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**“We Got Another Mexican—but He’s Dead”:** How the Portrayal of the Texas Rangers in Print Media Minimised Their Racial Violence towards Mexicans, 1910–1919

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# **“We Got Another Mexican—but He’s Dead”: How the Portrayal of the Texas Rangers in Print Media Minimised Their Racial Violence towards Mexicans, 1910–1919**

## **ABSTRACT**

Scholars of racially motivated violence in the United States have focused largely on acts against African Americans, neglecting the incidents faced by Mexicans, particularly those at the hands of the Texas Rangers. This paper explores the group’s brutal acts and their justification in Texas newspapers, glorification in East Coast publications and total omission from a New York magazine claiming to be a “record of the darker races.” It argues that the racial violence against Mexicans was minimised as a result of its coverage in US print media from 1910 to 1919.

**BY**

**Alex Loftus**

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Alex Loftus recently graduated from the University of Exeter with a BA in History. His work examines racial violence against Mexicans in the United States, with a particular focus on the state of Texas.

## Introduction

“We got another Mexican—but he’s dead.”<sup>1</sup> This was the official statement of Texas Ranger Captain James Fox following his investigation into a series of raids just north of Brownsville, Texas, in August 1915. Fox found a Mexican man on a ranch in the area and, believing him to be connected to the raids, killed him. The quote was flippantly offered over the phone to a journalist of *The Austin Statesman and Tribune*.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines the ways in which the Texas Rangers were portrayed in print media between 1910 and 1919, and consequently how these portrayals served to minimise the brutal, racially motivated violence they committed towards Mexicans in Texas. It argues that the publishers of print media misrepresented the real-world actions of the Texas Rangers, in order to satisfy the demands of their respective audiences, which ultimately minimised the violence they committed.

Texas is the state with the third-highest number of total lynchings, and the most perpetrated against Mexicans, with the Texas Rangers being the state’s primary perpetrator. Despite a gradual decline in lynchings nationwide from the 1890s, the 1910s marked a considerable increase in the number of those against Mexicans.<sup>3</sup> This notable rise in lynchings, in a state infamous for such horrific acts, did not gain significant press coverage at the time, nor did it carve out a place anywhere in US history or popular memory. As a result, 1910s Texas is the perfect case study to examine how racial violence against Mexicans in the US was minimised.

For most of the nineteenth century, the Texas Rangers were a decentralised group of citizen-soldiers who took it upon themselves to squash a perceived “Indian threat” to Anglo-American westward expansion. This changed in 1874 when the state legislature turned the group into official lawmen. The vigilantes, who had largely existed to commit racially motivated violence, were incorporated into the Texas justice system.

This paper does not use the terms, or variations of, Hispanic and Latino as they were not used contemporarily, and refer to a broader demographic not being studied here.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Mexican is used to encompass all individuals

1 “‘We Got Another Mexican,’ Phones Ranger Captain: Indications Point to Early End of Disturbance That Has Cost Many Lives,” *The Austin Statesman and Tribune*, August 15, 1915, 1, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/we-got-another-mexican-phones-ranger-captain/docview/1617247052/se-2>.

2 “We Got Another,” *Austin Statesman and Tribune*, 1.

3 Nicholas Villanueva, *The Lynching of Mexicans in the Texas Borderlands* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), 4.

4 William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848–1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xi.

who identify as Mexican nationals, Mexican immigrants living in Texas, and the descendants of Mexicans (mixed or otherwise).<sup>5</sup> Due to the exclusion of Mexicans from US records which classified people as either Black or White, it is challenging enough to identify a person in historical sources as Mexican and further specificity is often neither practical nor possible.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the Texas Rangers and other perpetrators of racially motivated violence did not differentiate between these subgroups, attacking them as a unified identity linked to Mexico through race or nationality.

The usage of the term “lynching” has, in recent years, received more debate among academics. Previously, scholars have used the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)’s 1940 definition, but this has been largely dropped due to its limitations.<sup>7</sup> For instance, it insists that the violence must be extra-legal but does not define the term, so it creates a grey area for police brutality which goes unpunished by a corrupt and institutionally racist organisation, such as the Texas Rangers. Historian Christopher Waldrep convincingly argues that the term is incredibly culturally significant and outlines how not using it can shift public opinion to justify racial violence.<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Villanueva Jr., professor of ethnic studies, builds on this and believes that to hold all perpetrators of racial violence against Mexicans accountable, scholars should use the term to broadly encompass all executions supposedly carried out in the name of justice.<sup>9</sup> This paper uses Villanueva Jr.’s inclusive definition, whilst also using mob violence as a broader term to also encompass acts which did not lead to death.

Historians William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb pioneered the field dedicated to mob violence against Mexicans, first with their 2003 article and then with the 2013 book *Forgotten Dead*.<sup>10</sup> They were the first lynching scholars to approach Texas as a state that borders Mexico, and not as the “West of the

5 Scholars such as Harris and Sadler also use the term *Tejano* to describe a Mexican resident of Texas. See Charles H. Harris and Louis R. Sadler, *The Texas Rangers and the Mexican Revolution: The Bloodiest Decade, 1910–1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2007), 7.

6 Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 5.

7 According to the NAACP’s website, “a lynching is the public killing of an individual who has not received any due process.” See NAACP, “What Are Lynchings?,” History of Lynching in America, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america#:~:text=A%20lynching%20is%20the%20public,under%20the%20pretext%20of%20justice>.

8 Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 4.

9 Villanueva, *Lynching of Mexicans*, 6.

10 Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*; William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, “The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 2 (2003): 411–438, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3790404>.

South.”<sup>11</sup> Prior to their work, there were two subsections of scholars studying violence in Texas: There were traditional scholars of lynching who engaged with racial violence, but only by viewing Texas as an extension of the South, which therefore overlooked violence against Mexicans.<sup>12</sup> And there were scholars studying violence in Texas as a Western state who neglected race as a factor. For example, Richard Maxwell Brown, the “foremost” scholar on Western violence, failed to include race in his six key reasons behind violence in the West, and historian Philip Dray’s award-winning 2002 book on broader US lynching, which includes a section dedicated to Texas, does not mention Mexicans.<sup>13</sup> In 1949, the journalist Carey McWilliams said “vast research” was required to estimate the number of Mexican lynchings before the field could blossom; half a century later, Carrigan and Webb provided this research.<sup>14</sup> *Forgotten Dead* includes two extensive tables documenting confirmed and unconfirmed lynchings of Mexicans that, while greatly beneficial, highlight the field’s main interdisciplinary struggle. In 2019, sociologists Charles Seguin and David Rigby confessed that social science lynching studies are far behind those of historians.<sup>15</sup> Despite Seguin and Rigby’s attempts to improve this, even their publicly available dataset only allows users to filter for “Black” and “White,” not for “Mexican.”<sup>16</sup> Since 2003, the scholarship has largely continued to work with a revisionist approach to the field of lynching, typically through focused case studies such as those by historians Ronald Hall and Monica Muñoz Martinez.<sup>17</sup> The reputation of the Texas Rangers has been similarly re-assessed, notably by the historians Charles Harris and Louis Sadler. They question the group’s heroic portrayal and draw attention to the violence committed against Mexicans, but largely absolve them of responsibility, instead blaming a lack of pay.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, they provide a strong foundation for this paper to take the next step from showing that the Texas Rangers had a significant role in the

11 Foley, *White Scourge*, 3.

12 Foley, *White Scourge*, 1–2; Ronald E. Hall, “They Lynched Mexican-Americans Too: A Question of Anglo Colorism,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 42, no. 1 (2020): 62.

13 Richard Maxwell Brown, “Violence,” in *The Oxford History of the American West*, ed. Clyde A. Milner, II, Carol A. O’Connor and Martha A. Sandweiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 393, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195112122.003.0012>; James W. Ely, “Review: Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism,” *Columbia Law Review* 76, no. 2 (1976): 362; Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 518.

14 Carey McWilliams, *North From Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1949), 98.

15 Charles Seguin and David Rigby, “National Crimes: A New National Data Set of Lynchings in the United States, 1883 to 1941,” *Sociological Research for a Dynamix World* 5, no.3 (2019): 1.

16 David L. Rigby, “Interactive Map of Lynching, 1883 to 1941, By Race of Victim,” accessed April 3, 2023, [https://davidrigbysociology.com/lynching\\_dot\\_map](https://davidrigbysociology.com/lynching_dot_map).

17 Hall, “They Lynched Mexican-Americans,” 62; Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 9.

18 Harris and Sadler, *Texas Rangers and Mexican Revolution*; Charles H. Harris and Louis R. Sadler, *The Texas Rangers in Transition, from Gunfighters to Criminal Investigators, 1921–1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019).

lynchings of Mexicans to analysing how this role is not more widely known and how it was minimised by print media.

The justice system existed but failed to protect Mexicans. It did not punish Texas Rangers for the lynchings, and its prisons were unable to protect those awaiting trial.<sup>19</sup> American cultural historian Amy Louise Wood famously writes about the “spectacle of lynching,” arguing it was a public display which aimed to instil fear into the targeted group.<sup>20</sup> While the Rangers frequently lynched in visible urban settings, there are also numerous instances where the bodily remains of Mexicans were found hidden in areas of woodland.<sup>21</sup> For almost all lynchings in the historical record, their first mention is in a local newspaper and, excluding a small number which went on to be documented in national publications and governmental records, it is the only proof of their existence.<sup>22</sup> Despite this, no scholar has dedicated a study to this source type’s coverage of Mexican lynchings by the Rangers.<sup>23</sup> By beginning with an examination of local newspaper reports in Texas, then expanding the focus to East Coast publications, this paper maps the trajectory of information in US print media, and reflects contemporary attitudes effectively.

The approach employed to use print media as a methodology is largely informed by communication theorist James Carey’s famous 1974 article, which criticises journalism historians for solely focusing on a source’s factual information rather than examining the attitudes, emotions, and expectations of the readership.<sup>24</sup> This paper does include information about publishers, but agrees with Carey that a more useful analysis of print media is one which focuses on the content and the audience. It makes use of obituaries which typically face hesitancy from scholars. Sociologists Bridget Fowler and Esperança Bielsa contend that obituaries are more about forgetting than remembrance and that the overwhelming focus on some demographics due to class, gender, race, and profession, serves to undermine them as a source type.<sup>25</sup> However, it is this specificity in subject choice that makes them

19 Carrigan and Webb, “Lynching of Persons,” 417.

20 Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2.

21 Martinez, *Injustice*, 1; Hall, “They Lynched Mexican-Americans,” 63.

22 Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 22.

23 It has been studied for African American lynchings, such as in Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*; Richard M. Perloff, “The Press and Lynchings of African Americans,” *Journal of Black Studies* 30, no. 3 (2000): 315–330, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2645940>; Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage During National Crises, With Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827–1965* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2006).

24 For the discussion on Carey’s research, see Nelanthi Hewa, “For the Record: Journalism Recording Technologies from ‘Fish Hooks’ to Frame Rates,” *Journalism Studies* 22, no. 3 (2021): 342–343, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1871400>.

25 Bridget Fowler and Esperança Bielsa, “The Lives We Choose to Remember: A Quantitative

incredibly valuable tools. Kimberly R. Bowman convincingly argues that obituaries reflect the dominant norms and values of a society and that they show what was considered significant to the people within it.<sup>26</sup>

This paper will begin by examining newspapers within Texas, which racistly portrayed the Mexican population as a significant threat to Anglo-Texans and the Texas Rangers as their only protection. Particularly, the use of the “Mexican situation” as an all-encompassing term to justify racially motivated violence. Then this research will look at newspapers in the states of Georgia and Connecticut, which misrepresent the real Texas Rangers as fictional characters found in dime novels and other works of fiction. It will examine audiences on the East Coast which wanted to believe in the existence of mythic characters of the Old West, causing the Rangers to be presented as heroes. This paper will end by analysing the New York-based magazine, *The Crisis*, the NAACP’s anti-racist magazine. The magazine did not report on any Mexican lynchings in its 110 issues spanning the decade studied, despite its tagline claiming to be a “record of the darker races.”<sup>27</sup> This omission, from this type of publication, implies the violence was not occurring, which of course minimises it.

## The “Mexican situation”

A theme looming over Texas print media of the 1910s was what they called the “Mexican situation.”<sup>28</sup> It refers in part to the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent political destabilisation of Mexico, but also describes the broader Anglo-Texan dissatisfaction towards the state’s Mexican population.<sup>29</sup> The broadness of the term gives it its power; its ambiguity masking calls to violence. By examining a single issue of *The Austin Statesman and Tribune* from August 1915, we can see how the “Mexican situation” dominated the narrative. References to Mexico and Mexicans can be found throughout the issue, and they are always framed as components of a wider threat to Anglo-Texans. One article reports on an incident of “outlawry” by a Mexican but extrapolates

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Analysis of Newspaper Obituaries,” *The Social Review* 55, no. 2 (2007): 203, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2007.00702.x>.

26 Kimberly R. Bowman, “History in Memoriam: Analyzing Obituaries to Learn Historical Context,” *The Social Studies* 111, no. 2 (2020): 51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2019.1653253>.

27 This was confirmed by analysing all 110 issues published during 1910–1919. See *The Crisis* 1, no. 1–19, no. 2 (1910–1919), Modernist Journals Project, accessed April 29, 2023, <https://modjourn.org/journal/crisis/>.

28 “The Border Situation,” *The Austin Statesman and Tribune*, August 15, 1915, 4, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/five-mexican-states-declare-independence/docview/1617248420/se-2>.

29 Harris and Sadler, *Texas Rangers and Mexican Revolution*, 5.

this to be supported ideologically and physically by all Mexican individuals and authorities.<sup>30</sup> Another article reports on fifty ranchers who “declare war” on some Mexicans for cattle theft. The ranchers broaden their target to all of Mexico and plan to cross the border, going so far as telling the Mexican governor José María Maytorena to prepare for an attack.<sup>31</sup> Even news which proves evidence against a unified Mexican conspiracy, such as five Mexican states declaring independence, is framed to intensify Anglo-Texan hatred. It is presented as proof that Mexicans are fiercely territorial and loyal to those they fight with and thus are a threat.<sup>32</sup>

Other newspapers perpetuated the “Mexican situation” as a context through which racial violence was minimised. For example, the *El Paso Herald* added provocative headlines to translated Spanish-language Mexican news articles to portray Mexicans as the aggressors, implicitly calling on Anglo-Texans to defend their land. One issue runs with the headline “A Sonora Paper Clamors Against Americans.” It includes the article “Calls on Mexicans to Smite Americans” which demands Mexicans to “rise against” Anglo-Texans.<sup>33</sup> However, a following article on the same page describes only protests against President Porfirio Díaz of Mexico and not Anglo-Texans, and a translated Mexican article in the same issue even clarifies that they knew “the American people as a whole do not approve of the action taken at Rock Springs,” referring to a lynching.<sup>34</sup> In Mexico, students led small-scale, peaceful protests against Anglo-Texan racial violence, whilst a much larger section of the population led violent riots against Díaz. The students made speeches and boycotted US businesses, whilst the anti-Díaz riots tried to radically overturn the presidency, leading to hundreds of protestors being arrested.<sup>35</sup>

30 “Funston Convinced Mexican Officials Behind Disorders,” *The Austin Statesman and Tribune*, August 15, 1915, 1, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/funston-convinced-mexican-officials-behind/docview/1617246679/se-2>.

31 “Mexicans Raid Ranch; Cowboys ‘Declare War,’” *The Austin Statesman and Tribune*, August 15, 1915, 1, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/mexicans-raid-ranch-cowboys-declare-war/docview/1617247368/se-2>.

32 “Five Mexican States Declare Independence,” *The Austin Statesman and Tribune*, August 15, 1915, 2, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/five-mexican-states-declare-independence/docview/1617248420/se-2>.

33 “A Sonora Paper Clamors Against Mexicans,” *El Paso Herald*, November 17, 1910, 1, *Chronicling America*, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn88084272/1910-11-17/ed-1/?sp=4&st=image&r>; “Calls on Mexicans to Smite Americans,” *El Paso Herald*, November 17, 1910, 4, *Chronicling America*, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn88084272/1910-11-17/ed-1/?sp=4&st=image&r>.

34 “Says the Demonstrations are Really Against Diaz,” *El Paso Herald*, November 17, 1910, 4, *Chronicling America*, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn88084272/1910-11-17/ed-1/?sp=4&st=image&r>; “Sonora Paper Berates Yankees,” *El Paso Herald*, November 17, 1910, 4, *Chronicling America*, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn88084272/1910-11-17/ed-1/?sp=4&st=image&r>.

35 Nicholas Villanueva, “Sincerely Yours for Dignified Manhood: Lynching, Violence, and American Masculinity During the Early Years of the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1914,” *Journal of*



This distinction was reported in broader US newspapers, but was not used to contextualise translated articles in Texas publications.<sup>36</sup>

Further success of newspapers in using the “Mexican situation” as rhetoric to blame a unified Mexican threat for Anglo-Texan problems can be seen in the range of situations for which the phrase was used. As Texas governor Oscar Colquitt neared the end of his second term in 1915, he sought to replace Senator Morris Sheppard as one of the state’s Democratic members of the US Senate. To do this, Colquitt challenged Sheppard to debate the “Mexican situation”; its significance as a campaign point reflecting the magnitude it carried in the state.<sup>37</sup> The “Mexican situation” had become the de facto response from Anglo-Texans when they faced any issue involving a Mexican. Therefore, the Texas newspapers were part of the active misrepresentation of Mexicans which antagonised the Anglo-Texan population into believing it needed immediate, violent defence.

An article from the above-mentioned issue of *The Austin Statesman and Tribune* is critical towards the US government for its disregard of the Texas border. It declares they “owe one plain duty to... protect them from a foreign foe,” but they are utterly incapable of doing this.<sup>38</sup> A series of articles in a 1911 issue of the *El Paso Herald* portray the US government as weak and ambivalent towards Texas. They claim American president William Howard Taft has “not thought of” Texas, but even if he had, he would be constrained by “inadequate... neutrality laws.”<sup>39</sup> These articles show that the state’s newspapers portrayed the federal government as incapable of defending the population from the “Mexican situation.” In his analysis of letters to the governor’s office, Villanueva Jr. concludes that the Anglo-Texan population was largely unhappy with the federal government’s handling of the “Mexican situation.” The Anglo-Texans were frustrated that the government took action in regard to radical political manifestos, but passed no comment on livestock theft and other issues deemed more pressing by Anglo-Texan civilians.<sup>40</sup> The government did increase their commitment to the border in 1916 when they sent 100,000 troops to Brownsville, Texas, but it was treated as training

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*the West* 49 (2010): 43.

36 Villanueva, “Sincerely Yours,” 43.

37 Patrick Cox, *The First Texas News Barons* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 117.

38 “Border Situation,” *Austin Statesman and Tribune*, 4.

39 “Congressman Presents A Complaint: Says El Pasoans Do Not Want Intervention; Has El Paso Letters,” *El Paso Herald*, April 20, 1911, 1, *Chronicling America*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084272/1911-04-20/ed-1/seq-1/>; “Diaz Lays the Blame onto Americans,” *El Paso Herald*, April 20, 1911, 1, *Chronicling America*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084272/1911-04-20/ed-1/seq-1/>; “Mexico Replies to Taft’s Note,” *El Paso Herald*, April 20, 1911, 1, *Chronicling America*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88084272/1911-04-20/ed-1/seq-1/>.

40 Villanueva, “Sincerely Yours,” 44.

for the First World War rather than a response to the “Mexican situation.”<sup>41</sup> This further detached Anglo-Texans from the government and increased the demand for violent intervention, which the Texas Rangers happily provided. Additionally, due to the rules of engagement, the government troops were not permitted to cross the border into Mexico, something the Texas Rangers had been doing extra-legally for years.<sup>42</sup>

After creating a context of demand for mob violence against Mexicans enacted by the Texas Rangers, or at the very least strengthening an existing appeal, the newspapers directly addressed the Texas Rangers’ lynchings and justified their actions. An article from the 1915 issue of *The Austin Statesman and Tribune* outlined above, describes the lynching of a Mexican by Texas Rangers after he resisted arrest. It says the lynching is “another” example that Rangers “will not waste any time on bad Mexicans...if they show any desire” to resist arrest, they will be shot.<sup>43</sup> It does not state that they shoot anyone who resists arrest, only the Mexicans who do. The article goes on to attribute a series of crimes to Mexicans, despite acknowledging that they have no evidence to confirm this suspicion.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, two articles in an issue of *The Statesman* from 1918 display the different reactions from the Texas Rangers towards Whites and Mexicans. After Texas Ranger Rowe was killed by a number of White draft evaders, it took four days until the suspects were caught and imprisoned.<sup>45</sup> Whereas Mexican draft evaders who killed a Ranger were caught and killed within 24 hours.<sup>46</sup> In isolation, these examples might not be sufficient to claim Mexicans received disproportionate and unlawful treatment from the Rangers, but when placed within the broader culture of racial violence, they serve to highlight the systemic discriminatory actions of the Texas Rangers. This behaviour justifies Carrigan and Webb’s description of “state-sanctioned terrorism,” but was not portrayed as such in contemporary Texas newspapers, thus minimising the violence.<sup>47</sup>

Even with the wave of revisionist historiography dedicated to proving that Mexicans were lynched too, the Texas Rangers found ways of hiding

41 Martinez, *Injustice*, 17, 19–20.

42 Linda B. Hall and Don M. Coerver, *Revolution on the Border: The United States and Mexico, 1910–1920* (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 59.

43 “We Got Another,” *Austin Statesman and Tribune*, 1.

44 “We Got Another,” *Austin Statesman and Tribune*, 1.

45 “White City Deserters Surrender: Alleged Slayers of Texas Ranger Gave Up Last Night, Eleven Men Are Taken, Rangers Have Control of the Former Fugitives,” *The Statesman*, July 16, 1918, 1, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/white-city-deserters-surrender/docview/1619621188/se-2>.

46 “Texas Draft Evaders Kill Ranger White,” *The Statesman*, July 13, 1918, 1, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/texas-draft-evaders-kill-ranger-white/docview/1619620017/se-2>.

47 Carrigan and Webb, “Lynching of Persons,” 415.

their lynchings in plain sight and so the scale of violence can often be underestimated. This includes the *Ley de Fuga* execution method (which translates as “the law of flight”) where Texas Rangers would capture Mexicans, set them free, and then shoot them for running away.<sup>48</sup> It is impossible to know the extent of this, but there have been “dozens” of confirmed instances.<sup>49</sup> Even historian Walter Prescott Webb’s disgustingly glamorous 1935 work on the Rangers’ history acknowledges that *Ley de Fuga* was used.<sup>50</sup> Historian Monica Muñoz Martinez argues that these actions by the Rangers set a pattern for abuse which led to collusion with mobs and state cover ups.<sup>51</sup>

Texas newspapers created an environment, knowingly or not, of the “Mexican situation.” They perpetuated racial hostility by framing all events involving Mexicans or Mexico as part of a wider conspiracy against Anglo-Texans. They led the population to demand intervention, and because they presented the federal government as incapable of doing this, there was a space for the Texas Rangers to exploit. Texas print media’s subsequent coverage of the Rangers directly addressed their lynchings and justified them and, as a result, minimised their racial violence towards Mexicans.

## The “Texas cowboy type” and silence in media portrayal

While publications within Texas covered the Rangers’ violence positively, those outside were largely silent. In the case of progressive New York-based magazines, this silence was a purposeful omission and will be covered in due course. On the contrary, magazines in the Eastern states of Georgia and Connecticut reported on the Texas Rangers as heroic characters in stories. This can be seen in obituaries, which glorified the Rangers to an extent that East Coast military personnel did not receive. Also, when these newspapers reported real-world events, they replaced accurate depictions of violence with common tropes, such as the retired cowboy. This misrepresented the real Texas Rangers by creating a heroic fantasy and minimised the violence they committed against Mexicans.

For example, Richard King, a soldier from Georgia, and Bill McDonald, a Texas Ranger, both held the rank of captain and both received obituaries of

48 Martinez, *Injustice*, 11.

49 Andrew R. Graybill, “Anglos, Mexicans, and Rangers in Texas, 1850–1900,” in *Reverberations of Racial Violence: Critical Reflections on the History of the Border*, ed. John Morán González and Sonia Hernández (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 59.

50 Walter Prescott Webb, *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935), 227.

51 Martinez, *Injustice*, 7.

similar length in Georgia newspapers, but were portrayed very differently.<sup>52</sup> McDonald was celebrated, with the title describing him as a “noted Texas Ranger and personal friend of several Presidents.”<sup>53</sup> King’s obituary received no title and he was portrayed as a soldier instead of a celebrity.<sup>54</sup> After glossing over McDonald’s personal life, his obituary dedicates itself to glorifying his military career. The passage calls him “famous” for his controlling the “most desperate characters,” and for his part in stopping the “most sensational crimes” on the Mexican border. It states he was known for his “daring” and would not hesitate to “charge Hades with a bucketful of water.”<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, King’s obituary is much more personal and emotive. It respectfully mentions his wife and children, and where he was born. It calls him a “brave soldier” who signed up as an officer in the American Civil War but does not talk about individual actions.<sup>56</sup> The single aspect of McDonald’s life discussed most in his obituary is his suppression of Mexicans—further confirming that the Georgia newspaper knew about the racial violence. But it was framed with a unique honour and glory, bestowed only to the Texas Rangers.

There was an appetite for stories of “frontier violence.”<sup>57</sup> The newspapers did not want to accuse the cultural icons of committing illegal, racially motivated violence and instead wanted to capitalise on the East Coast demand for Western stories. The real Rangers were portrayed to align with their mythic counterparts. This is further seen in a Connecticut newspaper’s reporting of the Texas Ranger J. McNeel, who came out of retirement to organise a militia to help protect Americans from the Mexican border. It focuses on his “experience in frontier work,” stating his squadron was “trained in frontier service” and represented the “Texas cowboy type.” McNeel deployed his militia in Mexico, where they explored the perceived untamed land and acted as the territorial aggressor.<sup>58</sup> These are all classic tropes of the American expansionary myth. Alongside this glamorisation, the report fails to address any racial violence, instead choosing to mirror some

52 “Capt. ‘Bill’ M’Donald Crosses Great Divide: Noted Texas Ranger and Personal Friend of Several Presidents,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, January 16, 1918, 4, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/capt-bill-mdonald-crosses-great-divide/docview/497249610/se-2>; “Obituary,” *The Brunswick News*, July 8, 1913, 2, *Chronicling America*, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn90052143/1913-07-08/ed-1/seq-2/>.

53 “Capt. ‘Bill’ M’Donald,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4.

54 “Obituary,” *Brunswick News*, 2.

55 “Capt. ‘Bill’ M’Donald,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 4.

56 “Obituary,” *Brunswick News*, 2.

57 Stephen J. Mexal, “‘My Dear Judge’: Owen Wister’s Virginian, Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., and Natural Law,” *Western American Literature* 51 (2016): 280, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44668475>.

58 “Mounted Scouts: Former Texas Ranger Raising Squadron of Cavalry,” *The Hartford Courant*, May 1, 1914, 10, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/mounted-scouts/docview/552500146/se-2>.

of the most successful Western novels of the time, such as *A Texas Ranger* by Napoleon Jennings and Owen Wister's *The Virginian*.<sup>59</sup> The former is written in the first-person perspective of a Texas Ranger, describing how his captain came out of retirement to heroically lead a squadron into Mexico; the captain's vast experience was vital to the mission's success.<sup>60</sup> Although Wister's novel although did not centre on a formerly retired Texas Ranger, it explored the idea of a changing West and the protagonist's struggle to adapt.<sup>61</sup> Both books long for the days of the frontier and laud the actions of earlier Anglo-Texans, reflecting an audience that craved mythic depictions of the Texas Rangers.

The supposedly factual Connecticut news article on McNeel mirroring the fictional heroic cowboy image demonstrates the glorification of the Texas Rangers; when a lawless frontier needed protection, the retired Texas Rangers were the only men up for the job. The consequence of this tasteless rhetoric was a lack of understanding on the East Coast of the true racially motivated violence faced by Mexicans. This was undoubtedly a major factor in the minimising of the lynchings nationwide.

In contrast, for New York-based magazines, the media silence surrounding coverage of the racial violence committed by Texas Rangers against Mexicans was even more overt. Instead of actively misrepresenting the events, as was the case in other East Coast newspapers, the magazines simply refused to discuss them. This omission is particularly consequential as these magazines were expected to criticise the period's social issues. Therefore, the silence implies to its readers that the racial violence was not happening or was simply not worth their attention.

The first of these publications is *The Masses* (1911-1917), a socialist magazine that was shut down by the federal government because of its criticism of the government's decision to implement conscription for the First World War. It only discussed the racial violence in Texas in one brief series, and this was to satisfy its anti-establishment agenda. From March to June 1911, *The Masses* published the four-part series of articles sharing the title "Revolutionary Mexico."<sup>62</sup> Each issue contained a longread on the current US-

59 "Mounted Scouts," *Hartford Courant*, 10; Napoleon Jennings, *A Texas Ranger* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1899); Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1902).

60 Jennings, *A Texas Ranger*.

61 Wister, *The Virginian*.

62 Carlo De Fornaro, "Revolutionary Mexico: Diaz and the Revolution, I," *The Masses* 1, no. 3 (1911): 5-6, <https://modjournal.org/issue/bdr526921/>; Carlo De Fornaro, "Revolutionary Mexico: The Fighting Parties in Mexico, II," *The Masses* 1, no. 4 (1911): 13-14, <https://modjournal.org/issue/bdr526732/>; Carlo De Fornaro, "Revolutionary Mexico: American Intervention—What For?, III," *The Masses* 1, no. 5 (1911): 11, <https://modjournal.org/issue/bdr526753/>; Carlo De Fornaro, "Revolutionary Mexico: Tomorrow in Mexico, IV," *The Masses* 1, no. 6 (1911): 9, <https://>

Mexico geopolitical situation: the first two focused on the events in Mexico, and the final two on the impact this had on the US. The series writer Carlo de Fornaro began his career in US newspapers but moved to Mexico in 1906 where he became editor of a newspaper incredibly critical of President Díaz. Fornaro served an eight-month prison sentence for criminal libel and later returned to the US and wrote for *The Masses*.<sup>63</sup> Since the publication did not contain advertisements and received all its funding from subscribers, it relied on provocative articles to lure in new readers.<sup>64</sup> Benoît Tadié believes the magazine would cover any topic, provided the article would sufficiently peddle anti-government and anti-capitalist rhetoric.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, it can be inferred that the editorial board's sympathetic stance towards the Mexican people and the racial violence they faced was only to satisfy the publication's agenda. The "Revolutionary Mexico" series was refreshing for the time in its portrayal of Mexicans, which validated the Mexicans' criticisms of Díaz and pointed out their racially demonised position in the US. Despite this, the series' angle was not to condemn the Texas Rangers but to demand socialism and relate the violence to the White readership.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the "Revolutionary Mexico" articles should be viewed as anti-government, and not pro-Mexican. The fact that the series remains a significant piece of pro-Mexican coverage in 1910s US print media, illustrates how little representation the violence received in New York magazines.<sup>67</sup>

Another magazine in discussion is *The Crisis* (1910-1932)—the official magazine of the NAACP. In addition to issues concerning African Americans, *The Crisis* covered issues faced by Native Americans, Chinese immigrants, Indian immigrants, and many other racial minorities across the US.<sup>68</sup> Its tagline even claimed to be a "record of the darker races," but Mexicans received no

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[modjourn.org/issue/bdr526774/](https://modjourn.org/issue/bdr526774/).

63 "Artists Welcome Fornaro From Jail: Friends Greet Him Warmly on His Release After Eight Months on Blackwell's Island," *The New York Times*, October 4, 1910, 6, <https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/artists-welcome-fornaro-jail/docview/97029482/se-2>.

64 Benoît Tadié, "The Masses Speak: The Masses (1911–17); The Liberator (1918–24); New Masses (1926–48); and Masses & Mainstream (1948–63)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume II: North America 1894–1960*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 835.

65 Tadié, "The Masses Speak," 833–836.

66 De Fornaro, "Revolutionary Mexico: Diaz," 5–6.

67 Rebecca Zurier, *Arts for the Masses: A Radical Magazine and Its Graphics, 1911–1917* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 22.

68 Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, "The Golden-Faced People: A Story of the Chinese Conquest of America," *The Crisis* 9, no. 1 (1914): 36–42, <https://modjourn.org/issue/bdr519339/>; Royal Freeman Nash, "The Cherokee Fires: An N. A. A. C. P. Investigation," *The Crisis* 11, no. 5 (1916): 265–268, <https://modjourn.org/issue/bdr508525/>; "Gandhi and India," *The Crisis* 23, no. 5 (1922): 203–207, <https://modjourn.org/issue/bdr514154/>. The last source was published after the 1910s, but it shows the dedication of *The Crisis* to covering India.

representation or mention of any kind.<sup>69</sup>

One of the lynching-related examples that can be used to examine *The Crisis*' silence on the Mexican cases was an issue from late 1911 containing a detailed report about the unjust, racially motivated lynching of the African American Zachariah Walker. It quotes *The New York Times* saying, "nowhere in the United States was a man ever lynched with less excuse or with an equal heaping up of horror on horror."<sup>70</sup> This is blatantly untrue. *The Crisis* asserts that the lynching's brutality and its allowance by state authorities makes it an exceptional case, but both factors are unremarkable during this period considering the Texas Rangers' racial violence against Mexicans. To say otherwise is to minimise the group's actions. Despite not providing any specific details of Walker's lynching, *The Crisis* implies that no word in English can convey its horror accurately. The publication says even the terms "inhuman" and "brutal" are too mild.<sup>71</sup> Walker was alleged to have shot a White man in Pennsylvania, before fleeing from an angry mob and hiding in a tree. The mob eventually caught up with Walker, and he was burnt to death.<sup>72</sup> Walker's lynching is deeply hurtful but was by no means unique. Nine months earlier, the Mexican Antonio Rodríguez broke out of a Texas prison and was burnt to death by the Rangers. His lynching led to mass protests in Mexico and was reported all over the US, including in New York, Washington, and Florida.<sup>73</sup> The case would have been known to those behind the "record of the darker races," but *The Crisis* excluded it from their publication.

*The Crisis* also claimed Walker's lynching was uniquely abhorrent because of the state's involvement, however it paled in comparison to that of Mexican lynchings. In Walker's case, the police chiefs were investigated but ultimately found not guilty of involuntary manslaughter.<sup>74</sup> Meanwhile, the Texas Rangers were a state law enforcement group committing lynchings themselves. They shot three Mexicans dead without trial in 1915, and massacred further 18

69 See *The Crisis* 1, no. 1–19, no. 2.

70 Raymond M. Hyser and Dennis B. Downey, "A Crooked Death': Coatesville, Pennsylvania and the Lynching of Zachariah Walker," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 54, no. 2 (1987): 87, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27773172>.

71 "Opinion: The Coatesville Lynching," *The Crisis* 2, no. 5 (1911): 188, <https://modjournal.org/issue/bdr522307/>.

72 Hyser and Downey, "Crooked Death," 86–87.

73 "Crowds in Mexico City Make Demonstrations Against Americans—Newspaper Building Stoned," *New York Tribune*, November 10, 1910, 1, *Chronicling America*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1910-11-10/ed-1/seq-1/>; "Greasers After Gore," *The Ocala Evening Star*, November 10, 1910, 1, *Chronicling America*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84027621/1910-11-10/ed-1/seq-1/>; "Mexican Rioters Attempt Life of U.S. Ambassador," *The Wenatchee Daily World*, November 10, 1910, 1, *Chronicling America*, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86072041/1910-11-10/ed-1/seq-1/>.

74 Hyser and Downey, "Crooked Death," 86.

Mexicans in 1918.<sup>75</sup> Historian Monica Muñoz Martinez states that alongside their hundreds of documented killings, thousands more were successfully covered up.<sup>76</sup> The Confirmed Cases Database by Carrigan and Webb includes several other incidents of Mexicans being killed by burning, as well as similarly brutal lynchings in Texas during each of the six preceding decades.<sup>77</sup> To say that two police officers not stopping the racially motivated lynching of an African American makes it an exceptional case is to grossly undermine, and certainly to minimise, the hundreds of Mexican lynchings the Texas Rangers allowed to happen, and the thousands more directly committed by them. An explanation for these lynchings' exclusion from *The Crisis* could be that the NAACP rejected the assertion that Mexicans were racially discriminated against because Mexico presented a supposedly safe land. Descriptions of Texas often centred on border towns and the borderlands.<sup>78</sup> It can be deduced that in the eyes of the NAACP, Texas was half Mexico, half US, making the lynchings as much the fault of the Mexicans as they were of the Anglo-Texans.

Despite their supposed dedication to exposing oppression, both progressive New York magazines did not cover Mexican lynchings in the same manner as lynchings of African Americans and other racial minorities. *The Masses* reported on the violence in its four-part longread “Revolutionary Mexico,” and whilst the magazine was sympathetic towards Mexicans, the articles were only published to satisfy the magazine’s anti-establishment, socialist agenda. Additionally, the Texas Rangers’ violence towards the Mexicans was never the focus of the magazine and the series. *The Crisis* was the NAACP’s magazine tasked with being a “record for the darker races.” It aimed to cover all non-White racial minorities in the US but failed to report on the plight of Mexicans. Such lack of coverage from a racial-inequality-focused magazine implied that the lynchings of Mexicans were not worthy of public attention, and thus, served to erase the violence committed by the Texas Rangers against Mexicans from the historical record. This combined with newspapers in other East Coast states, which knowingly mischaracterised the Texas Rangers as mythic defenders of the American frontier, created a culture in US print media outside of Texas where coverage the true violence faced by Mexicans was actively disregarded.

75 Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 214, 217.

76 Martinez, *Injustice*, 8.

77 For examples, see Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 180, 193, 200, 209, 211, 212.

78 Martinez, *Injustice*, 17; Carrigan and Webb, “Lynching of Persons,” 412; Hall, “They Lynched Mexican-Americans,” 62.



## Conclusion

The portrayal of the Texas Rangers in the 1910s print media undoubtedly served to minimise their racial violence against Mexicans. An honest portrayal of the lynchings did not fit into the various agendas of different publications. For example, some Texas newspapers presented the violence honestly but through a manipulative context that further fuelled the racial hatred against Mexicans. By perpetuating the “Mexican situation” and presenting the federal government as incapable of protecting the state’s population, the print media encouraged the Texas Rangers to intervene and served to justify their racial violence. Newspapers outside of Texas sanitised the violence to fit into a romanticised depiction of the frontier ever-present in contemporary fiction. Even the New York-based publications that were committed to speaking up for voiceless victims of racism omitted the racial violence committed against Mexicans, suggesting its non-existence. None of these media depictions held the Texas Rangers accountable for their actions, and all were silent on their racial violence against Mexicans.

Notably, this study has shown there is not a one-size-fits-all answer to how the violence was minimised, as each section demonstrates how publications in different states minimised the violence in different ways. For the last twenty years, historians have been adopting a revisionist approach against US lynching scholars who have focused almost exclusively on African Americans. When discussing *The Crisis*, this paper embodies a similar technique, but largely keeps the focus on Mexicans. Using the two decades of revisionist historiography as the foundation, this study analyses how the violence itself was presented or erased.

Finally, limited access to the non-digitised archival material, such as letters to the governor, and insufficient Spanish language knowledge has reduced the scope of this paper. If future scholars can utilise these resources and further examine the contemporary public opinion, it would greatly benefit the historiography of the Texas Rangers’ violence against Mexicans. “We got another Mexican—but he’s dead.”<sup>79</sup> Historians are only just beginning to learn the extent of the brutality behind such cavalier boasts.

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79 “We Got Another,” *Austin Statesman and Tribune*, 1.