankawa.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three possible explanations will be reviewed as plausible causes for the disappearance of the Karankawa: Disease, Spanish Colonial Policy, and Stephen F. Austin's Colonial Policy. Using a method of content analysis of historical documents for keywords and phrases that show indicators that support or deny the above-mentioned causes, this research aims to measure the theories of extinction and ascertain a correlation to a possible cause for the disappearance of the Karankawa people of Galveston.

### **Project Description**

The Karankawa are extinct and left behind no written records, however, through research and content analysis of historical documents the missing narrative can be discovered and a clearer understanding of the events that lead to the extinction of the Karankawa people can be highlighted. To posit a possible cause, literature and archaeological records are used as sources of scholarly research in the search for indicators to support or deny possible variables.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

I use three variables to evaluate and obtain a clearer understanding of why the natives of Galveston disappeared. The Karankawa are historically known as being the tribe of indigenous people located on Galveston island, with boundaries extending much further into the main land. Scholars believe the term Karankawa could be a larger group of people who spoke the Karankawa language yet belonged to sub-tribes such as the coco. However, for this research the terms Karankawa, native and indigenous will refer to the native Americans who inhabited the Galveston Island region. The exact title of the people who lived in this region is outside of the scope of this paper and could be a source for future work.

A bioarcheological analysis of over 60 sets Karankawa remains was reviewed when assessing the likely hood of disease being a major contributor, as well as multiple sources of historic literature. The effect of Spanish colonial policy was closely recorded as observed in *The Karankawa Indians: Their Conflict with the White Man in Texas* (Wolff 1969). These records help make clearer observations as to the indigenous peoples lives during this time. When analyzing Austin's colonial policies regarding the natives of Galveston, I have reviewed multiple primary sources that referenced Austin's handling of the indigenous, to include his own personal journal which was kept in detail.

This research is intended to provide an alternate view on the possibility of why the Karankawa are labeled as "extinct" and is not considered exhaustive in all possible research areas as constraints exist that prevent this. However, I believe as though the theory presented is logically sound and supported in both the historical literature and archaeological records.

# CHAPTER I

## DISEASE

### Disease

During the time of settlement and exploration in the new world, many reports of diseases decimating indigenous groups have been recorded. For this reason, disease is considered an important variable that could perhaps have played a major part in the collapse of the Karankawa. In other regions of North America, native people were finding themselves growing ill after contacting European explorers, tradesmen and settlers. The immune system of the American native was not genetically adapted to combat old world illnesses like small pox. The apparent weakness to the illness seemed to run rampant through native societies that had encountered the Europeans.

Later, as exploration turned into violent raids and conquest against the native people, indigenous genetic weakness would be exploited. Settlers seeking to take land from indigenous populations would expose blankets and linens to individuals infected with small pox, then gift the contaminated blankets to the indigenous. It wouldn't take long before the sickness would run rampant through a tribe and render them helpless to an outsider invasion, which was the motive to begin with. Combine these two new threats for disease with the already present maladies, and disease stands the potential to significantly influence the population of Galveston.

The earliest observations of the Karankawa were made by Alvar Nunez Cabeza De Vaca (1528) and French sailor Simars de Bellisle (1719). De Vaca, a Spanish Captain who became marooned on the *Isle of Misfortune* (Galveston Island) writes a detailed account of his journeys with the Karankawa. This initial observation conducted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century is the base line I use

to understand what the Karankawa culture and society may have been like prior to major European influence. One hundred ninety-one years later, a French sailor by the name of Simars de Bellisle found himself also marooned in the Galveston Island area, he too would live to write about his experience with the indigenous people and provide further observations as to the state of the indigenous people post contact.

The accounts of De Vaca and Bellise serve as very important observations of the indigenous people during a critical time in history. As European explorers were contacting native groups, old world diseases were being spread throughout North America. Diseases that would have come from across the Atlantic and been transferred via ship to the shores of the Americas. The expedition lead by De Vaca consisted of three-hundred healthy, fighting men, and five barges that were in terrible condition. Sailing West, the barges carried its crew across the Gulf of Mexico with little food and water. De Vaca made multiple stops so his men could rest and forage for food or fresh water, however, they would be pushed back out to sea by aggressive native Americans. After a long journey of malnourishment, open exposure to the weather and harassment from the indigenous, two of the five barges would run ashore on what is believed to be the present-day Galveston Island of the Texas Gulf Coast. The island is recorded by De Vaca as “Malhado”, which means misfortune, named after the troubles he encountered while living on the isle. It is commonly accepted by historians and archaeologists that this island of Malhado is Galveston Island (De Vaca 1528).

In the initial days on Malhado, De Vaca would observe some alarming deaths not only within his crew of remaining men, but also in the indigenous population. De Vaca exclaims that of the eighty men who had arrived on the two barges, only fifteen had lived. The condition of the crew however had been one of very poor health prior to arriving to the island. Many of the crew

had been starving and dying of thirst, and at times were forced to drink sea water and cannibalize crew members to survive (De Vaca 1528). Weak and of poor health, it appears the once strong and able Spanish sailor's health was too poor to fight off any new pathogens they might encounter on Malhado. Shortly after the deaths of his men, De Vaca writes "...the Indians of the land were struck by a stomach disease that killed half of their people, and they believed it was we who were killing them..." (De Vaca). Initially it appears the sailor's misfortune had brought sickness to Malhado and killed half of the indigenous people there, this is the same observation the native people had at the time. Despite the indigenous peoples need to remove the potential cause of this rampant sickness, the Karankawa let the Spanish live and stay.

Understanding the seasonal food supply of the indigenous people, there exists the potential for other causes of this "stomach disease." Aside from underwater roots, tubers and fish, during the season when the indigenous stayed local to the Islands, oysters were often harvested from the tidal zones. Oysters, especially if not harvested correctly or during certain times of the year, can carry dangerous water-borne pathogens. Dangerous pathogens or foodborne illness can account for the quick onset "stomach disease" observed by De Vaca, however, there is no certainty. In a study published by the Texas State Historical Association, it is stated that "Several diagnoses have been made regarding the disease that felled the Indians of Malhado..." the study goes on to cite "Dean R. Snow and K.M. Lanphear... suggested that the disease was typhoid fever" (Tyler 2008). Other possible diseases mentioned was infectious dysentery and cholera (Tyler 2008).

Evaluation of the specific disease and its origin is extremely difficult given the artifacts and literature left behind. Short term diseases such as typhoid fever claim the infected persons life before any evidence of illness or lesions become present on the skeletal structure, making the

analysis of the “stomach disease” difficult, and mostly educated speculation. One major observation that was noted in Tyler’s analysis of the De Vaca encounter, was that the majority of infected had been members of the Spanish crew, and the indigenous population saw a less percentage of infected. This suggests that the Spanish were more susceptible to the illness than the indigenous, which leads to the assumption that the infectious disease originated in the new world, and the Spanish had little immunity to it. While inversely, the indigenous had been previously exposed to this infection, and had some immunity towards it, thus the Karankawa suffered less casualties than the Spanish (Tyler 2008).

Further evaluation of illness in the Galveston Island area shows the coastal native people, the Karankawa suffered a high rate of non-specific infections, with over 30% of adult tibiae showing evidence of periostitis, osteitis and osteomyelitis (Tyler 2008). This high rate of infection is common with working people who spend considerable time in one area and is correlated to standing water and poor hygiene, which were both common to the lifestyle of the Karankawa. Despite the “stomach illness”, one third of the population suffering infection and a difficult humid and mosquito laden environment, the Karankawa were observed as healthy and formidable. In the archaeological records of the Mitchell Ridge Site (41GV66) and the Caplan Mound (41GV1), noted in figure 1, bioarcheologists observed the Karankawa “to have enjoyed a very successful subsistence strategy... were well nourished” and “showed little evidence of nutritional stress” (Tyler 2008; Ricklis).

Given the archaeological and paleopathological data of the Karankawa, scientists agree that it is more likely the indigenous were suffering from a local pathogen related infection, and not an illness introduced by De Vaca and his men. The “stomach disease” observed by De Vaca is more likely a “new world” originating pathogen as opposed to the “old world” disease theory

that is common with first time contact between North American indigenous people and Europeans (Tyler 2008).

One hundred and ninety-one years later French Sailor Bellisle would arrive to the same region and record his observations during his stay with the Karankawa. Similarly, Bellisle would describe the same harsh living conditions as De Vaca. Simultaneously, Bellisle would describe a group of extremely resilient and hard-working men and women, an observation that is supported by the bioarcheological analysis of Mitchell Ridge and Caplan Mound (Tyler 2008). In 1723 the Karankawa and the Spanish clash along Matagorda Bay, disrupting the peace and initiating an assimilation effort by the Spanish to subdue the native people. Over the next one hundred years the Spanish would build 15 missions and attempt to convert the Karankawa to the Spanish way of life.

Spanish efforts to pacify the Karankawa and surrounding tribes failed by 1730, in which "...the Karankawa and other indian tribes of the Texas area had proven to be the principal obstacle..." (Wolff 1969). The assimilation efforts continued for some time, until 1806 when the Spanish decided to break down and consolidate some of the missions. Realizing that the number of indigenous people being converted was nil, and the assimilation efforts conducted by the Spanish missions was nothing more than a location for the Karankawa to get free food and shelter, the Spanish would close their final mission in 1830 (Wolff 1969). This period of Spanish occupation and the attempt at regional control was complicated by the inability to cooperate with the native people. Meanwhile, the Americans were trading with the indigenous and supplying firearms and other modern tools to assist in the resistance. Karankawa men and women would resist Spanish control for a whole century until finally winning a victory over Spanish efforts allowing the native gulf coast tribes to remain in their homes and retain their cultural identity.

Recorded efforts by the Spanish to assimilate the Karankawa are the best records in existence as to the societal structure and state of the Karankawa during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Historical accounts and observations made by the Spanish along the Texas Gulf Coast in the 18<sup>th</sup> century negatively correlate to the presence of any major outbreaks or infectious diseases that could have destroyed large numbers of indigenous people. Inversely, the accounts of the Spanish during the 18<sup>th</sup> century positively correlate with the same observation made by bioarcheologists, that being of a healthy and nourished group of people, with little to no evidence of widespread infection caused deaths (Tyler 2008; Wolff 1969).

In summary, nearly 300 years of recorded observations, conducted by multiple ethnic groups and containing different biases provides no substantial evidence to support the theory that the collapse and eventual extinction of the Karankawa is related to any type of illness, sickness, disease or malady. Historical accounts and archaeological evidence both support a negative correlation between disease and the disappearance of the Karankawa, therefore disease is not considered to be a contributing factor to the sharp decline of the indigenous population of Galveston.

## CHAPTER II

### SPANISH COLONIAL POLICY

#### Spanish Policy

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Texas Gulf Coast would see much attention. The Spanish, French and English were simultaneously exploring and claiming parts of the new world as their own. The Le Salle expedition would leave a French Fort in Matagorda Bay named Fort St. Louis. After clashes between the French settlers and the Karankawa, Fort St. Louis was attacked in 1687 by a band of Karankawa. The French occupants were killed, except for five men who were tattooed and taken as slaves. This would be the final attempt of the French to colonize the Texas Gulf Coast, and soon the Spanish would move to claim this region (Wolff 1969).

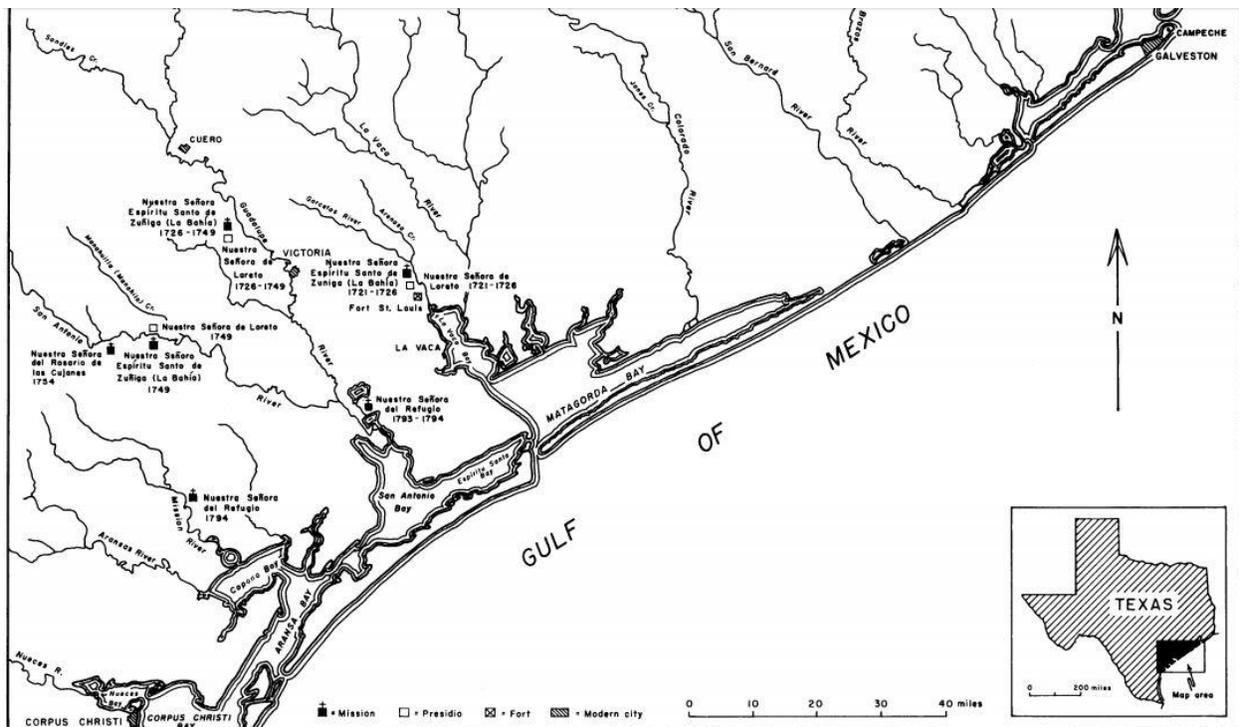


Figure 1: Map of Texas Gulf Coast, Spanish Missions  
From Thomas Wolff, *The Karankawa Indians: Their Conflict with the White Man in Texas*, pg. 5

Briefly, Spanish Captain Domingo Teran was leading a combined expedition into Texas to help strengthen the missions and Spanish interest in Texas. Captain Teran visited missions and observed the French presence in Texas in 1691 (Wolff 1969). At this time the Spanish had begun to invest in the colonization of Texas, leading with the construction of fourteen Spanish Missions along the rivers and bays of the Texas Gulf Coast. However, Captain Teran's expedition was poorly managed and the Captain and his men were forced to return home to New Spain. This brief period would establish missions in Texas, but the Spanish would see a lull in Texas activity until 1722.

The onset of the European war between France and Spain in 1719 would bring new interest to the colonies along the Texas Gulf Coast, specifically the weak French ones. Spanish explorers would see the French activity along Matagorda bay as a threat to the region and the development of Spanish colonies in the area. Spain would send Marques de Aguayo as “a symbol of renewed Spanish interest” (Wolff 1969) to the area, and on April 6, 1722 Aguayo's crew would establish the presidio of Nuestra Senora de Loreto in place of the ruined French Fort St. Louis. This would mark the beginning of a century of Spanish and indigenous relations.

Along the coast of Matagorda Bay, the Karankawa and neighboring tribes had clashed with the French, ultimately causing extreme difficulty in a French occupation of the Bay. However, the new Spanish presidio would show more promise. “It was seen that they [Karankawa] were very docile and would enter readily upon the world of cultivating the earth...” (Bolton 1906). This observation of the indigenous people would not last long, as the peaceful arrangement would see an end in 1723 when a skirmish between the Karankawa and presidial soldiers would break out and claim the life of explorer and Mission Captain Jose Domingo Ramon. After this altercation, the native people of the bay would return to their native homes and

remain hostile to the Spaniards. At times the Karankawa would return to apologize, seeking forgiveness for their acts against the Spanish, also food and supplies from the mission. This is noted as a continued pattern by Herbert Bolton in "*The Founding of Mission Roasario*" that continued for nearly twenty-five years.

Given the importance of the new colonies, Spanish General Pedro Rivera was commissioned to tour the Texas area and find means for cutting the cost of funding the new colony. It is quoted that General Pedro felt disdain for the native tribes of the region. His search for economic improvement would highlight the failed efforts of the missions, claiming the Karankawa and neighboring tribes would be unable to conform to the mission life, which would lead to the transfer of the mission and presidio. After General Rivera's visit to Texas, Spain would see the native people in a different light, a darker light. It is stated that it was at this junction that Spain saw the Karankawa and other indigenous tribes as the "principle obstacle" (Wolff 1969) in the way of Spanish advancement in Texas.

Jose de Escandon, Count of Sierra Gorda would be appointed as governor and representative of the Viceroy. Escandon's duty was to conquer Northern Mexico and some areas of Texas, to include regions of the Texas Gulf Coast. The intent of Escandon was made clear, and as stated in Bolton's writings on the missions, "the principal aim of Escabdons work of reorganization in the northern part of Nuevo Santandar was to subdue the insubordinate Karankawa tribes living along the coast..." (Wolff 1969). A new effort was put forward to bring the native people into Spanish missions and convert them to a Spanish life style. Fourteen mission settlements would be constructed and populated by settler families, not soldiers. It was thought the families would defend and care for the mission more diligently than a temporarily stationed soldier would.

For many years the native people near the missions were seen as taking advantage of Spain's good will. Karankawa were accused of simply visiting missions in times of need, or leaving at the first sign of argument, taking no real interest in conforming to the teachings of the Spanish missions. It is important to understand that currently dehumanization was already present in the Settler narrative towards the native people. Native Americans were viewed as uneducated, wretched, ugly and cannibalistic, this reputation would precede them no matter where they went. It is likely that despite the attempts of cooperation, the Karankawa could never feel welcome around the settlers or fulfill the expectations of the missions, as the indigenous could learn languages, customs and agriculture, but they could never be not native. Decades of disagreement would ensue between the missions and the Karankawa, periods of cooperation and strife would rise and fall. One mission worker reported in 1751, that since the man had arrived to work the mission in 1733, "...I have never heard that one of these Indians has attached himself to that mission" (Bolton 1915). In 1755 a new Spanish Mission was constructed along the San Antonio River; however, this mission would also see no success in converting the native people as reported by Father Juan de Dio Camberos in 1758 (Wolff 1969).

It is difficult to consider the effort required by the Karankawa to participate in Spain's efforts to pacify the indigenous without the use of military force. The Karankawa have been witnessing an invasion of their land, a disregard for their societal structure, and many acts of violence and hatred towards their people. Yet they were expected to relocate to missions, abandon their own lifestyle and adopt the one being taught to them, generally in French or Spanish; the missions never taught in a native tongue. Meanwhile, the people who did attempt to cooperate with the Spanish Missions would see extreme discontent and would be punished for minor events, such as dancing aboriginal dances at the mission. During times when Karankawa

would receive punishment for their conduct while living at the missions, the missionaries would see a decline in participation, as the Karankawa would abandon their homes near the mission and return to their native lands on the coastline. This lack of cooperation would continue until the missions ultimately fail (Kress 1931).

Spanish Captain, Luis Andry would receive orders in 1777 to conduct a geographical survey of Matagorda Bay. His ship would set sail across the Gulf of Mexico for the Texas Coast until arriving in the Bay of Espiritu Santo. It is at this location Captain Andry would run out of supplies and send five men ashore looking for aid. While the men were away, Andry and his crew were approached by two Karankawa men, who offered aid and information on the whereabouts of his crew who went ashore for aid. The Karankawa men would take three additional sailors with them, under the hospices of using their labor to acquire and transport more food back to Captain Andry and his crew, however, those three sailors were never seen again. The whole arrangement was viewed by the Spanish as a diversion, the Karankawa were waiting for more allies to arrive so they could raid the ship. The Karankawa would slay all the men to include the Captain and his son, as well as loot the Spanish ship for supplies and firearms (Wolff 1969).

After the Captain Andry event, Spain realized they had failed to assimilate or subdue the indigenous people of Texas. Recognizing that the Karankawa and neighboring tribes had much more ability to impede Spanish efforts than before, the Spanish would change their strategy for handling the indigenous. Several plans would be drafted to kill or capture the Karankawa, one plan involved a false shipwreck, where the Karankawa would be baited and arrested for their crimes against Spain. Another suggested plan was to sanction any trading between the Karankawa and other outside nations, quoted by the Spanish in 1778 “that would give them

encouragement when most decidedly they (the Karankawa) should be treated as an odious organization” (Wolff 1969). None of these plans were successfully executed.

By the mid-1780s Spain orders another inspection of the Texas Missions, this time overseen by Fray Jose Franscico Lopez. The reports did not look well, by 1785 Mission Rosario of Matagorda Bay was closed, claiming the Karankawa were easily swayed by “perverse Indians” to return to the coastal indigenous life, abandoning the mission (Wolff 1969). Despite the apparent failure of the missions, Spain still wanted to control the land, and the missionaries remained hopeful, so they established Mission Nuestra Senora del Refugio in the 1790’s. This mission “represented one of the last flickers of Spanish energy in the initiative of the northwestern Frontier of New Spain” (Dunn 1922).

By 1806 the difficult terrain, weather conditions and indigenous resistance was proving too problematic for Spain to maintain the presence they needed to be successful in controlling Texas land and its native inhabitants. Missions were merged together to cut back on expenses and allow for more focus in their efforts to assimilate the locals. By February 8, 1830 the last of the missions were secularized and made independent of the Spanish policy to control the region. The final order from Spain to merge and secularize the Missions would be the end of Spanish efforts to assimilate the Karankawa and other native tribes of the Texas Gulf Coast.

To quantify the effects Spanish missions had on the Karankawa population, I evaluate the records of the Missions and the men who worked with them. Assimilation policy and procedures were clearly present under Spanish efforts to colonize the region. Records support a positive correlation between the Spanish arrival and a massive assimilation effort that encouraged the abandonment of Karankawa culture. Inversely, all accounts show no indicators of the assimilation efforts to be successful, with little to no indigenous people being fully converted, or

adopting the mission way of life. While assimilation was a threat to the indigenous people for nearly a century, there exists no positive indicators showing Spain's colonial policy had a major effect on the population of the Karankawa. It is more likely that the policy, through missions, provided a supplementary means for food and sustainability during times of indigenous suffering possibly prolonging the Karankawas ability to remain in the region. This outside source of support likely supported Karankawa families and allowed the indigenous to maintain cultural identity while receiving aid. These indicators negatively correlate to Spain's colonial policy as being a major cause for a decline of Karankawa population and is not considered a major contributing factor to the deterioration and eventual extinction of the Karankawa.

## CHAPTER III

### COLONIAL POLICY UNDER STEPHEN F. AUSTIN

#### **Austin's Policy**

In 1820 Moses Austin would receive permission from the Spanish Governor to settle 300 tracts of land along the Tejas Gulf Coast (Texas). Moses Austin would pass away in 1821 and his son, Stephen F. Austin would inherit the land tracts and the responsibility of settling the 300 families in Tejas. Stephen F. Austin had experienced the “native problem” before arriving in Galveston, Austin made it his first order of business upon arrival to the barrier island to address the Karankawa. He would converse with community leaders of the Campeche settlement that was located on the east end of Galveston and locate the Karankawas region of occupation upon arrival. Stephen F. Austin et al. would make camp adjacent to the Karankawa campsite on Galveston in an attempt to bolster his presence and make known he would not be passive in dealing with the native people (Saxon 1989). Prior to Austin's arrival, literature supports that the inhabitants of the Campeche Settlement, ca.1819CE observed a strong indigenous presence, “hundreds of warriors in canoes” (Saxon 1989) and mostly cohabited on the island peacefully with the indigenous occupying the far western end of the island, while Campeche was located on the far eastern end.

Stephen F. Austin had full civil and military control until 1828CE, he drafted the *Instructions and Regulations for the Alcaldes* on January 22, 1824CE (Befiglio 1993). This early legislation would grant those Austin recognized as “civilized indians” a simple form of civil rights. This document would include multiple articles that would outline aspects of a judicial system and due process as well as basic human rights that were to be afforded to the indigenous

tribes of the region. The articles in some fashion represent a simple form of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*. For Austin and his newly developed Government, this would be a step in the right direction towards equality. In 1835, Austin creates the Committee of Vigilance and Correspondence made up of Austin, Wily Manin. William Pettus, Gale Borden, John H. Money, and Randal Jones, in which a resolution was issued that declared "the just and legal rights of the civilized indians should be protected" (Befiglio 1993).

This early civil policy set forth by Stephen F. Austin would be a strong indicator to a negative correlation between Austin's policy and the Karankawa extinction, however, Stephen F. Austin did not recognize all tribes as civilized. Therefore some indigenous groups were denied the protection that was afforded under the Instructions and Regulations for the Alcaldes and the Committee of Vigilance and Correspondence, specifically the Karankawa and native peoples of Galveston. Taken directly from a historical journal kept by Stephen F. Austin during his efforts to settle the Texas Gulf Coast, an entry dated September 17, 1821CE states:

*"These Indians and the Karanquas may be called universal enemies to man. They killed of all nations that came in their power, and frequently feast on the bodies of their victims. The [approach of] an American population will be the signal of their extermination for there will be no way of subduing them but extermination" (Austin 1821).*

This excerpt from Austin's journal is a primary source and irrefutable evidence that the rights of the Karankawa people of Galveston were not protected by neither the Instructions and Regulations for the Alcaldes or the Committee of Vigilance and Correspondence. This denial of basic human rights clearly marks a positive indicator that the Colonial Policy of Stephen F. Austin has a strong correlation to the decline of indigenous quality of life. Settlers under Stephen F. Austin would follow the guidance set forth by their new leader and perpetuate anti-Karankawa

views. It was even reported among Campeche (Galveston) settlement inhabitants that under Austins policy, business of the day was hunting the “redman” (Befiglio 1993; Saxon 1989).

The creation of a human rights policy for the indigenous, and the immediate denial of said rights to the Karankawa fueled a lawless campaign of native people removal. Soldiers and settlers alike would not hesitate to answer Karankawa presence with violence. Under Austin’s civil policies, violence could be conducted without fear of punishment. Karankawa children were kidnapped, woman would be raped and taken while the native men were offered no quarters and often attacked and killed on site. Often, basic infractions such as the theft would warrant a hunting party of colonials to band together and engage Karankawa at their homes and villages, killing innocent women and children along the way (Himmel 1999). Infractions such as these would further the dehumanization of the indigenous, which would continue to deny native people sanctuary as they tried to relocate under the new pressure as their ill seen reputation would precede them.

In 1824 Austin and a group of 90 men would pursue the fleeing native people as far south as the Mexican border and come full circle to Matagorda bay along the Texas Gulf Coast, this is where the final address of Austin and the Karankawa would be made. Seemingly broken, the indigenous people could run no longer and would seek sanctuary at the Spanish Mission, La Bahia. Orchestrated by the priest of the mission, Austin and Karankawa Chief Antonio would make a peace treaty, an agreement that would force the Karankawa to settle west of Lavaca river (Himmel 1999). This treaty would be renewed later in 1827, however, the defiant nature of the Karankawa would continue to cause issues as the native people refused recognize the agreement to remain west of the river.

The arrival of Stephen F. Austin in the year 1821CE and his civil and military actions against the Karankawa are observed in the literature as a strong indicator that his arrival correlates to a decline in native quality of life. Likewise, the denial of sanctuary and as outlined in chapter 3, the secondary and tertiary effects of a lack of nourishment and safety all correlate Austin's arrival to the steepest decline in Karankawa population. However, the lack of archaeological battle sites, war graves and bioarcheological trauma is a negative indicator that Austin's arrival is the main cause for the commonly accepted "extinct" status that has been given to the Karankawa. It is likely the native people were diligent enough to evade Austin's true intent of extermination, ultimately ending in a treaty that would offer the Karankawa a window of opportunity to find a new strategy for survival in the new Colonial era.

# CHAPTER IV

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

### Geoarchaeology

Two major occupational areas are known to exist in the archaeological record of Galveston Island. One being the Karankawa site 41GV5, Jamaica Beach, titled after the housing development that was being constructed when the site was first discovered. However, due to a lack of proper artifact handling and record keeping, this site offers little insight into the research topic. A second site, known as site 41GV66 or Mitchell Ridge, named after the geological feature on which it was found, offers extensive archaeological evidence for consideration in this research.

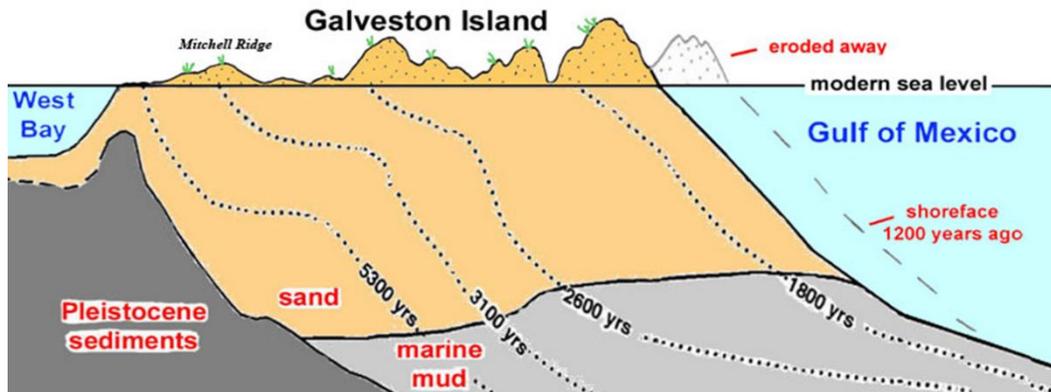


Figure 1: Geology of Galveston

From Ricklis, Robert A. *Aboriginal Life and Culture on the Upper Texas Coast: Archaeology at the Mitchell Ridge Site, 41GV66, Galveston Island*

Galveston island is a beach barrier island that began forming approximately 5300 years ago as the island began to grow seaward. However, we do not see Karankawa evidence in the archeological record until ca.84CE (Rickliss 1994). This late arrival is likely due to the immature

status of the island prior to the beginning of the common era. As an immature barrier island system and bay waters would not produce enough marine biological material to sustain long term occupation of the island. It isn't until the 14<sup>th</sup> century that we observe a major spike in occupational goods in the archaeological record. The Mitchell Ridge site is a large occupational site expanding over 500m in length along the bayside beach bar ridge, which provided two major components needed for sustainment on the barrier island, protection from adverse weather and flooding, as well as a fresh water lens that would produce a source of naturally replenished drinking water. In addition to these sites, a known naturally formed oyster reef that would grow on Pleistocene river levees inside the maturing Galveston bay would provide a shallow water crossing for the Karankawa to travel between the island and the main land, offering a means to travel, trade and hunt onto the mainland in which the natives originally migrated from.

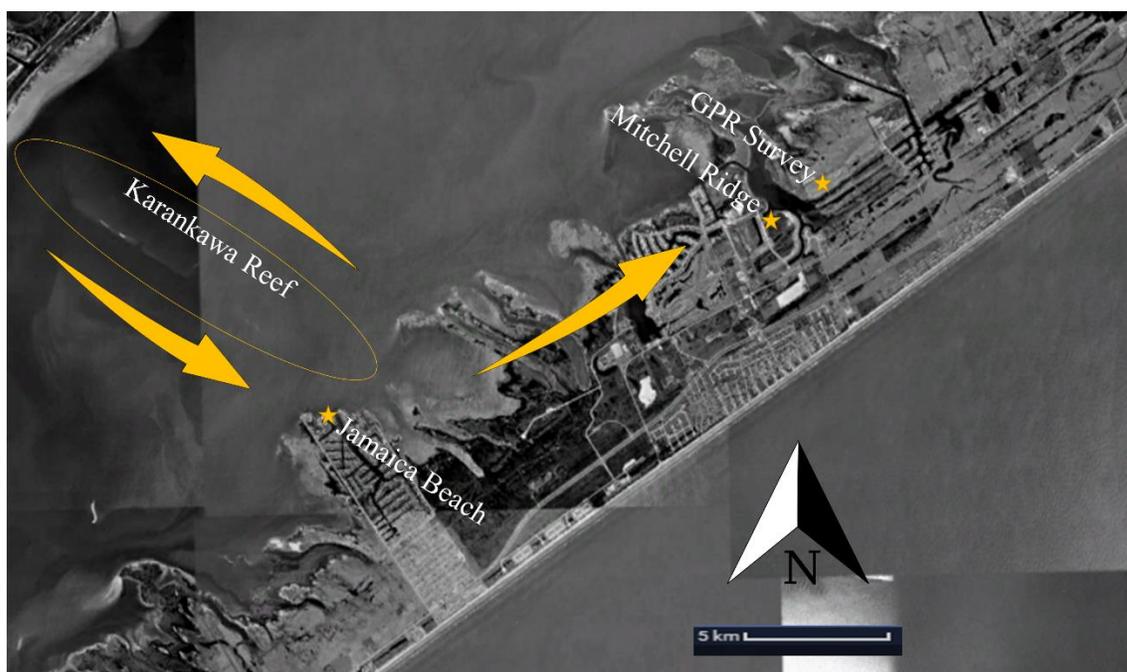


Figure 3: Galveston Features

Using Ground Penetrating Radar, a geophysical method that uses radar pulses to image the subsurface, I was able to survey a 140m by 30m section of land approx. 500m north-east of

the Mitchell Ridge site as noted in figure 2. This survey produced anomalous returns at transect 37 that are indicative of a major feature at approx. 80cm of depth, the same average depth of archaeological findings at site 41GV66. Likewise, the diameter of the site shows an approximate diameter of 20 to 30 meters, which is congruent with the dimensions of the major features located at 41GV66, such as hearths and working stations. Based on the anomaly found and its proximity to 41GV66, this possible site is potentially an unknown prehistoric occupational site belonging to the Karankawa people of Galveston and highlights the possibility that the Karankawa had a larger occupational footprint in Galveston than once thought.

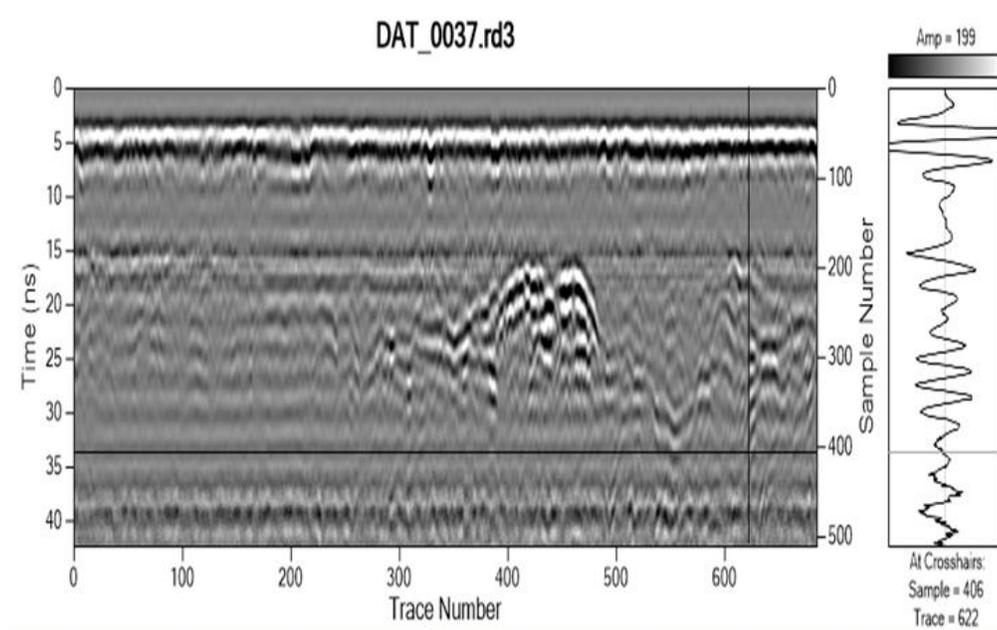


Figure 4: GPR Survey-Raw Data

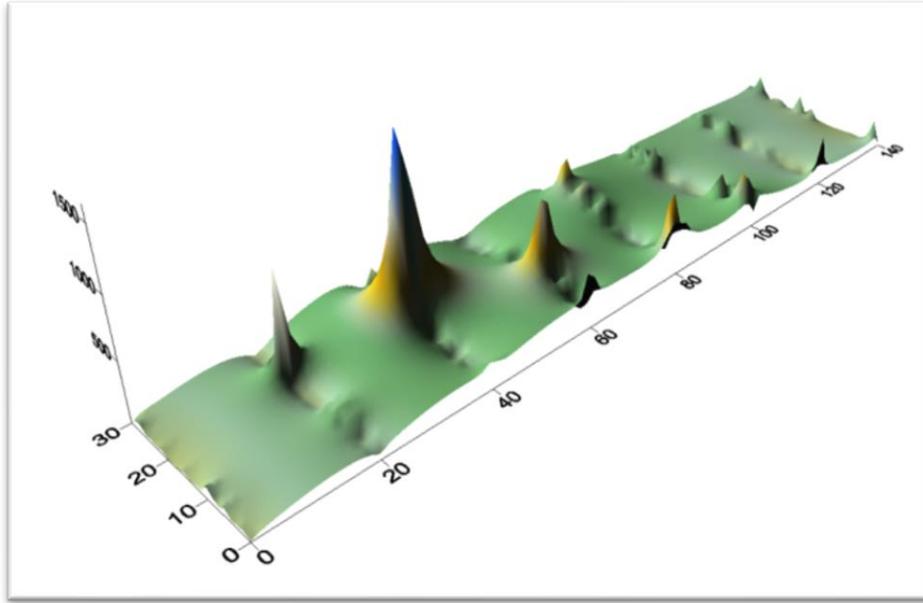


Figure 5: GPR Survey-3d Post Processing

The possibility of additional sites is an indicator that the population size and occupational setting is underestimated. This prospect could potentially highlight the difficulties Austin would have had in exterminating the native people of Galveston despite his use of a more developed military presence. The Karankawa reef and possible satellite camps, like the anomalous transect 37, could have provided the larger group of Karankawa with an early warning system and an evacuation route that Austin likely did not know existed at the time. Which is a negative correlation that Austin's violent campaign against the indigenous had a high rate of success, it is more than likely, the natives were able to escape undetected via the shallow water reef crossing to the West as highlighted in Figure 2, while Austin's forces approached from the East.

### **Bio-Archaeology**

Bio-archaeological analysis of grave sites do indicate a steep decline in native health and culture that correlates directly to the time in which Austin arrives. The archaeological record and an in-depth bioarcheological analysis conducted by Joseph F. Powell and Barry W. Baker of the

remains found at 41GV66, Mitchell Ridge shows strong indicators of typical new world diseases such as Syphilis, Non-specific infections and cancellous lesions. None of the indicators found in the bioarcheological analysis point to a catastrophic outbreak, likewise, the most recent literature pertaining to the Karankawa in the 1820's shows no correlation to the Karankawa population and disease. This is a negative indicator to the possibility that disease was a major cause for a population decline at the Mitchell Ridge site. While analyzing human remains from 41GV66, lesions and bone deformation caused by illness, trauma or malnourishment are less frequent in the prehistoric sample, whereas a higher frequency of skeletal change is observed in the historic samples, especially those dating 220+/- 2nd Sigma 1666CE (Rickliss 1994).

However, the margin of error on this date is large, and the actual date could be anywhere between 1511 and 1955CE. Historic remains generally showed signs of gracile bones, less than average microwear on the molars and malnourished maladies such as rickets, cribra orbitalia and porotic hyperstosis (Rickliss 1994). These maladies were found most often in indigenous remains where the cranium had European traits and suggests the affected individual showed signs of European influence. This is a weak correlation for contagious infectious diseases, however, a strong correlation to the negative effects colonialism had on the Karankawa, whereas some members of the community did not receive the nourishment that was so prevalent in years before Colonial occupation. Likewise, this increase in the frequency of malnourishment related indicators in the archaeological record has a weak correlation to the timeframe when Spain controlled the region, as the Missions provided supplemental housing and food. It is more likely these indicators arrived at the later date range, when Austin's policies denied the Karankawa sanctuary and sufficient land and food sources. A strong indicator and a positive correlation that Austin's policies were negatively affecting the survival rate of indigenous people on Galveston.

To better understand the findings of 41GV66 all radiocarbon dates taken from human remains at Karankawa internments were evaluated for frequency with respect to date. The analysis shows that there is a steep incline in Karankawa burials that correlate directly to the time frame in which Austin arrives, the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As shown in Figure 6, the date ranges 1755CE to 1955CE with a possible range of +/-70-90 years, shows that during those two centuries there were triple the amount of native remains interned at the Mitchell Ridge site. It is also possible the two date ranges have overlap due to the inaccuracy of the testing methods, and we could be seeing six times the internment rate as previously seen before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This data directly correlates to Austin’s arrival and is a strong indicator that Austin’s policies positively correlate to the decline of the Karankawa survival rate.

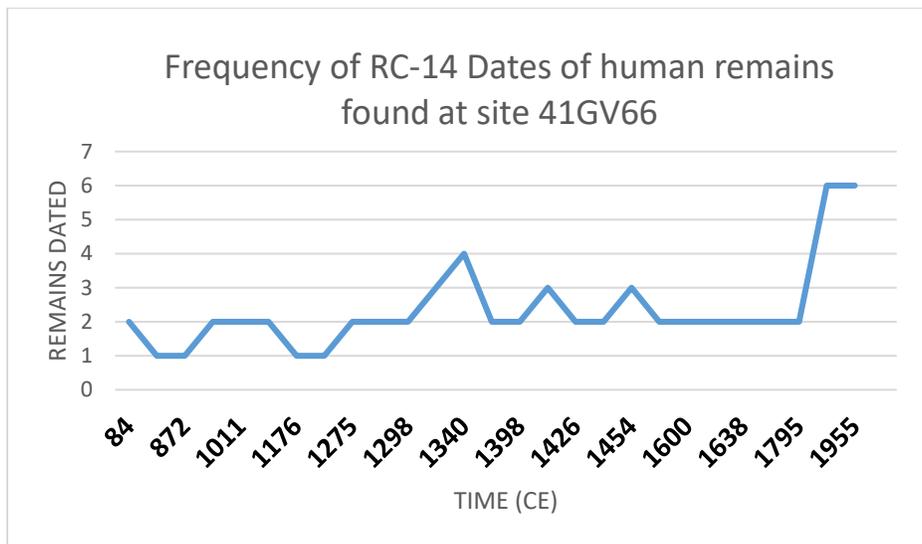


Figure 6: Karankawa Internment Frequency at 41GV66 Over Time

## CONCLUSION

The research supports a conglomerate of variables to explain the current “extinct” status commonly accepted for the Karankawa natives of Galveston. Spanish policy played a significant role in diluting Karankawa culture, despite the apparent victory the indigenous had over Spain's attempted assimilation policies, the effect of 100 years of institution would later return.

Karankawa people would later see a vast decline in their quality of life and the policies placed against them under the auspices of Stephen F. Austin. This decline would push the Karankawa to extreme measures, breaking the resilient spirit and prehistoric culture they retained for so long. Austin et al. would violently campaign against the Karankawa, devastating the family life and endangering all members of their community. The inherent danger pressed upon the Karankawa families forced the native people to flee their home lands in search of sanctuary.

After attempting to flee for several years, Austin's effective pursuit would push the Galveston natives as far south as the Mexican border and back up to Matagorda bay where the Spanish missionaries would offer asylum. It is after this arranged treaty between the native people and Austin that the Karankawa failed to maintain cultural identity as a group. While human remains, and burial pits found at 41GV66 show signs of violence, group burials and the destruction of native villages and culture, the count of dead is minimal compared to the likely number of indigenous people who occupied the region. Likewise, other reports of clashes between Texas Settlers and the native people outside the Galveston bay area at sites such as the Dressing Point and Skull Creek massacres exists. However, the reported combined native casualties were less than 70. This low mortality rate is an indicator that Austin likely did not exterminate the prehistoric tribe of the Karankawa, as he sought to do.

The rapid adoption of Spanish culture was key to the survival of the Karankawa, Texas settlers would continue to dehumanize native Americans and drown out their native culture, furthering the loss of any roots to the native ancestry the Karankawa may have retained. For fear of prosecution, murder and denial of basic human rights the natives accepted their “extinct” status, abandoned their native heritage and assimilated into Spanish culture throughout Texas.

Karankawa and other tribes of the region endured intense hardships throughout the end of the Pleistocene when the North American continent was experiencing an extreme cold climate that was considered the end of the “ice age”. The survival skills and adaptability required for a group of people to endure 15,000 years in one region under such harsh conditions is an indicator of how resilient the native people were. While Spain offered food and aid in exchange for institution, the native people were never forced against their will to adopt Spanish culture. It wasn't until Stephen F. Austin et al. would arrive and give the natives no alternative to his forced extermination plan that the native people would seek the help of the Spanish missionaries. While Austin had the means to defeat the natives through military power the indigenous people found a way to survive.

After the Karankawa Chieftain, Chief Antonio agreed to the treaty at La Bahia, diminutive evidence exists in the literature and in the archaeological record of the Karankawa except minor pockets of resistance. The apparent disappearance or extinction of the native people, and lack of a significant amount of human remains is an indicator that the Karankawa likely continued to seek asylum within the Spanish communities, abandoning their culture for the Spanish culture that was pressed upon them only a few decades earlier. This assimilation into the Spanish community was the only option the native people had for survival. It is even reported that some Karankawa fought alongside Mexico in the battle of the Alamo against Texas Settlers.

A strong indicator and positive correlation that the native people assimilated in the Spanish communities and are still living in them today.

In a recent research done by Professor Alston Thoms of Texas A&M University and quoted in a news article by the San Antonio Express News, Thoms correlated Texas native Americans to having lived in the greater San Antonio region for 15,000 years (Ayala 2018). Thoms also supports the idea that 65% of San Antonio citizens are Mexican American, and of that 65%, 80-85% of Mexican Americans in the region are likely of native descent (Ayala). This has major implications for a specific group of people living in the Texas-Mexico region who are currently under scrutiny by American policy makers and might soon be fighting to prove their citizenship. At the very least it highlights the importance of archaeological investigation and the conservation of cultural heritage sights. Future work could prove certain native groups believed to be extinct are still living among the modern population today, and once forgotten cultures could be rediscovered.

*“We were brainwashed,” said Linda Ximenes, a Tap Pilam tribal member. “There are still people who say we don’t exist, and that we aren’t really descendants.” -San Antonio Express News 2018*

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