

The Injustice Never Leaves You

Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas



Monica Muñoz Martinez

Introduction

IT WAS AN OTHERWISE ordinary day in early April 1918, but Miguel García, a Mexican national living in Texas, was growing concerned. His son Florencio, twenty-five years old, had not yet returned home from his job as a cattle herder in Cameron County. García started walking through town, asking relatives, friends, neighbors, and eventually even the county attorney and local law enforcement officers if they had seen Florencio. Days passed without news. Then someone told García that Texas Rangers had arrested Florencio over a week earlier, on April 5, just south of Brownsville. García knew that when ethnic Mexicans disappeared after being arrested, the prisoners' remains were often found hidden in the groves of mesquite trees in the rural Texas landscape. This grim news prompted García to start searching the brush in the countryside for his son's remains.¹

Miguel García repeatedly asked for help from local authorities. Oscar C. Dancy, the Cameron County attorney, remembered García's persistence: "the old man, the father of the boy, was at my office. He was at my office two or three times and my residence once."² Weeks later, local residents found human remains outside of Brownsville. "We found the bones of a human being," Dancy would later testify. "We found a pair of pants and a jumper and as I recollect it, a shirt, black hair and a hat . . . a light Texas

cowboy Stetson hat," he remembered, adding that there were bullet holes through the jacket, "Two, perhaps three."³ The clothing matched the description Miguel García had previously provided, and the investigation suggested that the body had been shot in the back three times. The remains consisted only of clothes, a skull with a tuft of hair, and bones scattered as far as 300 yards, likely by coyotes or buzzards. García arrived at the scene and identified the shoes, hat, and clothing as belonging to Florencio. The father pulled a monogrammed handkerchief out of the jacket they had discovered and verified that it was his son's.⁴

According to witnesses who last saw Florencio, he had been in the custody of three Texas Rangers (the state police) in the Brownsville jail just before his disappearance. An investigation by Mexican consuls in Brownsville revealed that the Rangers, accompanied by two civilians and a US soldier, arrested Florencio at Las Tranquilas Ranch. The Rangers asked a local rancher, Chas Champion, if they could borrow a lock and chain to secure their prisoner to a tree while they slept. Considering this unnecessarily rough treatment, the rancher instead found a judge, who gave the officers permission to place Florencio in jail overnight in the custody of local police.⁵

Pressure from Mexican consuls mounted. On May 24, 1918, Mexican Inspector General Andres G. García in El Paso wrote to Texas governor William P. Hobby asking for an investigation. According to the state police, the remains could not belong to Florencio because the bones had been bleached white by the sun. These bones, they suggested, belonged to someone killed months earlier. They also denied that the father had positively identified his son's clothing. In addition, the Rangers testified that they had in fact arrested Florencio on April 5 but had released him that same evening and did not place him in jail. They refuted witnesses who saw him behind bars. Their prisoner, they suggested, had not suffered any harm. The Rangers furthermore insisted that the truth was quite different: local residents had spotted Florencio across the border in Mexico.⁶ Nevertheless, García remained convinced that Texas Rangers had murdered his son.

In light of such discrepancies, how do we go about unearthing the history of violence on the US-Mexico border? If we relied on the Ranger investigation, we would not learn much more. But Florencio, born in Tamaulipas, Mexico, was a Mexican national living and working in Texas.

Without immigration quotas or limits on migration from Mexico, Mexican nationals and American citizens moved easily back and forth across the border. The death of a Mexican national in Texas prompted the local Mexican consuls to investigate his death. Their investigation found that Florencio's arrest had been based on unfounded suspicions. Letters from businessmen in the region defended Florencio's reputation as a diligent laborer. According to Oscar Dancy, locals remembered him as an "absolutely straight, square Mexican boy, above the average laborer or peon."⁷ Was Florencio García a threat and a thief or a dutiful laborer?

To these officials, Mexican and American alike, Florencio García was not a friend, relative, or a neighbor. His death was a diplomatic inconvenience. As one diplomat said, the death threatened both relations between the United States and Mexico and the potential for even more farming in the region. In April in south Texas, lots of crops needed tending. If word spread that Mexican laborers were being continually mistreated, workers might flee for other opportunities in the South or the West. Without field hands, the farming economy would be devastated. For Mexican officials, and some Americans, García's story was the latest in a long series of abusive policing by the Texas Rangers. These state police officers had a habit of disturbing the delicate equilibrium of labor and race relations. That equilibrium needed to be reestablished by diplomats and political leaders, who worried about potential economic losses. The records show that officials recognized the systemic impact of Florencio García's death but reveal no sense that they mourned it.

For the relatives and friends of Florencio, on the other hand, his loss was something else entirely. His loss was personal. Furthermore, it signaled the unjust death of yet another ethnic Mexican without recourse from the judicial system, the state administration, or the Mexican consul. Florencio's death was just one short chapter in a long history of racial violence in the borderlands.

On May 27, 1918, the Cameron County acting coroner, Henry J. Kirk, confirmed the family's claims when he filed a death certificate for Florencio García. Since the recovered body revealed little, the coroner had to modify the certificate. Its generic language reads: "I hereby certify that I attended deceased from _____ 191_, to _____ 191_, that I last saw h_ alive on _____ 191_, and that the death occurred on the date stated above at ____m." Kirk drew a line through most of this section, and instead

followed the statement "I hereby certify that I" with handwritten words. The modified form continued, "found the identified remains and that death occurred on unknown date." Where the certificate asked for the cause of death, Kirk wrote "unknown."⁸ The certificate also included important information about Florencio García and his family. Florencio was born on April 30, 1885 and he was married, although there was no space on the form to include his spouse's name. The record identified him as the son of Miguel García and Teburcia Velásquez, both of Tamaulipas. It noted that his remains were buried on May 26, 1918, in Brownsville. Miguel García had identified the remains and helped ensure that accurate information would be on file in the official death registry for the state of Texas.

The García family must have been unsettled by Kirk's decision not to list a cause of death on the certificate, despite investigators who described what appeared to be three bullet holes in the back of Florencio's jacket. Kirk's decision, however, did not prevent the family from filing civil charges. Now with a certificate to prove Florencio was indeed dead, and not alive and well in Mexico as the state police suggested, Texas Rangers George W. Sadler, John Sittre, and Alfred P. Locke were arrested just days after the García family buried their son. The officers filed a bond of \$3,000 each and were remanded to the custody of the captain of their company, Charles F. Stevens.⁹ The charges were brought before the same Henry J. Kirk who acted as both county coroner and justice of the peace. Kirk convened a grand jury that consisted entirely of Anglo residents with the exception of one local ethnic Mexican. After reviewing the evidence, the grand jury decided not to indict the Texas Rangers. Oscar Dancy later remembered that by 1918 grand juries in the region were "almost solidly Americans, mostly newcomers." The newcomers were Anglo Americans who had migrated from southern states. Their arrival expanded Jim Crow laws, the systemic segregation laws targeting African Americans, to the US-Mexico border. Targeted by "Juan Crow" laws, as historians now popularly refer to them, ethnic Mexicans found themselves increasingly segregated from Anglos in schools, churches, and restaurants and discouraged from voting or serving on juries.¹⁰

The grand jury's decision gave the state police continued license to characterize the life of Florencio García as they saw fit. In 1919, when Captain Stevens testified to the incident before a committee investigating abuses by the state police, he ignored the certificate of death and again asserted

MEDICAL PARTICULARS		street and number
16 DATE OF DEATH <i>unknown</i>		
(Month)	(Day)	(Year)
17 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from <i>found the 1918 identified remains</i>		
that I last saw him <i>alive on</i> <i>the date stated above</i>		
and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at <i>the</i>		
The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows: <i>unknown 189</i>		
<i>Henry J. Kirk J.P.</i>		
(Duration)	yr	mos ds.
Coroner (Secondary) <i>Acting Coroner</i>		
(Duration)	yr	mos ds.
(Signed) <i>May 25, 1918</i> M. D.		
(Address)		
*Use International List of Cause of Death—State the Disease Causing Death, or, in deaths from Violent Causes, State (1) Means of Injury; and (2) whether Accidental, Suicidal, or Homicidal.		
18 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (For Hospitals, Institutions, Transients, or Recent Residents.)		
At place of death <i>yr</i> <i>mos</i> <i>ds.</i> In the <i>yr</i> <i>mos</i> <i>ds.</i> State		
Where was disease contracted, if not at place of death?		
Former or usual residence		
19 PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL <i>Brownsville Tex</i>		DATE OF BURIAL <i>May 26, 1918</i>
20 UNDERTAKER <i>Bur E. Hinkle</i>		ADDRESS <i>Brownsville Tex</i>

Death certificates for victims of anti-Mexican violence at the hands of police are hard to find. In the case of the murder of Florencio García in 1918, the acting coroner for Cameron County had to modify the certificate to indicate that the date of his death was “unknown.” Later investigations showed that he died in the custody of Texas Rangers. Florencio García, May 1918, certificate number 19810, Bureau of Vital Statistics, State Registrar Office, Austin.

that García never met harm at Ranger hands. He testified under oath that García had last been seen living in Mexico.¹¹ Stevens’s testimony attempted to erase the murder as well as the pain suffered by the surviving García relatives. It also threatened to erase their efforts to seek justice in the aftermath of García’s murder. Stevens swiftly disavowed the murder and preserved the reputation of the state police.

García’s family pushed the Texas courts and police in multiple ways, imploring them to act on behalf of their son, to find his remains, to record

his death, and to prosecute the assailants involved in his murder. His parents, his brother, and his unnamed spouse, as well as Oscar Dancy, Chas Champion, Antonio Valiente, and Leopoldo Espinosa, were impacted by his arrest and his disappearance. They relayed to investigators the details of the last time they saw him alive and provided an opportunity for the judicial system to prosecute those involved in his murder. They left traces from 1918 in the historical record. But with the conclusion of the abuse investigation in 1919, Florencio and his surviving family disappear from the record. And yet this trace, however incomplete, is essential. The small, incomplete traces revealing the collective concern for his life helped ensure that today there are documents that challenge the police accounts. They provide an alternative story to the one where Florencio is a criminal and his family's grief is unfounded.

The larger tragedy of Florencio García's death, and the attempts by the state police to disavow his murder, lies in its utter ordinariness. Searching the Texas landscape for the remains of a loved one was an awful—and awfully familiar—ritual, repeated countless times before. By 1918, the murder of ethnic Mexicans had become commonplace on the Texas-Mexico border, a violence systematically justified by vigilantes and state authorities alike. Historians estimate that between 1848 and 1928 in Texas alone, 232 ethnic Mexicans were lynched by vigilante groups of three or more people. These tabulations only tell part of the story.¹²

Despite popular assumptions that vigilantism in the nineteenth century occurred primarily in regions where law enforcement institutions lacked structure and social influence, vigilantism was in fact practiced in places where criminal justice systems were well established. Violence that superseded judicial procedures regularly articulated popular distrust of the justice system or local frustration with the bureaucracy of criminal prosecution. Lynch mobs commonly took prisoners from jail even though courts would likely have sentenced them to execution. These vigilante actions, however, were tacitly sanctioned by the judicial system whenever local grand juries failed to indict or prosecute assailants who participated in mob violence.¹³ Moreover, law enforcement officers facilitated the conditions for making prisoners vulnerable to mob violence and even participated in lynchings. Vigilante violence on the border had a state-building function. It both directed the public to act with force to sustain hierarchies of race

and class and complemented the brutal methods of law enforcement in this period.¹⁴

In addition to these acts by mobs, state and local police committed extralegal acts of violence that are often overlooked in lynching statistics. When including acts of extralegal violence at the hands of Texas Rangers and local police, the numbers of victims of racial violence in Texas soars.

Extralegal violence at the hands of law enforcement has for too long been shielded in a cloak of legal authority. The decade between 1910 and 1920 was a particularly brutal period, when ethnic Mexicans were criminalized and harshly policed by an intersecting regime of vigilantes, state police, local police, and army soldiers. During these years of vitriol and aggression, law enforcement officers, soldiers, and vigilantes claimed the lives of hundreds more ethnic Mexicans, citizens of the United States and Mexico alike. Estimates of the number of dead range from as few as 300 to as many as several thousand.

State racial terror and vigilantism were linked. In particular, police abuse and collusion with vigilante mobs, followed by state cover-ups, set a pattern for sanctioned abuse. The frequency, and normalcy, of anti-Mexican violence seeped far beyond Texas and encouraged a public passivity toward violent policing that has had long-standing consequences for people living near the border.

The violence on the Texas–Mexico border took many forms. Ethnic Mexicans were intimidated, tortured, and killed by hanging, shooting, burning, and beating. Nearly all the known victims were adult men, though a few women and children suffered the same vicious wrath. What this violence nearly always shared was location: death often occurred in the isolation of the rural Texas landscape. The thick mesquite brush and the dark of night frequently cloaked these acts from public view.¹⁵ These events were also linked in a broadly felt injustice. Assailants rarely faced arrest and grand juries regularly failed to indict the accused for wrongdoing. For members of law enforcement, a culture of impunity prevailed.

Terror and intimidation permeated the region. For each victim that died, there were others who witnessed the violence. People organized their daily routines to avoid conflict with law enforcement officers or known agitators of vigilante violence. Children witnessed parents being beaten, or worse, and cousins saw their kin being shot. Many of the dead would not

be recovered or given a proper burial. Assailants threatened witnesses and prevented them from tending to the bodies of loved ones. Still, relatives and friends searched, and protested the ongoing murders, for months and years and decades. Some would store the sites in their memories, to share them years later.

Journalists described the violent scenes as they were unveiled in the daylight or exposed in unexpected encounters with corpses hanging from telephone poles or the limbs of mesquite trees. People spotted decapitated bodies floating down the Rio Grande.¹⁶ Such encounters with the dead surely provoked a range of reactions, from horror to anger to a righteous sense of justice served. But for friends, neighbors, or family of the dead, and for allies in the struggle against injustice, finding the remains was also part of a much longer process of grieving and of remembrance.

This book is about the long legacies of violence. It returns to a period of terror acknowledged by historians of the border but forgotten in public memory. Politicians, historians, the media, and historical commissions of the early twentieth century all inscribed a celebratory version of events in newspapers, books, lesson plans, museums, and monuments. This version of history was a key ingredient in their nation building. It hid state crimes and disavowed the loss and trauma experienced by residents. Historical institutions neglected to keep accurate records of racially motivated killings and in this way bolstered efforts to erase this period of terror from state history. Records that do exist often labeled the dead as criminals. *The Injustice Never Leaves You* reveals how the keepers of history convinced the broader United States that this period should be remembered instead as a time of progress.

The architects of official history, however, did not account for the other ways history is made. They did not consider the witnesses and survivors of violence who would pass memories from one generation to another.¹⁷ They underestimated residents who had their own claim in the border region and refused to be intimidated, residents who would share their stories with their children, residents who would leave personal records documenting the terror that shaped daily life. *The Injustice Never Leaves You* is their story. In addition to the recovery of a history of state violence in the borderlands, it reveals valiant acts of preservation and remembrance conducted by people

who lived in a world shaped by violence but who refused to be consumed by it.

The efforts of such people, of course, exist outside of official history, just like the murdered human beings they sought to remember. There are no indexes that name all the dead and catalog the circumstances of their murders; all such efforts to remember are partial and unofficial, existing in the margins. There are, however, signal cases that provide insight into the conditions that allowed this vast violence against Mexicans to flourish. In the pages that follow, we will examine a public lynching of a Mexican national by an Anglo mob in central Texas in 1910; a double murder of two Texas landowners by a Texas Ranger and a local posse in south Texas in 1915; and a massacre organized by Texas Rangers, local ranchers, and US soldiers in west Texas in 1918. Separated by time, location, and outcome, these cases give a glimpse into the far-reaching practices of anti-Mexican violence. They show that neither class, citizenship, nor social influence protected ethnic Mexicans in this decade. Studied together, these cases expose the linked practices of racial violence that created a long-lasting, pervasive atmosphere of terror. Mobs lynched ethnic Mexicans with impunity, state and local police colluded with vigilantes, and the militarization of the border fed anti-Mexican sentiment, making racial violence all the more lethal.

This book documents both a ferocious period of terror and also the various techniques grieving relatives and their communities employed to hold vigilantes, police, and governments accountable. Living amidst terror, communities utilized multiple strategies for survival. People still challenged the criminalization of ethnic Mexicans and sought justice for the dead. Residents took up arms and engaged in public protest, witnesses faced assailants in court, journalists documented and criticized violent events in editorials, local politicians petitioned for change, and Mexican diplomats pressed for investigations and arrests. Recounting these myriad acts disrupts the typical narrative: that violence is followed by reconciliation, that the dead were likely criminals anyway, that the mere passage of time can heal wounds.¹⁸

This book also highlights the long efforts to reckon with loss and shows that mourning can be a practice of resistance, passed from generation to generation, continuing even a century later. Recovering the names of the dead and the names of those who brought them harm is a crucial and

ongoing effort in the struggle against state violence. Such enduring efforts, often in direct opposition to popular memory, testify to the value of connecting truthfully with the past. The families who have reckoned with this violence harbor a lesson we all should heed. We must reckon with the fact that the southern border of our country was created—and policed—violently, and not valiantly, and that we have continually suppressed this truer, more accurate past. It is a past that bleeds into the present, a suppression that continues to shape our future.

FORGING BORDERS WITH VIOLENCE

This history of violence takes shape around the contested creation of the US–Mexico border and efforts for economic control by new Anglo settlers. In 1821, Mexico gained its independence from Spain. But within forty years of independence, a tangled series of conflicts—the Texas Revolution (1836) and the US–Mexico War (1846–1848)—resulted in the United States acquiring half of Mexico’s territory. As a result, the political border of the region now known as Texas was continually shifting. Native American nations, especially the Comanche, continued to contest outside governance—Spanish, Mexican, Texan, and ultimately American—in the region. Anglo migration into the region ensured that settlers had to contend with Native Americans and Mexicans, two groups that struggled throughout the nineteenth century to maintain their place in the region as the colonial powers shifted.

These constructed and changing boundaries required constant enforcement across the century. In 1823 Stephen F. Austin, an early Anglo settler who lived in the region soon to be Texas, organized a small group of men, called rangers, to protect settlers and their property. After Texas claimed independence from Mexico in 1836, the men worked to ensure that Anglo settlers flourished in the new Republic of Texas. That flourishing, however, came at the expense of groups identified as enemies of the new settlement as well as those groups wanted for labor. The Texas Rangers were described as a “fighting force” created by Anglo settlers to fight in the ongoing war for racial supremacy, battling Mexican landowners and indigenous nations, including the Tonkawas, Lipan Apache, Waco, Karankawa, Kiowa, and Comanche. The Texas Rangers targeted both the “Indian warrior” and the Mexican *vaquero* as enemies of white supremacy.¹⁹

The Rangers also did their part to help preserve a slave-based agriculture by violently policing enslaved African men and women. During the state's long history of chattel slavery, the Rangers tracked and punished enslaved people trying to cross the Rio Grande into Mexico to freedom. Once across the border, the men, women, and children were out of reach of those attempting to claim them as property, who were not allowed to follow them into Mexico. Of course, Rangers frequently broke the neutrality laws that forbade their trips across the border. They also terrorized ethnic Mexicans accused of harboring runaway slaves. One Texas Ranger described them as "black as niggers . . . and ten times as treacherous."²⁰

In the early nineteenth century, Texas Rangers blurred the lines between enforcing state laws, practicing vigilantism, and inciting racial terror. Historians now view the Texas Rangers as the first prominent Western vigilantes to be endowed with legal authority.²¹ The most frequent complaints of Texas Rangers abusing their power came through what some referred to as *la ley de fuga*, or the law of flight or escape. Under this morbid legal regime, Rangers released prisoners and ordered them to run. Officers then proceeded to shoot the prisoner while in flight, later filing reports that they killed the prisoner to prevent escape or because the prisoner resisted arrest.²² As early as 1870, a newspaper editor from west Texas reported disgust at the frequency with which Texas Rangers used the expressions "killed while attempting to escape" and "killed while resisting arrest." The editorial alleged that these expressions had dire resonances "that are fast coming to have a melancholy and terrible significance to the people of Western Texas. They furnish the brief epitaph to the scores who have fallen and are falling victims to the ignorance, the arrogance, or the brutality of those charged with the execution of the law."²³

The US military also actively policed ethnic Mexicans. They collaborated with Rangers to suppress uprisings that challenged American rule in the region. Ethnic Mexican landowners identified as people of the region and not of Mexico or the United States. They embraced nineteenth-century liberal ideologies that held individual freedom and liberty as core principles. As historian Elliot Young explains, "For border people, freedom specifically meant preventing central-government interference in a region that had been relatively isolated and semiautonomous for its entire history. The centralist versus federalist struggles in Mexico that ultimately resulted in

Texas independence in 1836 were part of this long history of fighting for autonomy.”²⁴

Some Mexicans resisted federal encroachment by merely continuing to live as they had before the region shifted hands. Others, prompted by threats to their land ownership and economic influence, resorted to armed resistance. A decade after the United States claimed half of Mexico's territory through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Juan Nepomuceno Cortina took up arms and rebelled against the new nation and new Anglo settlers recruited to south Texas after the state was annexed into the United States. In the summer of 1859 Cortina defended a Mexican *ranchero* from a public beating by shooting Brownsville city marshal Robert Shears. In November 1859, Cortina delivered a proclamation accusing judges and attorneys of expropriating land from Mexican landowners and practicing anti-Mexican violence. The son of a wealthy landowning family, Cortina led an estimated 600 men in a battle against the Texas Rangers and the US Army. He described Anglo settlers as “vampire guises of men” who robbed property and hunted and murdered Mexican men “like wild beasts.”²⁵ Despite being defeated, Cortina would inspire a genre of border ballads sung by ethnic Mexicans to honor those who stood up to discrimination, colonization, and violence.²⁶

Ten years after Cortina's revolt, ethnic Mexican landowners suffered losses as Anglo colonization was fortified with technological advances. In 1874, Illinois farmer J. F. Glidden patented his invention of barbed wire, which became a favored tool for defining private property and guaranteed the successful colonization of the western United States.²⁷ By fencing in the rural landscape in the 1870s, Anglo ranchers created barriers to rivers and streams, blocked previously unfettered grazing patterns for cows and goats, and summarily stifled ideals of open land use and communal access practiced by *rancheros* for numerous generations. The changes in property ownership and ranching paved the way for Texas land to be subdivided and sold for commercial farming. It took little more than a decade for ranch lands in Texas to be fenced in entirely. Ethnic Mexicans in the Southwest found themselves assigned as manual agricultural labor in this new economy, giving rise to the popular Mexican saying “*con el alambre vino el hambre*”—with the barbed wire came hunger.²⁸

Alongside technological innovations, new American property laws and taxation ignored *ranchero* property rights under the 1848 Treaty of Gua-

dalupe Hidalgo. This culminated in a sweeping reorganization of Anglo-Mexican relations in Texas.²⁹ Taxation, court-ordered surveys of land boundaries, and challenges to the validity of Spanish land grants kept Mexican landowners depleting their cash to pay legal fees. When landowners came up short on paying taxes or private debts, county sheriffs and county courts would coordinate auctions at which thousands of acres could be purchased for less than a penny an acre. In 1877 the Hidalgo County sheriff sold 3,000 acres for \$15.00 and the following year sold another 4,000 acres for \$17.15. Texas laws targeted Mexican property owners in the state.³⁰

The shifts in economic influence led to increased racial tensions and to resistance. In September 1891, Catarino Erasmo Garza led a group of hundreds of border residents back and forth across the Rio Grande in a revolt against both Mexico and the United States encroaching on a population that had enjoyed living, mostly unimpeded, on the margins of national power. Riding into battle with the motto *libres fronterizos* (free border people) stitched on their hatbands, the Garzistas were a multiclass movement that included wealthy merchants and landowners, lower-middle-class professionals, poor farmers, and landless ranchers. Mexican nationals and Texas-Mexicans, as well as a few Anglos, Italians, and residents from interracial marriages between Anglos and Mexicans, filled out the ranks of the rebellion.³¹

The geographical distance from the central governments made apprehending revolutionaries on the far reaches of US and Mexican soil tactically and strategically difficult.³² Efforts by the Mexican and US governments to incorporate the borderlands required infrastructure that would connect the regions to markets, transportation, and communication systems. In 1891 two rail lines finally connected Laredo, Texas, to northern tracks. The Texas-Mexico track ran from the port city of Corpus Christi to Laredo. The International and Great Northern Railroad linked Corpus Christi to San Antonio, which then connected to tracks that led north, east, and west. These railroads opened Laredo to the markets in centrally located San Antonio and allowed goods to be transported across the country. It would be another decade before a rail line from Mexico City to the northern Mexican border would open up international commerce, but even so, in the late nineteenth century, the railways and telegraph lines that crossed the US-Mexico border were becoming crucial elements in government attempts

to enforce control over the people living in the border regions. These advances in infrastructure were coupled with violent policing.

Military strategies for defeating Catarino Garza's rebellion were brutal and set a precedent for later practices by the US Army and state police alike. US Army captain John Gregory Bourke, leading the suppression, was one of many who embraced cutthroat strategies on the border. He made his approach clear when he wrote, "The cheapest thing to do is to shoot them down wherever [they are] found skulking about with arms in their hands, and to burn down some of the ranchos which gave them shelter." According to the captain, killing rebels was not enough. He wanted the complete devastation of any community thought to support the Garza revolt. Having refined these lethal methods during a fifteen-year effort waging war on the Apache nation in Arizona, the captain brought them to the border region in Texas.³³

Spanish-language journalists expressed outrage at the devastation. The Rio Grande City newspaper *El Bien Público* published accounts in the 1890s that documented atrocities committed by US soldiers. The editor, Jesús T. Récio, published petitions sent to the governor of Texas and letters substantiating grievances against Bourke and his attempts to terrorize civilian communities. Récio charged the army with burning ranches of suspected Garza allies, threatening residents with lynching, searching houses without warrants, and stealing guns, horses, and private family papers. Complaints were filed with the army, the district attorney, the attorney general, the governor of Texas, Mexican officials, and President Benjamin Harrison. The charges of abuse by the US military would fall on deaf ears, and Captain Bourke would continue to lead a brutal repression of revolutionary activities and spread fear throughout the region.³⁴

The Garza revolt was defeated and by 1892 Garza was living in exile. Putting down the revolutions allowed the US state to militarize the Rio Grande and transform the borderlands from a region where people united by culture, tradition, and proximity moved freely across borders into an increasingly political and social boundary.³⁵

The US effort to forcibly end the rebellion became a measure of its growing imperial drive for conquest. In these same decades, the United States was also increasing its territory to include Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, and Hawai'i and to exert control in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Panama. Military officers like Captain Bourke invoked dis-

courses and strategies employed by the United States in other imperial endeavors that relied on notions of race and Anglo superiority. The military officers inflicted racial terror on ethnic Mexicans in an effort to end challenges to Anglo social, political, and economic control. They enabled a culture of US imperialism that justified Anglo domination in south Texas and in the US West more broadly.³⁶

Handily suppressing the revolt showed that the federal government was capable of bringing stability to the border region that encouraged Anglo economic investment.³⁷ The military campaigns were coupled with media coverage that portrayed south Texas as having infinite economic potential that was wasted in the hands of inferior ethnic Mexicans incapable of developing the land.³⁸ The remaining ethnic Mexican landowners struggled to maintain their land through the first decades of the twentieth century. With the completion of the railroad in 1904, produce grown in south Texas could be shipped from Brownsville to Corpus Christi and on to national markets via the Missouri-Pacific railroad system. By 1907 the railway hauled approximately 500 carloads of farm products daily. A new wave of Anglo migration came to the Texas-Mexico border region.

The agricultural revolution witnessed skyrocketing land values and inspired outside land developers and commercial farmers to migrate to south Texas in droves. According to David Montejano, land promoters worked to "convert pastures into plow fields" by marketing ranch lands that could grow profitable cash crops and helped replace ranching with farming. By the 1920s, the number of farms increased dramatically while their size decreased. Land developers recruited Anglo buyers from the Mississippi Valley to settle in the region and take part in the "farm revolution." These events meant a drastic reorganization of land and space in south Texas. In Hidalgo County, for example, the 1910 census records showed 677 farms averaging 969.5 acres, but by 1930 the numbers jumped to 4,327 farms averaging 126.9 acres. Successful recruitment efforts resulted in rapid population growth in the region as well. In the early 1900s the population in deep south Texas counties totaled 79,934, but by 1920 the population rose to 159,842, and in 1930 the number doubled to 322,845. Montejano describes this as "one of the most phenomenal land movements in the history of the United States."³⁹

Witnessing this social transformation firsthand, Jovita González described this farm colonization as an "American invasion . . . hordes of

money-making Americans poured into the region."⁴⁰ A team of land developers encouraged commercial farming practices that literally required a transformation of the landscape itself. Employers relied on Mexican wage labor to cultivate the land for the coming agricultural revolution. Teams of men cleared dense countryside of mesquite trees and cacti covered in barbs and thorns, which choked the landscape and made farming difficult. Rows of crops soon replaced brush country.

Anglo farm settlers transformed the social and political landscape as well as the physical one. They ushered in Juan Crow laws of segregation and prohibited interracial marriages, formerly a part of the social fabric in mixed Anglo and Mexican communities. They insisted on the new code of social relations, which in turn initiated a new racial hierarchy. Political battles took shape over local governments. The newcomers moved to disenfranchise Mexican residents and minimize their social or economic influence. They charged Mexican ranchers with using political machines to fill voting booths with droves of Mexicans seen as ignorant and unfit for participation in elections. According to Anglo settlers, ethnic Mexican residents did not merit the rights and privileges of Americans, despite their status as legal citizens and their long history in the region. One newspaper demeaned local Mexican residents as a "class of foreigners who claim American citizenship but who are as ignorant of things American as the mule."⁴¹

In contrast, several articles published in the Spanish-language newspaper *La Crónica* challenged the racism sweeping across south Texas. Texas-Mexican journalists, writing in the midst of the social upheaval, criticized Anglo politicians and landowners for denying civil rights to ethnic Mexican residents in Texas and for relegating them to cheap labor. One article in 1910 described their exclusion from schools as a grave attempt to create an ignorant class. Moreover, journalists condemned the frequent use of vigilante violence to create a docile labor force. The article charged that through violence Anglos attempted to "condemn the Mexicans to a condition of beasts of burden."⁴²

Although the farm colonization in the region was well under way, the new settlers still felt their control was tenuous. Economic dominance of the region did not remove the threat of revolt in the minds of the Anglo residents in south Texas. Proximity to Mexico left many feeling vulnerable. Politicians, military leaders, and local residents increasingly portrayed residents

in the Mexican nation as a threat to American capitalist interests in the Southwest. Their fears were soaked in racist perceptions of their south Texas neighbors, and yet Anglo perceptions were, on a numeric level, correct. Even as they altered the land, they remained a minority population.

The ethnic Mexican population was growing, too. Mexican nationals migrated north to escape an economic depression in 1880 and a recession in 1906. Between 1910 and 1920 even more Mexicans crossed over into the United States to escape the Mexican Revolution. During the civil war in Mexico as many as one million Mexicans sought refuge in the United States. Most of them came via the Texas–Mexico border. Although many refugees soon returned to Mexico, the number of ethnic Mexicans in the United States tripled during the decade of the 1910s.⁴³

Beyond proximity and population growth, the turbulence of the Mexican Revolution in Mexican towns on the international border caused fear in neighboring American cities. Residents worried that the revolutionary plots to overthrow the Díaz administration and redistribute land in Mexico could spill across the border and threaten Anglo property ownership and US control. Texas governors and residents alike made requests for US troops to guard the Texas–Mexico border. Rumors circulated of the threat to Mexican border towns like Matamoros and neighboring US towns like Brownsville.

State violence was the response. In 1913 Texas governor Oscar Colquitt dispatched over 1,000 state militiamen and the Texas National Guard to appease residents of Brownsville and El Paso.⁴⁴ As US soldiers stationed on the Texas–Mexico border trained before deployment in World War I, they transformed the border into a militarized zone. The newest advances in military technology, including barbed wire, spotlights, tanks, machine guns, and airplanes were used to surveil Mexican residents.

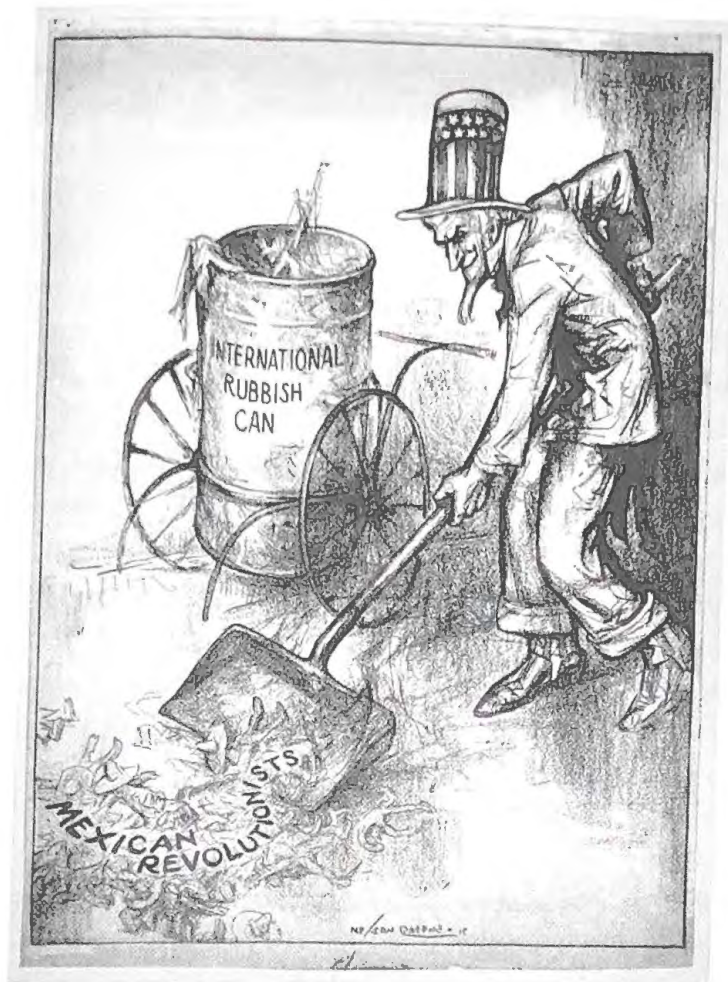
Refugees fleeing the Mexican Revolution were met with growing nativist sentiment. Denied humanitarian aid, refugees were portrayed as a threat to Anglo Americans. In 1914, for example, defeated Mexican federal soldiers and panicked civilians crossed into west Texas to escape the devastations of civil war. They were met with hostility and imprisoned at a camp in Fort Bliss, just outside of El Paso. West Texas towns called for arriving refugees and federal soldiers alike to be segregated from US residents. Mexican soldiers and Mexican women and children walked on foot across the unforgiving desert from the border town of Presidio seventy miles



Refugees wrapped in blankets stand with their possessions, guarded by US soldiers. In 1914 approximately 4,500 Mexican refugees fleeing the violence of the Mexican Revolution were imprisoned at a camp in Fort Bliss just outside of El Paso. The camp held Mexican men, women, and children, as well as Mexican federal soldiers. Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

to Marfa, where a train transported them to Fort Bliss. While detained, Mexican soldiers were forced to build a prison camp that stretched across forty-eight acres of land. An intimidating barbed wire fence, stacked ten strands high and secured to the ground by hog-wire fence, surrounded the camp. Some reported that electricity charged the barbed wire fence with a lethal current.⁴⁵

While Mexican federal soldiers and civilian refugees were treated as national threats and placed in prison camps, civilians in Texas accused of being revolutionaries or bandits could expect far worse treatment. During this era, the figure of the menacing Mexican revolutionary and bandit was cemented in popular imaginary. In 1915, for example, the *New York Evening Telegram* published a cartoon by Nelson Green depicting a grinning Uncle Sam using a shovel to toss piles of dead Mexican revolutionaries wearing sombreros into an "international rubbish can."⁴⁶



In the 1910s the figure of the menacing Mexican revolutionary and bandit was cemented in the popular imagination. In 1915 the *New York Evening Telegram* published a dehumanizing cartoon by Nelson Green depicting a grinning Uncle Sam using a shovel to toss piles of dead Mexican revolutionaries wearing sombreros into an “international rubbish can.” Cartoon Drawings Collection, LC-DIG-acd-2a08860, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Depicting Mexicans as waste did no favors for ethnic Mexicans living in the United States. Between 1914 and 1919, state administrations responded to the calls to guard the Texas–Mexico border, creating the conditions for a dramatic increase in violent policing. By 1916 the Wilson administration had deployed approximately 100,000 National Guard troops between Yuma, Arizona, and Brownsville, Texas.⁴⁷ Unfamiliar with the border region in Texas, US troops struggled to police the Rio Grande. As

calls to militarize the border continued, residents frequently claimed they needed more Texas Rangers, not more outsiders. The state police, they argued, were local and more effective than soldiers from northern states like New York or Rhode Island. In 1915 the state police included only twenty-six men, so the Texas legislature increased the state budget and the governor expedited the hiring process. In 1916 hundreds of new Texas Rangers patrolled the region, and by 1918 the force swelled to approximately 1,350 Rangers. By decade's end, the intersecting regimes of vigilante, state, and military policing took hold of the broader social landscape, declaring all Mexicans enemies of the state.⁴⁸

In particular, the expansion of the Texas Rangers was a response to calls for more police in 1915. In the summer, authorities reported that local residents were planning to subvert US control of the borderlands. *El Plan de San Diego*, a manifesto attributed to Mexican secessionists, called for a revolt to overthrow US rule in south Texas and an end to Anglo economic and political power through a "Liberating Army of race and people" including ethnic Mexicans, African Americans, and Japanese living in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Colorado. The plan went so far as to call for the expulsion of Anglos by murdering all Anglo men sixteen years and older.⁴⁹

Resisting the expansion of farm colonization in the region reflected broader public sentiment that objected to the economic exploitation of Mexican wage laborers, the institutionalization of racism through Juan Crow laws in Texas, and the increasing military presence. *El Plan de San Diego* called for burning bridges and derailing trains, among other acts of rebellion to interrupt federal, state, and local infrastructure. Raiders also targeted prominent ranches that had become a symbol of Anglo farm colonization. The King Ranch, for example, was known in this period as the greatest symbol of Anglo domination on the frontier. As the first ranch to be fenced with barbed wire in the nineteenth century and the first to develop a new breed of cattle in the United States, the ranching empire maintained a staggering two million acres of land at its peak and maintained property across several counties.⁵⁰

As a method for transitioning from ranching to farming during the agricultural revolution in the early twentieth century, prominent families directed farm towns as bankers, merchants, and political officials. The south Texas town of Kingsville in Kleberg County, for example, located in the

middle of the King Ranch, became entirely serviced by the King-Kleberg family companies. The families owned or primarily financed the Kingsville Company, the Kleberg Bank, the King's Inn, the Kingsville Ice and Milling Company, the Kingsville Publishing Company, the Kingsville Power Company, as well as irrigation and cotton ginning companies. This financial monopoly gave the family the power and influence to have a Texas Ranger headquarters. Such intimate relationships with the Rangers led residents of south Texas to commonly refer to them as the King Ranch's private security. The ranch was known as the most well-guarded piece of private property.⁵¹

On August 8, 1915, some sixty men raided the flag station at the Las Norias section of the King Ranch where the Texas Rangers maintained their headquarters. The response to the raid was swift and brutal, with Texas Rangers leading the charge. One soldier later reflected in his memoir that among the Rangers there was a "savagely radical element." He described "glaring abuses in retribution and threatening to clear the Valley of Mexicans."⁵² In an indiscriminate manhunt, Rangers killed ethnic Mexican men in revenge for the raid. Locals later lamented that any Mexican man in close proximity to the ranch faced the wrath of state and local law enforcement posses, soldiers, and vigilantes. Local resident Frank C. Pierce tallied at least 102 left dead in the wake of this killing spree, almost double the number of men alleged to have raided the King Ranch.⁵³ Historians estimate that between August 4, 1915, and June 17, 1916, Texas Rangers and deputy sheriffs killed more than 100 Mexican residents without conducting proper investigations. Some described the violent period as an "orgy of bloodshed"; others estimate that the number of deaths in this short period was closer to 300. Texas judge James Wells estimated that in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties alone Texas officers and vigilantes executed between 250 and 300 Mexican men in less than a year.⁵⁴

Some Anglo investors profited from the period of fear and wartime anxiety. They utilized local and state police to protect their claims to property and to help dismantle the remaining economic control by a class of ethnic Mexicans in south Texas through intimidation and violence. Writer and theorist Américo Paredes wrote that in this era, the Texas Rangers in particular "furnish[ed] the fortune-making adventurer with services not rendered by the United States Army or local sheriffs. And that is why from the point of view of the makers of fortune the Rangers were so important

to the 'pacification' of the Border." He continued, "The Rangers and those who imitated their methods undoubtedly exacerbated the cultural conflict on the Border rather than allayed it . . . the Rangers stirred up more trouble than they put down."⁵⁵

The manifesto and ongoing raids gave state authorities ammunition to profile ethnic Mexicans as enemies of the state. The raids also amplified calls by Anglo residents for more policing of ethnic Mexicans. David Montejano wrote of *El Plan de San Diego*, "The losers in these conflicts were usually the uninvolved civilian population, who bore the brunt of escalating and indiscriminate retaliation and counterretaliation."⁵⁶

The dramatic changes of this period turned ethnic Mexican residents into permanent enemies of the state. Any local resident that looked Mexican, regardless of citizenship, social status, or evidence of guilt, could be profiled as a "bandit" or "bandit sympathizer" between 1910 and 1920. State and local police ignored legal procedures and regularly denied residents the right to trial by jury and to presumed innocence. This pattern of violence continued for years. In 1919 the brutality of the Texas Rangers had become so brazen that the state legislature agreed to form a senate committee to investigate abuses by the state police. Anglo residents, civilians, businessmen, and politicians alike lined up to defend the Rangers. They suggested that the violence at the hands of the state police only matched, but did not exceed, the violence against Americans by Mexicans in Texas and across the border. In other words, Rangers responded with violence to quell violence on the US-Mexico border. They described the border region as an area of social crisis. C. L. Jessup, a ten-year resident of Brownsville, went so far as to admit that state police and local residents waged an all-out war against Mexicans. Jessup described local residents as living in "simply a state of war; every home almost was an arsenal."⁵⁷ The attorney questioning Jessup reiterated, "The war is on the Mexican banditti."⁵⁸

RESEARCHING HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE

In the early twentieth century, Texas politicians, the state police, the mainstream press, and historians had intersecting interests that resulted in portraying this period of anti-Mexican violence as rightfully done, all in the name of protecting the private property of US citizens and securing the

US–Mexico border. Recovering an alternative account requires returning to the landscape of the Texas–Mexico borderlands and looking for the remains of the departed. But our process of exhumation must be done with great caution; photographs, testimonies, and reports that describe the dead must be handled with great sensitivity, in order to avoid reinforcing their erasure and further normalizing the violence. Our efforts require us to search, first and foremost, for lost humanity.⁵⁹

Across the first half of the twentieth century, both the actions of the state police and the victims of state violence caught the attention of a number of scholars.⁶⁰ These accounts typically focused on periodic moments of armed conflict between Anglo and Mexican men; rebellion and repression take center stage. This research offered two competing narratives: the first valorized the actions of the Texas Rangers; the second valorized the actions of residents who challenged the state police with armed rebellion. The two opposing strains of scholarship helped develop two different groups of celebrated heroes who would be fixtures of popular culture for decades.

Walter Prescott Webb, a prolific historian known for his foundational work on the American West, grew up in the rural community of Ranger, Texas, where he attended Ranger High School. In 1935 he published *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense*, which for decades remained the definitive account of the heroic Rangers narrative, a celebration of the Rangers for their dogged efforts to dispel the dangers of the frontier for Anglo settlers.⁶¹ He credited the state police with ushering Texas into a modern era. His account showed little concern for the brutally repressive methods employed by Rangers and US soldiers. Instead, Webb's narrative is full of racist descriptions of Anglo superiority over savage Native Americans and inferior Mexicans cursed with mixed blood. For a quarter of a century, Webb's celebratory interpretation of the state police stood as the official account of this period.

Américo Paredes's publications in the mid-twentieth century helped cast an alternative light on the history of the Texas Rangers. He reinterpreted the Texas Rangers as outlaws who abused their authority to displace Mexican landowners and intimidate residents, and he celebrated Mexican residents who resisted state violence. His first book, *"With His Pistol in His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (1958), studied the Mexican ballad tradition, the *corrido*, and the local heroes who featured prominently in the