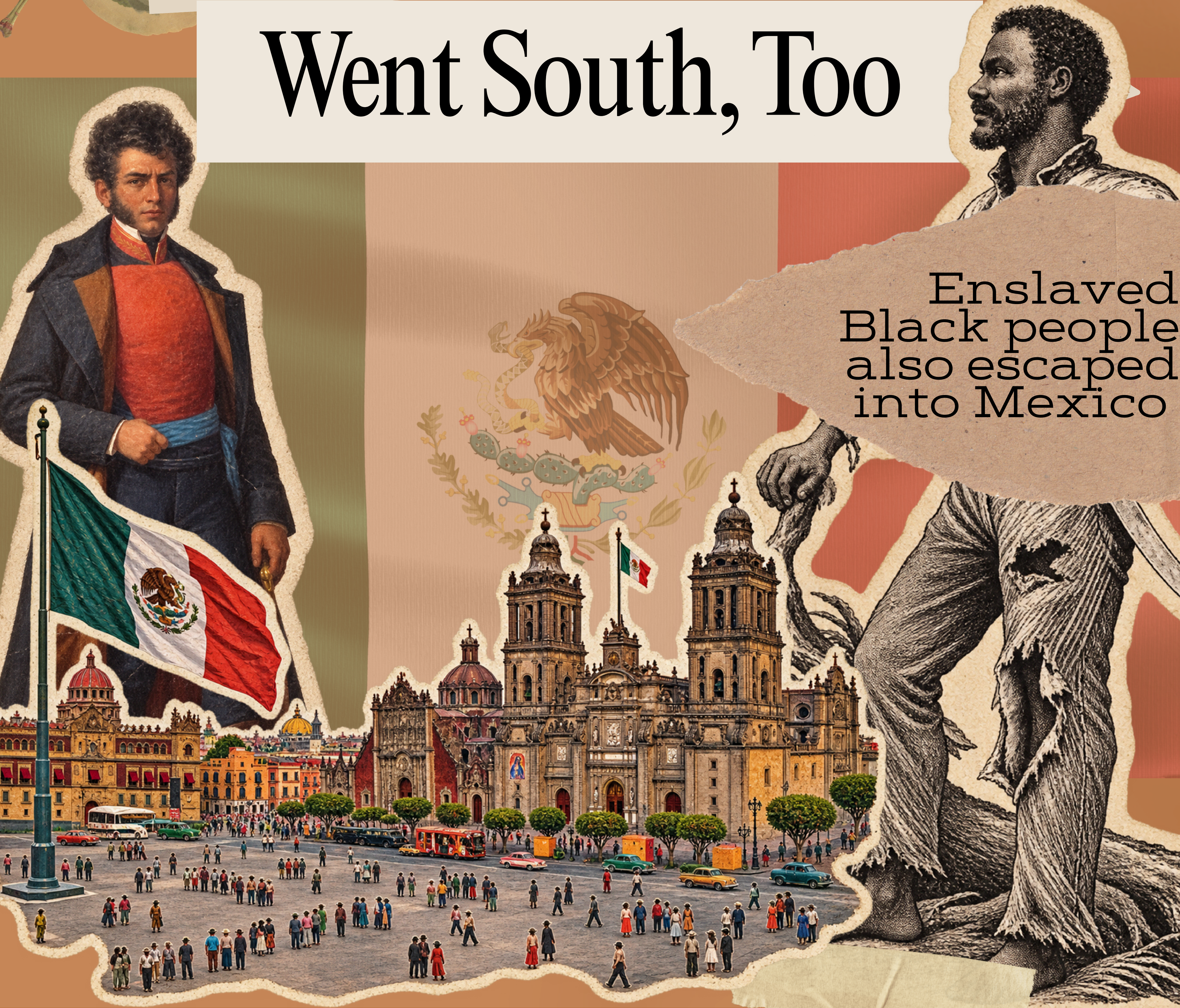
The Underground Railroad Went South, Too



Enslaved Black people also escaped into Mexico



Freedom Was Not Only North

The Underground Railroad is commonly associated with escapes north toward free states and Canada. However, many enslaved people in the "Deep South" and Texas traveled to Mexico, and crossing the Rio Grande could place them beyond the legal reach of American slavery.





In 1829 Mexico Abolished Slavery

- President Vicente Guerrero abolished slavery in Mexico, although Texas temporarily received an exemption.

- After Texas separated from Mexico in 1836, its constitution protected slavery. Mexico, however, remained a nearby destination where enslavers' claims were not legally recognized.



Vicente Guerrero

Families Escaped During War



José de Urrea

During the Texas Revolution, enslaved Black families used the Mexican Army as an avenue toward freedom. In April 1836, General José de Urrea recorded that fourteen enslaved people and their families reached his forces. Rather than return them to their enslavers, Urrea wrote that he "sent them free" to Victoria, Mexico.

THE JOURNEY WAS DANGEROUS

Freedom seekers traveled toward crossings near Matamoros and Piedras Negras. Despite Mexico's proximity, they faced extreme heat, hunger, unfamiliar terrain, armed patrols and slave catchers. Some traveled in groups, acquired horses or carried weapons to defend their freedom.

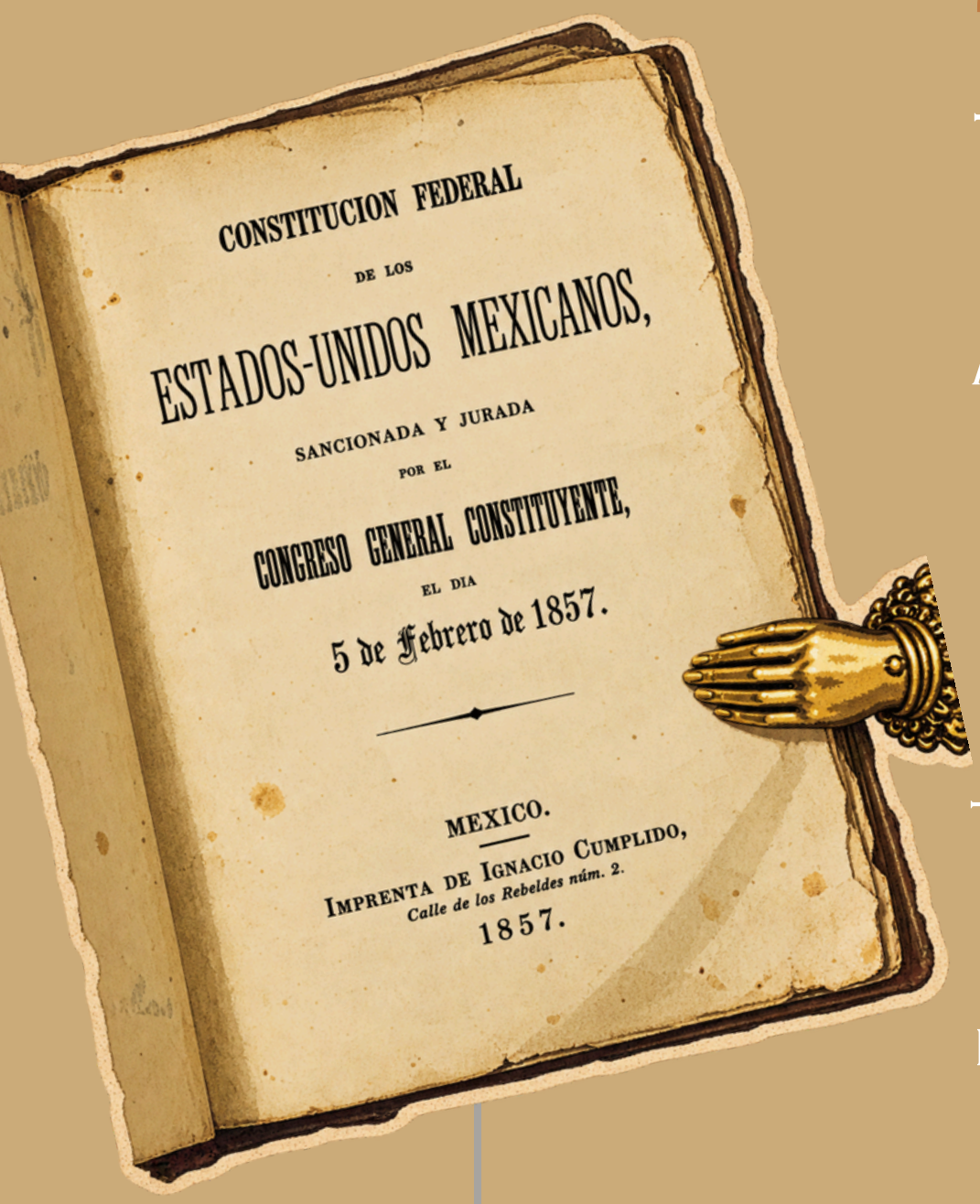


THEY DID NOT ESCAPE ALONE

Mexicans, Tejanos, some German settlers and Black Seminole communities provided information, shelter or protection. However, the Southern network was less organized than many northern routes. as a result, Enslaved Black people remained the primary planners of their escapes.



MEXICO REFUSED TO RETURN THEM



Texas enslavers repeatedly demanded an extradition agreement. Mexico refused. Its Constitution of 1857 declared that an enslaved person entering Mexican territory received freedom and legal protection. This resulted in, the Rio Grande becoming a line of resistance to American slavery.

Freedom Did Not Guarantee Equality

Black freedom seekers could still encounter racial discrimination, kidnapping and exploitative labor in Mexico. However, they were no longer legally owned and possessed rights unavailable under American slavery. Some worked, married and established new lives in Mexican communities.



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