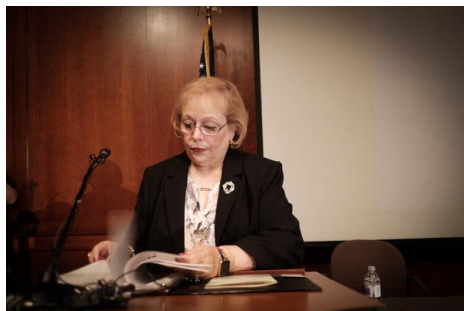


Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/02/us/porvenir-massacre-texas-mexicans.html>

*Lynch Mobs Killed Latinos Across the West. The Fight to Remember These Atrocities is Just Starting.*



Arlinda Valencia, a descendant of lynching victims, at a remembrance ceremony at the State Capitol in Austin, Tex., last year. Credit...Jessica Lutz

By [Simon Romero](#)

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EL PASO — Arlinda Valencia was at a funeral when an uncle told her a bewildering family secret: An Anglo lynch mob had killed her great-grandfather.

“A mixture of grief and shock overwhelmed me since this was the first I heard of this,” said Ms. Valencia, 66, the leader of a teachers’ union in El Paso. “The more I looked into it, the more stunned I was at how many Mexicans were lynched in this country.”

Ms. Valencia and other descendants of lynching victims are now casting attention on one of the grimmest campaigns of racist terror in the American West: the lynching of thousands of men, women and children of Mexican descent from the mid-19th century until well into the 20th century.

Some victims were [burned alive](#), like Antonio Rodríguez, 20, a migrant worker who was hauled from a jail in Rocksprings, Tex., tied to a tree and set ablaze in 1910. Other mobs hanged, whipped or shot Mexicans, many of whom were United States citizens, sometimes drawing crowds in the thousands.

Lynchings have long been associated with violence against African-Americans in the American South, and these atrocities are remembered at the [National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#) in Alabama. Lynchings of Hispanics have faded into history with less attention. Often, they have

been portrayed as attempts to exercise justice on behalf of white settlers protecting their livestock or claims to land.

But a new movement is underway to uncover that neglected past. It has unleashed discussions about the scramble for land or mining claims that frequently influenced these lynchings, as well as the traces of such episodes in resurgent anti-Latino sentiment and the question many parts of the United States are confronting: Who gets to tell history?

“The conquest of the West is still simply a tale of incredible progress for many Americans,” said Monica Muñoz Martínez, a professor of American studies at Brown University who has written extensively about [anti-Mexican violence in Texas](#).

“But despite the unwillingness to recognize these lynchings as a tragedy, or even recognize them at all, momentum is building to finally reckon with these events,” said Professor Muñoz Martínez, who was raised in Texas and is a co-founder of [Refusing to Forget](#), a group committed to increasing awareness about state-sanctioned violence against Latinos in Texas.

Texas, which [enshrined white supremacy](#) in its 1836 constitution when Anglo slaveholders seceded from Mexico, had by far the most episodes of mob violence against people of Mexican descent, according to William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, historians who have [documented](#) such cases.

Reasons given for these lynchings varied wildly, including accusations of cattle theft, murder, cheating at cards, refusing to play the fiddle, shouting [“Viva Diaz!”](#) — even witchcraft.



Texas Rangers on the King Ranch in South Texas in 1915 with lassoes pulled around the bodies of Jesús García, Mauricio García and Amado Muñoz. (Credit...Robert Runyon Photograph Collection/ Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, via The University of Texas at Austin)

In 1880, a mob in Collin County in North Texas accused Refugio Ramírez, his wife, and their teenage daughter, María Ines, of [bewitching their neighbors](#). The three of them were burned to death, according to Laura F. Edwards, a historian at Duke University.

In another episode in 1882, a man of Mexican descent identified as Augustin Agirer filed a complaint against an Anglo man who shot at his dog. In retaliation, Anglos tracked Mr. Agirer down and fatally shot him in front of his wife, The Austin Weekly Statesman [reported](#) at the time.

In 1922, a group of 10 men snatched Elias Villareal Zarate from a jail in Weslaco in South Texas, where he was being held for [fighting with a white co-worker](#). La Prensa, a San Antonio newspaper, described how the mob hanged him, raising the ire of Mexican diplomats who were trying to curb such killings.

One of the [most contentious lynching episodes](#) anywhere in the West involved the ancestors of Ms. Valencia, the El Paso teachers' union official. The family and several neighbors had settled in the outpost of Porvenir in a remote stretch of West Texas on the Rio Grande, eking out a quiet existence as farmers.

But on Jan. 28, 1918, a group of Anglo cattlemen, Texas Rangers and United States Army cavalry soldiers descended on the village as families slept. They seized 15 men and boys, the youngest of whom was 16, marched them to a bluff overlooking the river and fatally shot them at close range.

After burning Porvenir to the ground, the Rangers and ranchmen claimed, without offering proof, that the villagers had been thieves. They contended that the victims had been informants for Mexicans who had raided the nearby Brite Ranch a month earlier. They also claimed that they had come under fire.

But investigations by the Army and the State Department found that the Mexicans were unarmed when they were killed. Ms. Valencia's great-grandfather, Longino Flores, was among the dead. Her grandfather, Rosendo Mesa, was a boy at the time. He survived because he was away buying provisions.

"My grandfather kept everything about the massacre to himself, which kind of amazed me," said Ms. Valencia, reflecting on why it took so long for her to find out about the killings. "Remember, this is Texas. There's reverence for the nearly godly Texas Rangers. To this day, the truth is hard."

Ms. Valencia found out how hard it is to even agree on the facts surrounding the killings when historians and descendants of the victims at Porvenir, a village largely erased from local memory after it was razed in 1918 and survivors fled, applied to the Texas Historical Commission for a historical marker.

“Don’t tell me that if the police kill an Anglo in Chihuahua City, there isn’t going to be some differences about what really happened,” said Jim White III, 70, a descendant of the Brite family, whose ranch not far from Porvenir was the one that had been raided a month before the lynchings.

“It was a turbulent time on the border when you had a lot of people getting killed on both sides,” said Mr. White, who still lives on the family’s ranch and refrains from calling the killings a massacre. “It’s 2019, right? Playing the race card doesn’t work any more.”

Image



A historical marker to commemorate the massacre at Porvenir. Credit...Jessica Lutz  
Others who have opposed the marker include the chairwoman of the historical commission, who cited concerns that it was being used by “militant Hispanics” looking for reparations. The Presidio County attorney worried that the dedication ceremony for a marker could serve as the backdrop for a “major political rally” for Beto O’Rourke, the Democrat who last fall was a candidate for the United States Senate, according to The [Texas Observer](#), which wrote an extensive report on the dispute.

After several delays, the descendants finally got their [marker](#) in late 2018 on a highway near the razed village. It came after the historical commission’s state chairman, John Nau — a beer-distribution magnate who [donates heavily](#) to Republican officeholders — told staff members to inquire about having markers that described raids that occurred on Anglo ranches around the time of the Porvenir massacre.

“Chairman Nau's comments were provided as advice about how the county could address local concerns that the whole story was not being told about this period in Texas history,” said Chris Florance, a spokesman for the commission.

While tension persists over how to commemorate the lynchings in Porvenir, there are hundreds of examples of other documented extrajudicial killings of Latinos in states aside from Texas, some in places far from the border.

For instance, in 1919, two Mexican citizens were being held in a jail in Pueblo, Colo., as suspects in the murder of a police officer. A mob broke into the jail, drove the two men to the edge of town and [hanged them during a heavy rainstorm](#) in front of about 100 people. The El Paso Herald reported that Mexico's consul in Denver [investigated the episode](#) and concluded that the mob had lynched the wrong men.

In Albuquerque's Old Town Plaza, where gift shops and restaurants now cater to tourists, three men identified as Escolastico Perea, Miguel Barrera and California Joe were hanged by a mob of about 200 local residents in 1881 in connection with the murder of a geological surveyor, Col. Charles Potter.

“Though lynching in general is to be condemned, yet to every case there is an exception,” The Santa Fe New Mexican [reported](#) at the time. “In the instance of the dastardly murder of Charles Potter, it is very doubtful whether justice can be too swiftly meted out.”

California endured its own eruption of lynchings of Mexicans during the Gold Rush from 1848 to 1855 as competition for mining claims intensified. Anglo miners used mob violence in an effort to expel Mexicans or exact revenge. In one episode in 1851, a mob hanged [Josefa Segovia](#) in Downieville, Calif., after she stabbed an Anglo man who tried to assault her.

Efforts by Anglo settlers to take control of land owned by Mexicans, along with fears that Mexicans could help African-American slaves foment revolts, contributed to the sense of hostility around some lynchings. In the 1850s, several counties in Texas expelled Mexicans, and in 1854, the city of Austin [ordered](#) every Mexican to leave unless vouched for by Anglos.

States on the border are grappling yet again with efforts among prominent conservatives to label Latino immigrants a [security threat](#). Some in the borderlands see parallels with earlier outbreaks of anti-Hispanic militancy in the United States, citing examples like the [armed vigilantes](#) patrolling the Arizona desert, the expansion of the Border Patrol, and calls for the mass deportation of undocumented Hispanic immigrants.

“With everything that's happening on the border, it infuriates me that these lynchings were just swept under the rug,” said Brandi Tobar, 19, a college student in San Tan Valley, Ariz., and a descendant of one of the men killed at Porvenir. Ms. Tobar is a co-writer of a song, “Village Called Porvenir,” to remember the massacre.

She added, "If we don't want something like this repeated, it's about time for the entire country to know the truth."