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THE PERSISTENCE OF RACIST VIOLENCE IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY, 1921-1927

A Thesis

by

VINCENT A. LARRALDE

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

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December 2022

THE PERSISTENCE OF RACIST VIOLENCE IN THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY, 1921-1927

A Thesis
by
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December 2022

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ABSTRACT

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Masters of Arts (M.A.), December 2022, 117 pp, 1 figure, references, 71 titles.

This thesis examines the conditions that led to the violence orchestrated by Texas Rangers during La Matanza, and how after the Porvenir Massacre of 1918, state reform initiatives resulted in an investigation of the Texas Rangers in 1919. As a result, they were reduced in force and capability, and modern-day scholars imply violence associated with La Matanza ceased in the Valley after that.

However, this thesis argues that racist violence did not disappear but continued in the 1920s. Posses continued the administration of racist violence and lynching against ethnic Mexicans. Therefore, this thesis examines one case in Cameron County in Rio Hondo from 1921-1922, which led to a posse lynching of one Mexican National and police torturing two ethnic Mexicans. The other took place in Willacy County from 1926-1927 in the city of Raymondville and resulted in the lynching of three Mexican Nationals and one ethnic Mexican.

DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for always supporting me through life. Completing my graduate studies would not have been possible without the help and guidance of all professors within the History Department of UTRGV. I thank each professor for directing me to succeed and excel in this program. I would also like to thank my committee members for their patience in assisting me through the thesis process. Special thanks to Dr. Campney for taking time out of his busy schedule to have weekly meetings to help me with any questions regarding clarifying my thesis.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine racist violence against ethnic Mexicans in the first three decades of the twentieth century but particularly in the 1920s by Anglos in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, which, hereafter, will be referenced as the Valley. For this essay, the Lower Rio Grande Valley is defined as the counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy County because the majority of violence documented within this thesis occurred within these counties.

This thesis will first analyze the rapid economic and demographic growth of the Valley as an agricultural region after the railroad arrived in 1904 and the subsequent violence which culminated from the regional tensions amongst Anglos and ethnic Mexicans, known as La Matanza. La Matanza was an epochal massacre of hundreds of ethnic Mexicans by Anglo vigilantes in the summer and fall of 1915 and is an event that has, over the past two decades, finally begun to receive the historical attention that it deserved.[1] The examination of La Matanza and its historiography will, in this thesis, set the stage for a similar analysis of racist violence in the as-yet under-investigated period of the 1920s, which will comprise the bulk of the study. Our central focus will be to examine the racist violence and lynching administered in the 1920s to ethnic Mexicans due to continued extortion, subjugation, and oppression adopted by local law enforcement and Anglo residents within the Valley.

[1] Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans (New Haven: Yale University Press*, 2005), 176.

This thesis will showcase two case studies on racist violence from 1921 to 1927 within Cameron and Willacy County and, more peripherally, three related incidences of racist violence, two in Hidalgo County and one in Cameron County. Scholars focusing on local, regional, and state reform initiatives after the horrors of La Matanza, the similarly sensational massacre of fifteen ethnic Mexicans by an Anglo mob in the West Texas town of Porvenir in 1918, and the well-publicized hearings on these violent episodes in 1919 have concluded that violence declined precipitously in the region after that. Scholars' works suggested that reforms after 1915 equated to improvement through their collective lack of examination of violence in the 1920s.

However, historians William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb demonstrate the decline in ethnic Mexican lynchings by detailing that, from 1911-1920, 124 anti-ethnic Mexican lynchings occurred across the Southwest.[2] However, they could only confirm ten total lynchings in the following decade, signifying a 92 percent decrease.[3] Of these ten, seven were within three counties of Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo. This localized spike in the Valley, as this thesis will show, continued ruthless repression of ethnic Mexicans, which, although not as severe as that manifested during La Matanza, represented a significant level of sustained violence in its own right.

Carrigan and Webb best characterize lynching in the 1920s by stating, "these attacks took place surreptitiously, rather than in open defiance to the law [in contrast to the previous decades], and they received more public censure than support."[4] Various sociopolitical factors resulted in shifts by local law enforcement in the 1920s, asserting themselves within the primary role of administering lynching violence. These factors included an increase in police presence, the rise

[2] 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 (Winter, 2003), 423.
[3] Carrigan and Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928," 423.
[4] Carrigan, William D. and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xiv.

in activism against lynching, more assertive consular activity by Mexico, a marginally increased belief in the court system, Juan Crow segregation practices, and a state investigation of the Texas Rangers.

Geographically, Carrigan and Webb's study demonstrates the Southwest, except for Texas, had an early peak in violence that began in the mid-19th century and sharply reduced within the last three decades of the century.[5] Except for Southern California, New Mexico, and the Valley, the reduction in violence in the late 19th century resulted from Anglos dominating the domains of ethnic Mexicans across the Southwest very early and violently.[6] This domination made it no longer necessary to dispossess and subjugate ethnic Mexicans because Anglos controlled most aspects of society. Texas violence emerged as early as 1850, but the conditions leading to La Matanza's violence took much longer to appear in the Valley because Anglos took longer to penetrate the Valley's economic, social, and political domains. When violence did arrive in the Valley, violence peaked by 1915. After this year, racist lynchings reduced in frequency except for the Porvenir Massacre. This lynching was carried out in 1918 by Texas Rangers, Anglo Ranchers, and U.S. Army Cavalry. The cease in violence was followed by a state investigation into the Texas Rangers, which led to the previously mentioned decline in lynching by Texas Rangers in the Southwest.

The Valley's violence spiked due to local law enforcement's continued application of racist ideology and tactics against ethnic Mexicans in the 1920s.[7] Therefore, the statistical decline in violence at the regional level, as detailed by Carrigan and Webb, does not correspond to a Valley where violence continued at a high level. Thus, while Carrigan and Webb suggest a substantial decline in Southwest lynching, this study shows the Valley did not follow this pattern.

[5] Carrigan and Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928," 423.
[6] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 12.
[7] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 178.

As demonstrated by the statistical data of William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, below in Figure 1, eight of ten ethnic Mexican lynchings in the 1920s occurred within the Valley.[8] The other two happened elsewhere in the Southwest. Of these eight lynched in the Valley in the 1920s, five of the victims examined in this study parallel-match Carrigan and Webb's data. Under the outlined lynching criteria, this thesis will add three new lynchings, bringing the total to eleven. This data means eighty-five percent of lynchings in the Southwest in the 1920s occurred in the Valley. However, there are still several unconfirmed events of anti-Mexican violence that have gone unexamined that would likely inflate these statistics.

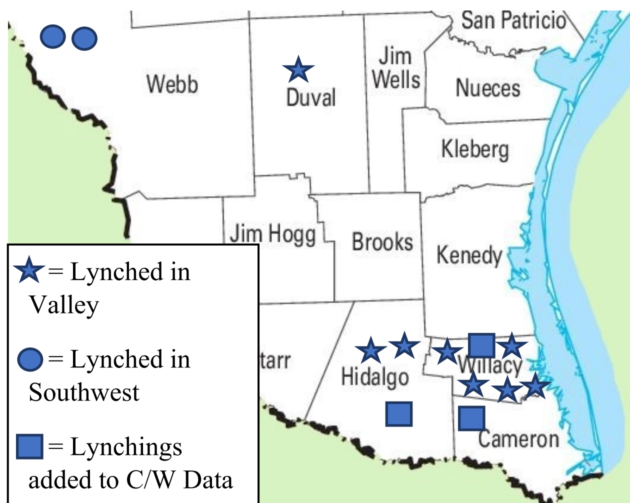

Figure 1: Lynching of ethnic Mexicans Victims in the Southwest and the Valley in the 1920s[9]

Despite the reforms that aimed to eliminate Texas Ranger violence after La Matanza, violence persisted in the 1920s due to significant sociopolitical changes that exacerbated the racist discrimination of ethnic Mexicans. Texas Ranger violence in the 1910s was centered around thwarting what Anglos perceived as ethnic Mexicans seeking to implement revolution.[10] However, this thesis will prove the 1920s were more about the Anglos' racist policing of ethnic

[8] Carrigan and Webb, "The Lynching of Persons of Mexican Origin or Descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928," 423.
[9] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, Appendix A-B.
[10] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* 84.

Mexican populaces. Fundamentally, in both decades, Anglos were racist. Still, their motives for violence differed between decades, proving that violence in the 1920s was not a vestige of violence of the mid-1910s but a substantial disruption in Anglo-Mexican relations.

To ensure the security of their dominance, newcomer farmers implemented as much racist division as possible in the 1920s. Newcomer farmers who arrived by railroad in the 1910s from regions such as the Midwest, Northeast, and Deep South seeking economic opportunity had by the 1920s obtained majority control over the Valley and disenfranchised a large majority of the old Democratic Mexican-American ranching class by 1915. Not only did they have prior experience in doing this in their native regions, but it also contributed to the atmosphere of continued violence beyond 1915.[11] Reforms that tackled Texas Ranger violence did nothing to quell the racism embedded in Anglo-controlled farm counties in the Valley in the 1920s. Counties such as Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy completely supported local law enforcement's endeavors to protect the Anglo populace from ethnic Mexicans.

After detailing La Matanza, this thesis focuses on two case studies from 1921-1927 and is contextualized with two other Hidalgo County lynchings and one in Cameron County, respectively. This study suggests that mob violence remained a well-established method of racist control throughout the 1920s. While none of the incidents of violence in the 20s matched the unbridled fury or the extraordinary death count of the violence a decade earlier, they nevertheless represented a very high level of violence relative to the extent of mob violence elsewhere in the U.S. by this same period. As this thesis will demonstrate, Anglo mobs lynched at least eight ethnic Mexican victims in five incidents in the Valley counties of Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy Counties between 1921-1927. Most scholars implied that violence had ceased after

[11] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans: In the Making of Texas 1836-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 133.

1915, as their works covered racist lynching at the end of La Matanza and then quickly focused on the reform and the decline of lynching in the 1920s and beyond. This finding is at variance with the assumptions that such violence effectively disappeared after the Porvenir Massacre.

Utilizing these cases, I argue that racist violence persisted from 1921-1927 and transformed into a more veiled, enigmatic, and ambiguous form of violence that permeated the Valley's County institutions and became less widespread but remained directed towards subjugation, oppression, and terrorization of ethnic Mexican communities in the Valley. The purpose of my paper is to dispel notions that violence ceased in the Valley in the 1920s and to examine the shifting ideological administrations of racist violence over time to inspire future historians to explore this decade of violence thoroughly, so its lynchings can become more adequately documented. This thesis's objective will be to examine forms of racist violence that were considered ambiguous or arbitrary in the 1920s, document them analytically, and compare them with the period of violence in the Valley from 1904-1915 to identify critical transformations associated with the administration of racist violence within both periods.

By assessing the racist violence of the 1920s and comparing it with the violence administered in the previous period, the intention is to answer questions about lynching, which remain under-analyzed. Some of these questions include who the perpetrators were, the reasons behind the lynchings, where they continued to occur, and why they continued to happen. Before examining the violence associated with these periods, however, we must briefly review the conditions that allowed this violence to thrive. Anglos knowingly constructed these conditions to subjugate ethnic Mexicans and maintain dominance.

One condition present not only in the 1910s but also in the 20s in the Valley was the Anglo practice of viewing ethnic Mexicans through a prism of collective guilt. Khalil Gibran

Muhammad demonstrates this in his book *The Condemnation of Violence*.[12] Collective guilt is the idea that individuals, when identified as part of a specific ethnic minority group, carry the responsibility of the entire group regardless if they were not involved in any acts or behaviors that the group or other individual may have solely perpetrated. Anglos in the Valley in the 1920s often practiced collective guilt by assigning blame for crime to all ethnic Mexicans rather than against the individual perpetrator. Collective guilt emphasizes the Anglos' belief that if one ethnic Mexican was a criminal, they were all collectively criminals.[13] One recurrent theme that will exemplify the existence of this practice in this study is the mass arrest of ethnic Mexican suspects after reported crimes. Muhammad best sums up the idea of collective guilt with a quote by Jonah Thorsten Sellin, in which he states:

> We are prone to judge ourselves by our best traits and strangers by their worst. In the case of the Negro, stranger in our midst, all beliefs prejudicial to him aid in intensifying the feeling of racial antipathy engendered by his color and social status. The colored criminal does not as a rule enjoy the racial anonymity which cloaks the offenses of individuals of the white race[14]

This philosophy of collective guilt did not bode well for Mexican-American citizenship. U.S. Anglos' thirst for territorial, economic and political conquest of the Southwest made all ethnic Mexicans equally guilty, as Anglos viewed them as the enemies of progress and civility. After the U.S.-Mexico War, the U.S. government, to the dismay of Anglos, provided the option of citizenship to former Mexicans to persuade Mexico to mitigate its stance in appropriating the western and southern boundaries of newly acquired states.[15] Ethnic Mexicans within the bounds of freshly claimed U.S. states had one year to decide to remain in the U.S. and be granted

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[12] Muhammed, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Boston: Harvard University Press), 5.
[13] Muhammed, *The Condemnation of Blackness,* 3.
[14] Muhammed, *The Condemnation of Blackness,* 2.
[15] Linda C. Noel, "I am an American: Anglos, Mexicans, Nativos, and the National Debate over Arizona and New Mexico Statehood," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, No. 3 (2011), 466.

citizenship or immigrate back to Mexican territory.[16] Ethnic Mexicans were unsure the U.S. Government would protect their civil liberties but genuinely believed the U.S. would provide them with the most economic opportunity. However, in the Southwest between 1850 and 1890, ethnic Mexicans' civil liberties were far from protected.[17]

At the turn of the twentieth century, technological transformations brought an influx of Anglos to the Valley, disrupting critical industries such as ranching, business, agriculture, and land development. Historian David Montejano best illustrates the transformations undertaken by migrant Anglos as he cites anthropologist Eric R. Wolf's theory of "North Atlantic Capitalism." The theory summarizes, "[the immigrant who arrived] everywhere destroyed unproductive societies, broke apart old communal ties, and replaced them with new material and social

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[16] Richard Griswold Del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 62.

[17] For more on the Chronology of Racist Violence within the Southwest see, Carrigan, William D. and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 6, 20, 21, 37; Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 10, 11, 25; Richard Griswold Del Castillo, *The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo: A Legacy of Conflict* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 10, 14, 33, 66, 67; Richard H. Peterson, "Foreign Miner's Tax of 1850 and Mexicans in California: Exploitation or Expulsion?" *Pacific Historian 20* (Fall 1976), 265, as quoted in, Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* 52; Andrés, Reséndez, "National Identity on a Shifting Border: Texas and New Mexico in the Age of Transition, 1821-1848," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 2 (Fall, 1999), 670, 672, 669, 677, 683; David J. Weber, *Myth and the History of the Hispanic Southwest: Essays* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), 144; Arnoldo De León, *They Called Them Greasers: Anglo Attitudes Toward Mexicans in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), x, 16; William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, "La Matanza and the Canales Investigation in Comparative Perspective," in *Reverberations of Racist violence: Critical Reflections on the History of the Border*, ed. Sonia Hernadez and John Morán González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021) 92, 93; Jan Jarboe, "Goliad, Goliad County Pop: 2029 Alt: 187," *Texas Monthly 19,* no. 4, (Summer, 1991), 99; Mexico: Comision Pesquisidora de la Frontera del Norte, *Reports of the Committee of Investigation Sent in 1873 by the Mexican Government to the Frontier of Texas* (New York: Baker & Godwin Printers, 1875), 179; Jerry Thompson, *Cortina: Defending the Mexican Name in Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press 2007), 12, 18, 23, 24, 25, 31, 43, 95; Joseph E. Chance, *José María de Jesús Carvajal: The Life and Times of a Mexican Revolutionary* (Trinity University Press, 2012), 55, 59, 101, 188, 201, 206, 243; George T. Díaz, *Border Contraband: A History of Smuggling Across the Rio Grande* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 3, 23, 30, 31; Bell, Samuel E. and James M. Smallwood, "Zona Libre: Trade & Diplomacy on the Mexican Border 1858-1905," *Arizona and the West* 24, no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 120, 123, 131; Morris Leopold, "The Mexican Raid of 1875 on Corpus Christi," *The Quarterly of the Texas State Historical Association* 4, no. 2 (Winter, 1900), 128; Ruth Dodson, "The Noakes Raid," *Frontier Times*, 23, No. 10 (July 1946). Pg.1; [17] William M. Hager, "The Nuecestown Raid of 1875: A Border Incident," Arizona and the West 1, no.3 (1959), 267, 268; Carrigan, William D. 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 (Winter, 2003), 423; Paul Cool, *Salt Warriors: Insurgency on the Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2008), 10, 14, 43, 45, 195, 212.

structures, new social relations, solidarities, and metaphors."[18] In other words, these immigrants brought a system of economics where the Valley was now for sale, including its labor, land, and wealth. The emergence of the Midwestern economic agent forced the Valley's commodities to no longer be burdened by social ties and moral obligations.[19]

Unlike many other Southwestern regions, ethnic Mexicans had dominated the Valley in every facet of life since the end of the U.S.-Mexico War. However, Anglos, who migrated into the Valley in the early decades of the 20th century, were determined to change that reality soon after their arrival. Migrant Anglos had a long history of living in environments in which they had actively practiced the oppression of blacks through various racist tactics, including lynchings, sundown towns, expulsion, and Jim Crow laws.[20] They maintained control of their respective economic, political, and social landscapes and felt they could do the same in the Valley.[21]

Consequently, Anglo immigrants spearheaded racist violence by establishing anti-ethnic Mexican initiatives throughout all domains. These conditions led to feverous disgruntlement by ethnic Mexicans, culminating in resistance to overthrow the new Anglo order. Ethnic Mexican rebellions were matched with fiercer counters by Anglos and actively degraded the perception Anglos held of ethnic Mexicans over time. Many groups within the larger Anglo group in the Valley chose to be the initiators of this violence, including Texas Rangers, local law enforcement, and Anglo vigilantes. They were all complicit in enacting racist violence against ethnic Mexicans in 1915, although Texas Rangers took the primary role.

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[18] Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 276 in Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 104.
[19] Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars*, 277.
[20] Brent Campney, *This is Not Dixie: Racist Violence in Kansas 1861-1927* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 7.
[21] Timothy P. Bowman, *Blood Oranges: Colonialism and Agriculture in the South Texas Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M University press, 2016), 110.

However, after horrendous bloodshed in 1915, widespread racist violence had drawn the ire of state and federal criticism in addition to international condemnation by Mexico. As a result, widespread violence exacerbated tensions before they improved.[22] Still, the United States eventually worked to compromise with Mexico on destroying revolutionary sanctuaries and leadership, increasing police and military presence, and cooperating with Mexico's diplomatic representation to further ethnic Mexican's legal representation.[23] As a result, local, state, and federal authorities claim they had suppressed the Valley's violence by 1916. Political reforms in the Valley, spearheaded by Mexican-American politician J.T. Canales, who lobbied for congress to investigate the killings by Texas Rangers during this violent period, led to reforms that transformed the violent state institution of the Texas Rangers into a more moderate entity by 1919.[24]

With the end of the massacre by 1915, modern historians have assumed or implied that the Valley had become a safer place for ethnic Mexicans by the 1920s. However, racist violence declined but did not disappear and remained robust. Although many reforms took shape to hinder the administration of Texas Ranger violence, they did not completely deter the growing rise of racist discrimination embedded in a large majority of the Valley's Anglo populace and local police institutions.

As a result of the examination of both periods, this thesis argues that the shift from state to local law enforcement's administration of racist violence resulted from the rise in accountability and awareness of the Texas Rangers' brutal actions in the previous decade. Aside from Texas Rangers, reformers did little to tackle the racist violence among local Anglo

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[22] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* 146.
[23] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas,* 142.
[24] Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves you: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 183.

populaces and police forces during these tumultuous years. Local law enforcement was often present during Texas Ranger investigations that had transpired during "La Matanza." Local county police, as a result, absorbed, adapted, and modified tactics and ideologies from Texas Rangers and used them to create their form of policing against the "Mexican problem" within their communities. In addition, Texas Rangers had the full support of the Anglo populace in 1915. Law enforcement also retained this support with the local public in the 1920s, and Anglo residents sometimes participated in racist violence with law enforcement.

Texas Rangers' enthusiasm for extralegal violence lost its legitimacy among Anglos in the 1920s. However, continued policing remained necessary with the rise of Juan Crow practices, the increase in ethnic Mexican prohibited voting, the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan, the rise of alcohol Prohibition, and the increased dependence on ethnic Mexican labor.

Newcomer farmers had instituted segregation policies in the farm counties they obtained control over, such as Willacy, Cameron, and Hidalgo.[25] Juan Crow practices mirrored the laws of Jim Crow in the American South, and Anglos designed them to keep ethnic Mexican communities separate from Anglos and to bolster racist discrimination towards ethnic Mexicans through systemic and institutional abuses.[26] Newcomer farmers also aimed to maintain the disenfranchise of ethnic Mexicans politically by instituting white primaries and poll taxes that kept them from voting for Democratic candidates.[27]

The emergence of the Ku Klux Klan exacerbated tensions among Anglos and ethnic Mexicans by terrorizing ethnic Mexican communities in the Valley in the 1920s.[28] The first rise

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[25] For more on the political functions of Valley counties see, Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 151; Alicia Marion Dewey, *Pesos and Dollars: Entrepreneurs in the Texas-Mexico Borderlands, 1880-1940* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2014), 41, 94, 141.
[26] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 160.
[27] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 143.
[28] Juan O. Sánchez, *The Ku Klux Klan's Campaign against Hispanics, 1921-25: Rhetoric, Violence and Response in the American Southwest* (North Carolina: McFarland Publishers, 2018), 97.

of the Ku Klux Klan originated in the post-civil war South. It was known for the violence it administered to formerly enslaved people aiming to reintegrate themselves into southern society.[29] The Ku Klux Klan in the Valley was synonymous with the second rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s nationwide. Membership within the second Ku Klux Klan was at an all-time high.[30] Members of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s were more inclined toward the intimidation of minorities rather than actual violence.[31] The organization was not violence-free by any nature. Still, they tended to refrain from violence because the accountability of racist crimes had increased considerably from the post-civil war era.[32]

Anglos often relied on the local chapters of the Ku Klux Klan that prominent Anglos had established in the cities such as Brownsville, Harlingen, McAllen, Mercedes, and San Benito to terrorize local minorities in the Valley.[33] In 1921 Klansmen interrupted an American legion parade which a large portion of ethnic Mexicans attended. The terror of the Ku Klux Klan's silent stroll through Mercedes instilled fear in all attendees. The Ku Klux Klan often aligned themselves with prominent Anglo community members to promote Anglo Supremacist ideology, effectively oppressing any non-whites. This behavior constantly reinforced the terrorization of ethnic Mexicans through petrifying spectacle.[34]

Prohibition in 1920 also bolstered anti-ethnic Mexican violence. It immediately created a lucrative illegal market for liquor on the border, which led to the killing of ethnic Mexicans

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[29] Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishing, 1992), vii.
[30] Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York and London: Liverwright Publishing Corporation, 2018), 2.
[31] Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK,* 2.
[32] Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*, 66.
[33] Brent M.S. Campney, "Anti-Japanese Sentiment, International Diplomacy, and the Texas Alien Land Law of 1921," *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 85 no. 4, 2019, p. 871.
[34] Campney, "Anti-Japanese Sentiment, International Diplomacy, and the Texas Alien Land Law of 1921," 871.

during overly offensive apprehensions by law enforcement agencies.[35] Tequileros in the 1910s and smugglers in the 1920s filled the role of alcohol transporters. In response, federal, state, and local enforcement agencies attempted to crack down on illicitness.

Enforcement agencies' negative attitudes towards ethnic Mexicans transporting alcohol across the border often led to incidences where officers induced violence through aggressive arrest tactics. Anglos perceived smugglers to be revolutionary invaders. Ethnic Mexicans, conversely, regarded smugglers to be hardworking rancheros looking only to make a quick buck. Anglo bias led federal officers only to focus their attention on the illicit activity of tequileros and turned a blind eye to Anglo bootleggers. Interactions at border smuggling routes are where most enforcement agencies instituted violence against ethnic Mexicans. However, despite the law, viewing these smugglers as murderous invaders, they had only killed one farmer in thirteen years of operations during Prohibition. Most smugglers killed officers in self-defense, and law enforcement mainly instigated these interactions. Due to superior weapons, training, and tactics, law enforcement relished partaking in incidences in which they knew they would be victorious.

The triangulation ambush killing of three tequileros by Texas Rangers and mountain customs inspectors on December 17, 1922 proves officers often took the offensive. They spent an entire day tracking and left them no chance at surrender by setting up an ambush that targeted ethnic Mexicans on a ranch in Zapata County, leaving all of them dead. Much of these characteristics of the 1920s that bolstered racist violence against ethnic Mexicans also showcase how police officers often constructed narratives of themselves as defenders of Anglo community.[36]

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[35] George T. Díaz, *Border Contraband: A History of Smuggling Across the Rio Grande* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 93.
[36] Díaz, *Border Contraband: A History of Smuggling Across the Rio Grande*, 93, 94, 96, 99, 100, 101.

Due to these transformations, racist violence that used to be blatant, visible, and widely supported in 1915 would become subtle, elusive, and ambiguous in the 1920s. After 1919 Anglos perpetrators did not take legal impunity for granted, as they knew they more susceptible to conviction in regards to visible racist violence and lynchings. So, in the 1920s, perpetrators had to enact violence within what the Valley's Anglo society would deem appropriate action against accused ethnic Mexicans. Unfortunately, for ethnic Mexicans, there was not much racist violence the Anglo community chose to invalidate, so racist violence continued in a much more concealed and secretive manner. To understand the violence directed towards ethnic Mexicans during these sanguinary periods, we must clearly define terminology for the most targeted demographics of this period.

Because many scholars cannot corroborate the national citizenship of some victims of racist violence, it is necessary to create an umbrella-like term to encapsulate the demographic living in the Valley that was ethnically different from Anglos. Federal governments often disputed victims' national citizenship because confirmation of national identity afforded the victim and nation certain legal advantages and vice versa. Therefore, due to international contestation, federal investigators never affirm some of these victims' national identities. Consequently, it is best to characterize these unconfirmed people with descendants and cultural heritage primarily from Mexico and who differed from Anglo-Europeans as "ethnic Mexicans."

In contrast, "Mexican-Americans" and "Mexican Nationals" will be reserved for victims of racist violence whose citizenship government investigators could ascertain. For example, the term "Mexican-American" will be reserved for people of Mexican descent, initially under Mexican rule, who held U.S. citizenship.[37] Mexican Nationals are those with Mexican citizenship living or temporarily visiting the U.S. Therefore, these three classifications of people

[37] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* xiii.

of Mexican descent will allow us clearly define the victims from our period of study, and it will also allow us to dispel some of the ambiguity associated with some of the lynchings we choose to examine.

The violence that transpired in both these focus periods was not arbitrary. It was a long-fostered, deep-seated hatred of ethnic Mexicans that had burst forth due to Anglos growing intolerance since the early frontier of Texas. The Texas Rangers formed to respond to what Anglo settlers viewed as a dangerous and threatening frontier filled with hostile Indian groups and disgruntled Mexican National vaqueros.[38] Anglo settlers founded the Texas Rangers to defend against retribution for Anglos' injustices when they seized vast amounts of land from Indians and Mexican nationals.[39] Since their foundation in 1835, Texas Rangers were the enforcers of Anglo attitudes, such as frontier protection in Texas, the implementation of Manifest Destiny in 1845, and racist Progressive Era ideology at the dawn of the 20th century.[40] The purpose of the violence, which was directed toward Mexican Nationals by Texas Rangers, was as best described by Historian Michael L. Collins, who stated:

> Texas Mounted Rangers long before they evolved into law enforcement units-served as units of Anglo-American conquests…more than a shield to defend the border from the ravages of Mexican bandits and Indian Marauders, they served as a spear for the expansionists designs of ambitious leaders who remained dissatisfied with the conquest.[41]

Anglos heralded Texas Rangers as frontier heroes, a historian who aided in championing this myth was Historian Walter Prescott Webb, one of the Texas Ranger's largest sympathizers who only mildly criticized the Texas Rangers in his extensive publications.

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[38] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves you*, 241.
[39] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leave You*, 10.
[40] Trinidad Gonzalez, Benjamin Heber Johnson, and Monica Muñoz Martinez, "Refusing to Forget: A Brief History," in *Reverberations of Racist violence: Critical Reflections on The History of The Border* ed. Sonia Hernández and John Morán González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 28.
[41] Michael L. Collins, *Texas Devils: Rangers and Regulars on the Lower Rio Grande 1846-1861* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 6.

However, Webb's characterization of the Texas Rangers that existed throughout history gives credence to the notion that Texas Rangers offered only extreme violence as a substitute for leadership. Webb characterizes this leadership when he states, "to every force that has borne the name, was the absence of formal discipline… the natural turbulence and independence of the frontiersman made obedience distasteful to him."[42] However, Texas Rangers' leadership is highly questionable, considering they were constantly the culprits responsible for the arbitrary killing of ethnic Mexicans in the early 1900s.

One of the first incidents of Texas Rangers violence in the Valley occurred in Starr County on November 10, 1906, when media outlets alleged four Texas Rangers had been fired on by ethnic Mexicans when passing La Casita Ranch in Rio Grande City. Captain J.W. McDonald said he instructed his men to hop back on the stagecoach as he heroically and single-handedly fought off the ethnic Mexicans and killed all four. In an almost laughable fashion, Anglo newspapers reported ethnic Mexicans shot hundreds of shots and riddled the officers' shirts with bullet holes. Still, not a single bullet struck the Texas Rangers.[43] As Mcdonald returned to town Sheriff Deodoro Guerra, authorities quickly learned that this attack resulted from friction between two factions, the Reds (Republicans) and the Blues (Democrats), that disagreed with the upcoming local elections. These two political factions were rivals because of landowning prominent Tejano families that did not share similar values on county politics and may have occasionally implemented violence amongst each other. According to historian David Montejano:

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[42] Walter Prescott Webb, *Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1935), 79.

[43] "State Capitol: A Rumor of Serious Trouble in Starr County," *The Houston Post*, June 15, 1906, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 2, Brent Campney's Research Collection on Race Relations in South Texas, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Special Collections Archive, Edinburg Campus. Hereafter, BCRC.

> A landowner indicated his preference for the sake of the commoner, by his choice of colors; ideological matters were unimportant… Jovita Gonzalez stated landowners joined parties not for political conviction, but for personal enmity and hatred.[44]

Four days before the La Casita attack, an unknown suspect nearly pistol-whipped Republican Starr County Judge Robert Langley to death in his home. Also, an unidentified suspect assassinated Republican Judge Welch in his home in the middle of the night just days before a vital bi-partisan general election. Newspaper speculation insisted that some Democrats had killed Welch and injured Langley. Many local citizens believe the ethnic Mexicans killed at La Casita Ranch were also part of the political faction responsible for Welch's death. Judge Welch's assassination, Judge Langley's beating, and the attack on La Casita Ranch drew no suspects. Contemporaries firmly believed that Texas Rangers and the democratic political party fabricated the attack on the judges. They killed these ethnic Mexicans and attempted to paint a narrative that they were politically extreme ethnic Mexicans that orchestrated the attack on the judges and sought to have them take the blame for it. The *Corpus Christi Caller* newspaper editorial stated:

> The slaying of four Mexicans who fired on McDonald's band of Texas Rangers is another chapter in the tragic story of South Texas's unclean politics…The Mexicans killed were angry at being refused permission to vote on receipts paid for by a political clique.[45]

The editorial suggests democrats forced four ethnic Mexicans to vote for the "reds" in the upcoming election and could have used this as an ulterior motive to have the judges attacked and have the incident pinned on unimportant political extremist Mexicans instead of the essential members of the Democratic Party who devised the attack on the judges. In other words, the Democratic party used the ethnic Mexicans as scapegoats for

[44] "Blues and Reds of Starr County Have a Bitter Feeling Towards Each other," *The Houston Post*, November 15, 1906, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 2, BCRC.
[45] "May This Forever End It," *The Corpus Christi Caller*, November 16, 1906, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 2, BCRC.

the murder and attempted murder of two republican judges to prevent the shifting of political momentum within county politics. In the end, the Valley's justice system never charged anyone for these crimes in Starr County, and four ethnic Mexicans took the fall for a twisted political feud.[46]

Another Texas Ranger killing occurred in Starr County on May 6, 1909. Severo Lopez was attending a farewell party at a diner in Rio Grande City when Texas Ranger Levi Davis and two other Texas Rangers ordered ethnic Mexican partygoers to shut down their celebratory event. When ordering the masses to disperse, Texas Ranger Davis used his rifle barrel to shove Severo Lopez and ordered him to move on, but Lopez refused to obey. Without any force by Lopez, Davis repeatedly used his rifle butt-stock to bash Lopez's face for his disobedience. The Texas Rangers claimed a scuffle between both parties to possess the gun ensued, and an unidentified shot rang out, killing Lopez instantly. Starr County police eventually arrested Levi Davis to await bond and trial for the Murder of Severo Lopez.[47] However, Davis's social connection gave him an advantage as Developer Lon C. Hill and rancher John Closner paid some of his $2,000 bail requirement.[48] He was also favored legally as Levi Davis's trial occurred on July 6, 1909, and it took only 29 minutes for the jury's acquittal.[49]

Lynching is the primary type of racist violence examined in this thesis. Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage best defines lynching through his examination of racist violence against blacks in the Deep South using three characteristics, which I will adapt and modify to explain anti-ethnic Mexican mob violence in the Valley from 1904-1915, and 1921-1927. Brundage's first characteristic of lynching is having the unwavering support of the broader Anglo

[46] "Rio Grande City Politics as Seen by A Resident," *The El Paso Herald*, November 27, 1906, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 2, BCRC.
[47] "Mexican Killed by a Ranger: Disturbance at Restaurant Results Fatally," *The Brownsville Herald*, May 06, 1901, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 2, BCRC.
[48] "Ranger Davis Gives Bond" *The Brownsville Herald,* May 15, 1909. Pg. 1.
[49] "Ranger: Levi Davis Acquitted at Corpus," *The Daily Advocate*, July 5, 1909. Pg. 1

community before, during, and after a lynching. The second was Anglos used their violence to enforce the subordination of ethnic Mexicans and the supremacy of Anglos through often non-sensational displays of lethal violence. The last characteristic was that lynchers often maintained legal impunity for their actions and usually faced minor to no consequences.[50]

Many different types of mobs enacted lynching throughout history. However, because of its focus on the nature of the violence in the Valley, this thesis will focus on Brundage's discussion of posses as the type of lynching prevalent in South Texas in the 1920s. Posses usually formed immediately after the discovery of a crime. Their initial purpose was to capture rather than lynch suspects. However, as police revealed details of the crime, the collective Anglo hatred for ethnic Mexicans rapidly grew, often culminating in the lynching of an alleged perpetrator. Akin to our definition of lynching, posses could vary significantly in their composition. As categorized by Brundage, posses were often spontaneous gatherings consisting of legalized deputies, neighbors, relatives, crime witnesses, or just nearby rabble-rousers. Furthermore, the more sensational the alleged crime, the more likely it was to enthrall Anglos from neighboring communities to participate. These groups often straddled the line between staunch supporters of local law enforcement's investigation of crimes and being an extralegal force above the law, a line they crossed when they took decisive action to lynch a suspect.[51]

When posses sought to rectify transgressions perpetrated against the broader Anglo community, they would initiate a search that intended to apprehend the suspect. However, racist ideology coupled with the impulsive nature of the posse would usually result in the suspected culprit's lynching. Posses usually lynched perpetrators within a week of the discovery of their crime. Posses, compared to other types of lynch mobs, were not ritualistic. Additionally, as long

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[50] W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 18

[51] Brundange, *Lynching in the New South*, 33, 34.

as they refrained from partaking in sadistic displays of open violence, they usually did not attract attention and escaped accountability from the legal justice system. Lastly, they also held popular support from Anglo media outlets because the latter often viewed posses as a group of courageous citizens going above their duty to quell criminal threats to society.[52]

Historian Brent M. S. Campney's work on racist violence in the Midwest delineated two periods in Kansas in the mid-19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century. The first period demonstrates Anglo mobs were the primary administrators of lynching, and the second period showcases that with the decline in lynching by 1903, police took over as the primary and sole institutors of racist violence that led to police killings. By the turn of the twentieth century, racist violence "was more closely associated with the barrel of a policemen's gun than with the noose of a lynch mob."[53] During the latter period, police officers in Kansas, acting under the protection of a badge, flagrantly killed Blacks. Claims of self-defense were all officers needed to justify police killings, and even when they shot unarmed victims in the back, they were sure to face no consequences. Campney's work demonstrated law enforcement's continued tradition of racist violence in Kansas as mob lynching declined.

Police violence as racist oppression is also central to the historiography of anti-ethnic Mexican violence in the Rio Grande Valley in the early twentieth century. Like the Rangers, local officers occasionally participated in the brutality of "La Matanza." By the 1920s, Officers had adopted many of the practices Texas Rangers utilized and even perfected the art of secrecy, as they often used their legal authority to conceal their actions and, like lynch mobs, would often receive unyielding support from the Anglo community.

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[52] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 33, 34, 35.
[53] Brent Campney, *This is Not Dixie*, 132, 133, 134.

The merciless third-degree interrogation tactic constituted intense coercion on suspects to produce confessions. These methods often utilized prolonged interrogations, torturous methods, and verbal threats. Common amongst local law enforcement in the 1920s, its origins date back to the early 1860s. As Carolyn Ramsey explained in the 17th Annual Meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police in 1910, "the third degree was not limited to those charged with a crime. In some cases, a material witness to a homicide was put in the sweatbox and became a defendant."[54]

As demonstrated by Arturo F. Rosales, police implemented the third-degree more often against poor suspects, who were not aware of the inner workings of the law, and who were in minimal contact with their lawyers. Police were not inclined to educate ethnic Mexicans on the inner workings of the law and instead capitalized on their shortcomings by securing guilty confessions through intense interrogation. Rosales documented an Arizona lawyer in the 1930s who testified, "I have often been present when police interrogate these unfortunates. They will admit to anything even if they are not guilty." Three brothers accused of murder in Greaterville, Arizona, had the third degree applied through the method of hanging, and one of the men subsequently died from his injuries. A trial for the deputies responsible led to their guilty conviction, but to the Mexican community's disappointment, they were quickly pardoned by the governor.[55]

The "escape law" was a tradition used in the early 20th century by Texas Rangers. It constituted arresting ethnic Mexicans on suspicion of a crime and releasing them before

[54] George C. Thomas and Richard A. Leo, *Confessions of Guilt: From Torture to Miranda and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 122

[55] Arturo F. Rosales, *Pobre Raza!: Violence, Justice, and Mobilization Among México Lindo Immigrants, 1900-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 86.

transporting them to local county jails.[56] As the prisoners ran on the command of the Texas Rangers, the officers would cold-bloodedly lynch them by shooting them, and then the officers that shot them filed reports that they were resisting arrest.[57] This practice became so bad that in the 1870s, west Texas editorials complained that there was rampant use of phrases such as "killed while attempting to escape" or "killed while resisting arrest."[58] Also, local authorities utilized La Ley De Fuga in multiple ways to construct narratives of self-defense. Also, semantics played a role in framing the perceptions of ethnic Mexicans using La Ley De Fuga. In 1915, state and local agents labeled ethnic Mexicans they executed as "bandits," whereas in the 1920s, they labeled them as criminals.[59]

For example, on July 23, 1915, Hidalgo County sheriff's Stokes Chaddick and U.S. customs inspector John Dudley shot two Mexican-American brothers, Gregorio and Lorenzo Manriquez, near Progresso, Texas, suspecting them of resisting arrest while robbing a general store.[60] One day later, at a Mercedes restaurant, the same officers shot another unidentified Mexican-American three times in the back when he stole personal property from the vicinity, and they claimed he shot first.[61] The Anglo community touted the officers for avenging law and order in the local community. In contrast, the local white newspapers dehumanized the victims as petty criminals. These types of killings allowed officers to use La Ley De Fuga at their discretion and essentially paint a narrative that ethnic Mexicans were dangerous criminals whom they must use their legal authority to eliminate.

Scholars such as Brundage and Campney, who focused on anti-Black violence, drew a firm boundary between lynching and police violence. In both scholars' studies, there was a

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[56] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 11.
[57] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 11.
[58] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 11.
[59] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 90.
[60] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 90.
[61] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 90.

specific period that differentiated mob lynchings from police violence, and they hardly, if ever, operated synonymously. Scholars of the Rio Grande Valley have also often attempted to parse distinctions between the police forces and the lynch mobs that often roamed together indistinguishably. Because of that significant characteristic, this thesis will consolidate the actions and memberships of mob members and officers who undertook lethal violence under *lynching*. In practice, the activities and membership of the parties involved in lynching within the Valley in the 1920s were often inextricably intertwined, and more may be lost than gained from trying to draw distinctions. Although between 1904 and 1915, Texas Rangers administered the majority of violence, it was not always solely Texas Rangers. As for the period between 1921-1927, local law enforcement officers were usually the main orchestrators of violence, but it was not limited to just local police. The Anglo populace, more broadly, often sought the exact retribution the cops were seeking.

Therefore, lynching, for our purposes, is an act of lethal mob violence perpetrated by a posse against one or more ethnic Mexicans to enhance the domination of the majority group and subordinate the minority. For this thesis, a posse, one specific type of 'mob' could be composed of a combination of Anglo civilians, deputized citizens, or local police officers.

However, since Texas Rangers, who had perpetrated mass violence in 1915 and Porvenir in 1918, had gone through a significant investigation and been reduced and reformed in 1919, they were no longer the culprits of violence from 1921-1927, and local police had taken over that role. Marrying the insights from both the lynching scholarship and the police violence scholarship, I define lynchings as lethal incidents by posses that garnered the widespread and often overt support of the Anglo population, resulting in minor or no consequences for the perpetrators of these acts. As for the Valley's historical accounts of racist violence, many were

often vague, and the composition of the mobs was often undeterminable. In this case, the acts of violence leading up to the victim's death were a significant determining factor in determining if a particular incident of violence was a lynching.

As soon as lynch mobs' actions came to light, Mexican diplomacy played a vital role in obtaining justice for the victims and families of Mexican Nationals. Unfortunately, Mexican-Americans did not have access to this representation. Because of rampant lynching violence, Mexico intended to offer every resource to Mexican Nationals and their families, whether slain, charged, or convicted. And as stated by historian F. Arturo Rosales, "only the organization of the Mexican Consuls could muster the resources to sustain successful campaigns that defended civil rights."[62] During the La Matanza in 1915, communities were more reliant on the aid of communal legal defense funds, mutual aid societies, patriotism, and recreational resistance.[63] Lack of representation resulted from the Mexican Diplomatic Service's not urgently prioritizing Mexican Immigrants to the U.S. because they were themselves in the midst of their civil war. As for the 1920s, when appointed Mexican Consuls were not stepping in to provide legal protection for the accused, the aforementioned private entities occasionally offered the necessary financial fundraising or legal protection through hired personal attorneys.[64]

Mexican Nationals had the legal protection of their native nation to which they could go for representation. Unfortunately, there was no federal law on lynching from 1910-1920, so it was difficult for Mexican diplomats to maneuver their legal requests to the state department.[65] Although the federal government had an overarching interest in cooperating with Mexico, local counties had no federal oversight in the first three decades of the 20th century. So local counties

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[62] Arturo F. Rosales, *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Houston: Arte Publico Press, 1997), 61.
[63] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 61.
[64] Rosales, *Chicano!*, 62.
[65] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 163.

rarely prosecuted lynchings perpetrated by Anglos since there was never any threat of federal intervention.[66] As a result, Anglos perpetrators with the support of their local community and with the legal protection of their county continued to operate with impunity well into the 1920s.

Furthermore, the U.S. State Department used tactics to discredit the victim's nationality before they snowballed into significant international controversies, such as in the lynching of Antonio Rodriguez in Rocksprings, Texas. The Mexican newspaper *La Cronica* claimed that Rodriguez was a Mexican national and that his relatives were from Guadalajara, Mexico. Meanwhile, the *Advocate* of Victoria, Texas, traced his lineage and birth city back to Eagle Pass, Texas. The United States government knew disproval of Mexican citizenship could ensure the removal of legal protections and indemnities and provide more protection for the perpetrators. The U.S. and localized governments were adamant in pressing the U.S. citizenship of Rodriguez and other ethnic Mexicans because it was a perfect tool for implementing suppression against families or any resistors tenaciously inclined to legal accountability.[67] If they could convince the general populace that an ethnic Mexican was a U.S. citizen, they could effectively strip them of Mexican consular representation.

Mexican diplomatic intervention was beneficial. It reduced the frequency of lynching by threatening international accountability and allowed families of Mexican Nationals to have a legitimate authority to whom to appeal.[68] Although most cases did not legally receive the full scale of justice, the Mexican consulate could usually file appeals to obtain indemnities for the family due to its loss. Nevertheless, these indemnities did not heal the emotional trauma experienced by the family.

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[66] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 135
[67] Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 42, 44, 45.
[68] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* 141.

Although families of lynching victims often used consular support to employ resistance against Anglo impunity, Mexican-Americans were not afforded this luxury. They often used personal forms of resistance to combat Anglos. Sometimes this resistance took the form of Spanish newspapers resisting the narratives of Anglo newspapers by reporting their accounts of incidences of racist violence. Other times it took the form of armed resistance where Mexicans felt compelled to reciprocate violence against Anglos when targeted by Anglo violence.

Mexican-Americans retaliated against the administration of violence by Anglo mobs and local law enforcement by establishing armed groups that sometimes aimed to equalize racist violence undertaken by Anglos or protect counterparts from having Anglo violence enacted upon them. The other form of resistance was that of social banditry, influential individual Mexican-Americans or groups that condemned Anglo racist violence and took it upon themselves to inspire the masses, such as Juan Cortina, Joaquin Murrieta, or the Sediciosos.

The final form of resistance was ethnic Mexican journalism which publicized reports of racist violence through investigative editorials that promoted social awareness of racist violence on the border.[69] Many of these forms of protection were excellent forms of improvised defiance against Anglos. Still, it was more beneficial to have the entire legal diplomacy of a nation to defend ethnic Mexicans.

The origins of international protection arguably began with the lynching of eleven Italian Americans in New Orleans on March 14, 1891, by a posse of six men seeking vengeance for the murder of police chief David Hennessey. Thousands of people turned up, but six men were charged with committing the lynching. Pasquale Corte, the Italian consulate, never managed to prove the case but he protested by leaving New Orleans at the request of his nation. The United States did not end up prosecuting the six men responsible but Italy's managed acquire

[69] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* 98, 103, 107, 114.

indemnities of $25,000 for each victim's family.[70] This was one of the first national implementations of effective consular support nationwide, and it set a precedent for the utilization of international diplomacy.

The first international protection for Mexican Nationals began with the lynching of Luis Moreno in Yreka, California, in 1896, when he was pulled from a cell and lynched by a mob of over 200 people. The Mexican Government witnessed the rampant deaths across the border and held little faith in the American legal system to hold mobs accountable. As a result, Mexican consulates based in the U.S. would request permission from Washington, D.C., to conduct their investigations of Mexican nationals' deaths.[71] These consular officials would often uncover biases and non-truths in American lynching investigations.[72] Mexican consulates' effectiveness varied over time as they encountered significant resistance from local law enforcement and U.S. politicians. Mexican Minister Matias Romero led efforts, and he was able to prove that Moreno was indeed a Mexican National. Because of this, he launched an alternative criminal investigation that convinced Romero Moreno killed the two storeowners in self-defense. Although Romero could not rally enough support to indict someone for Moreno's lynching, he got the U.S. State Department to grant the family an indemnity of 2,000 dollars.[73]

It is necessary to understand the profile of Anglos who migrated to the Valley seeking opportunity, to understand the violence which occurred there. These Anglos brandished ferocious hatred for ethnic Mexicans, which they acquired from their long-held belief and practice of controlling what they perceived as racist inferiors. The ingredients for racist polarization began in the 1850s as many Anglo Midwesterners, Northeasterners, and some

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[70] Richard Gambino, *Vendetta: The True Story of the Largest Lynching in U.S. History* (Toronto: UTP Distribution, 200), 136.
[71] Gambino, *Vendetta, 136.*
[72] Gambino, *Vendetta, 136.*
[73] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 138.

Southerners migrated to the Valley slowly to exploit industries such as cattle ranching, real estate, and shipping.[74] Anglo migration and exploitation upended Mexican-Americans claims and caused embitterment among the Mexican-American community that their grasp on their industries were slowly degrading.

Anglos subtly pervaded the Valley's industries from 1850-1900. Still, because the Valley had no significant transportation access to critical northern cities, it was difficult for deeper-pocketed, more well-connected Anglos to make large migrations to the Valley to establish a permanent foothold. As a result, ethnic Mexicans maintained a large demographic majority throughout this period. The cattle ranching industry was the first Valley industry in which Anglos established a foothold. Still, with Anglos' encroachment, violence against ethnic Mexicans also increased due to the contestation of their ownership and political power. Famous South Texas reformer Nicasio Idar summarized the situation best. She stated, "The very notion of categorizing ethnic Mexicans as worthy of the benefits of progress and capable of moral, intellectual, and industrial development represents a challenge to an Anglo supremacist world-view that cast ethnic Mexicans as being forever inferior to Anglos."[75]

When Anglos arrived in the Valley in 1904, and after and witnessed Mexican-Americans holding on to a fragile social, political, and economic majority, they were taken aback at sight. Northern Anglos, a half-century removed from completing a coast-to-coast conquest of the

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[74] For more on the profile of Anglos see, Sonia Hernández and John Morán González. "Introduction: Memory, Violence, and History in the 1919 Canales Investigation" in The Reverberations of Racial Violence*: Critical Reflection on the History of the Border* ed. Sonia Hernández and John Morán González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 5; Tom Lea, *Richard King Vol I*, (London: Little Brown and Company, 1957), 10, 110; Pat Kelley, *River of Lost Dreams: Navigation on the Rio Grande,* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 44; Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 29, 51, 52, 107, 160; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas,* 18; Trinidad Gonzalez, Benjamin H. Johnson, and Monica Martinez, "Refusing to Forget: A Brief History" in *Reverberations of Racist Violence: Critical Reflections on the History of the Border*, ed. Sonia Hernández and John Morán González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 33.
[75] Gabriela González. "Humanizing La Raza: The Activist Journalism of the Idar Family in Early Twentieth Century Texas" in *The Reverberations of Racial Violence: Critical Reflection on the History of the Border* ed. Sonia Hernández and John Morán González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 147.

continental U.S., perceived themselves as far superior to the ethnic Mexicans they encountered in the Valley. Anglos, in actuality, associated Mexican-Americans' backward-oriented social hierarchy with the epitome of corruption and immorality.[76]

Tensions escalated after 1904 as wealthier migrant Anglo farmers began large-scale agricultural investment projects in the Valley's burgeoning agricultural industry.[77] The railroad connection brought Anglo-Midwestern farmers familiar with Jim Crow laws, racist progressivism, and the lynching of African-American laborers who worked on farms.[78] Anglos who migrated to the Valley were intent on not losing their coveted racist superiority against ethnic Mexicans, so they took significant influence from Jim Crow Laws and transformed them into Juan Crow practices.[79]

Newcomer farmers attempted to construct an environment whereby ethnic Mexicans were nothing more than cheap endless labor. By 1915 farmers ensured their vision by emplacing constant pressure on Mexican-Americans during the decade of the 1910s. As a result, mostly Anglo newcomer ranchers were the survivors and beneficiaries of the industry exodus. Racist violence simultaneously surged as a result of Mexican-Americans' dispossession. It led to the Texas Rangers enacting brutal racist violence against ethnic Mexicans in 1915 to protect Anglo dominance. But most importantly, this racist violence did not cease, and the ruthless tactics and lethality of Texas Rangers were adopted and modified by local law enforcement in the Valley in the 1920s.

Before examining the succeeding chapters that assessed the periods from 1904-1915 and 1921-1927, we must express the sources this thesis will utilize to apply critical analysis to the

[76] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 130.
[77] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 107.
[78] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 160.
[79] Trinidad Gonzalez, Benjamin H. Johnson, and Monica Martinez, "Refusing to Forget: A Brief History" in *Reverberations of Racist Violence: Critical Reflections on the History of the Border*, ed. Sonia Hernández and John Morán González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 33.

transformations of racist violence within the Valley. The approach separates into two distinct sections: the period of violence from 1904-1915 that constituted the bulk of the Valley's violence and the period from 1921-1927, in the attempts to prove that violence persisted in the latter period.

These publications serve as the core information regarding events that transpired in 1904-1915. These secondary sources include David Montejano's *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas 1836-1986*, Benjamin Heber Jonhson's *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans*, William D. Carrigan & Clive Webb's *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States 1848-1928*, Monica Munoz Martinez's *The Injustice Never Leaves You*: *Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas*, and Sonia Hernández and John Morán González's *Reverberations of Racist Violence: Critical Reflections on the History of the Border*, and Walter Prescott Webb's *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense.* In addition, we will utilize primary accounts by Sheriff John R. Peavy in *Echoes of the Rio Grande: From the Thorny Hills of Duval to the 'Sleepy Rio Grande* that will allow us to gain alternative into the motives of law enforcement agents making critical actions during the tumultuous period 0f 1915 against ethnic Mexicans.

As for the latter period, the sources derived from the Brent M.S. Campney Collection of archival newspapers that detail the events of racist violence in the Valley in the 1920s will be the foundation of the two 1920s case studies. This thesis primarily utilizes secondary sources in the chapter of La Matanza to provide a brief and fast-paced overview and analysis of the events that took place in 1915. The thesis focuses on primary source documents for the case studies. These sources include contemporary newspaper accounts and a film directed by Perry Hart titled *Valley*

of Tears. The director interviews former Raymondville Mayor Mike Crowell, who provided testimony of the violence of the 1920s, specifically on the lynching of five Raymondville men.

CHAPTER II

THE CAUSES AND RACIST VIOLENCE OF LA MATANZA

The conditions that led to the emergence of La Matanza occurred in the Valley from 1904-1915 as a result of rapid and large-scale Anglo migration to the Valley, causing the commencement of rapid shifts in economic, social, and political conditions, which created an array of tensions between and among ethnic Mexicans and Anglos. Although Anglos had begun escalating violence against ethnic Mexicans in the early 1900s, these newfound tensions led to greater Anglo maltreatment and violence against ethnic Mexicans. These conditions led ethnic Mexicans to revolt against the Anglo order. Eventually, they resulted in a collective and far fiercer onslaught against ethnic Mexicans by state law enforcement, local law enforcement, and Anglo citizens in 1915.

One factor that forever changed the ranching industry and led to the emergence of the commercial agriculture industry was the construction of St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railroad in 1904. The railroad construction boosted the minimum wage to around a dollar a day, but that was still far from the average U.S. worker who lived off 500 to 600 dollars a year.[80] Many Valley elites assumed that the railroad would increase commerce, political representation, and cultural diversity since there was more reliance on interethnic relations in the ranching industry. When Confederate General Robert E. Lee journeyed to the

[80] Timothy P. Bowman, *Blood Oranges: Colonialism and Agriculture in the South Texas Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M University press, 2016), 42.

Valley, he stated, "South Texas was akin to the American Congo."[81] However, prominent Anglos who resided in the Valley strove to distance themselves from that perception with the railroad construction. Migrant Anglos' attraction to the Valley stemmed from year-round growing seasons, developing irrigation, unlimited wage labor south of the border, and a railroad to deliver goods north for profit. The railroad also made the Valley a highly marketable region forcing land prices to skyrocket. While this was suitable for deeper-pocketed northern farmers and ranchers, many Mexican-American ranchers already experiencing struggles faced mounting pressure due to incredible surges in land prices. These circumstances resulted in many Mexican-Americans' losing their ranches and way of life. As a result of their dispossession, many Mexican-Americans were relegated to seeking labor-oriented jobs aside from ethnic Mexicans. They undertook rigorous work such as clearing brushland, working on the Anglo ranches that had acquired their land, or working for Anglo farming operations.

Most believed the advent of the S, B, & M railroad in 1904 was paved with good intentions, but the influx of migrant Anglos led to worsening conditions for ethnic Mexicans. Mexican-American ranchers would become relegated to a life of dispossession and wage labor by a diverse influx of Anglos from the Midwest, Northeast, and Deep South who had experience in the administration of racist violence against blacks in southern plantations and against blacks on Midwest farms. Unbeknownst to the Mexican-Americans, they would immediately begin implementing these racist, discriminatory tactics.

Also, Mexican-Americans would become the targets of racist violence and have their political rights and land ownership eliminated. Newcomer farmers held no loyalty to their workers and saw zero benefits to remaining political allies with ethnic Mexicans. Anglo farmers

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[81] Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans (New Haven: Yale University Press*, 2005), 27.

viewed the Democratic political machine as a disgrace to U.S. Politics. As Benjamin Heber Johnson states:

> Insurgent farmer politicians disparaged ethnic Mexican voting, offering lurid descriptions of drunken barbecues and painting them as menaces to American Democracy. They saw the patron-client relations that were the basis of the machine's strength as evidence of innate Mexican passivity.[82]

The effects of the railroad and the discovery of the Valley's agricultural potential negatively affected Mexican-American landowners throughout this period. But in contrast, Anglo newcomer farmers prospered, the Valley's population nearly doubled, and the Valley eventually became one of the largest producing agricultural regions in the nation.[83] The upheaval Anglos caused Mexican-Americans led them to become severely embittered, and this set the stage for the violence that would ensue in 1915.[84]

Newcomer farmers founded many towns, including Mercedes, San Benito, Raymondville, San Juan, and Mission.[85] Boosters sought to grow cities to increase land property values exponentially.[86] Once railroad connections had been constructed and the influx of newcomer farmers began, the value of farmland property quintupled between 1900 and 1920. The land became unfathomably expensive, adversely affecting Mexican-American rancheros as they could not purchase land to grow or maintain their operations. They sometimes even had to consolidate their operations due to rising property taxes.

Besides legal land loss, Anglo land developers and ranchers also extorted Mexican-Americans from their properties. Businessman, rancher, and lawyer Lon C. Hill was famous for

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[82] Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans (New Haven: Yale University Press*, 2005), 27, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35 (Quoted passage, 27, 36).
[83] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 30.
[84] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 31.
[85] Bowman, *Blood Oranges,* 31.
[86] Bowman, *Blood Oranges,* 55.

founding the city of Harlingen. However, his business dealings with Mexican-Americans were not always legitimate. He was notorious for purchasing property from ranchers' relatives on unpartitioned land, thus undermining the primary owner. When the head ranchero believed they owned full rights, Hill challenged them in court and often won, and mounting court fees would induce them to sell what remained of their land. County officials documented his disregard when he told a Mexican-American rancher with the surname Barrera, "I told him to pick up his doll rags and piss on the fire, and he was gone."[87]

Mexican-American ranchers in large quantities were soon defaulting on their properties due to rising taxes or extensive legal fees from litigation. Ranchers' lands would be purchased and consolidated for low prices by more extensive operations, thereby increasing their power. According to Johnson, "Sheriffs sold three times as many lands parcel for tax delinquency in the decade from 1904 to 1914 as they had from 1893 to 1903." Expedient land loss exacerbated racist tensions and fueled racist violence in the Valley.

This shifting landscape at the turn of the century caused Mexican-American ranchers to almost entirely disappear as a profession, leaving them with feelings of betrayal. The men who lost their ranches found no other option but to work for the Anglo-led agricultural operations that had been the cause of their dispossession. Agricultural work was far less personalized, rough and repetitive, and based worker pay on monitored, speed-based quota work, to prevent slacking. The agriculturalists' vision was much more detached and viewed ethnic Mexicans as labor only, a physical presence to fill the void of needed work.[88]

A shifting political landscape in the Valley also played a significant role in decimating Mexican-Americans within the ranching industry. Newcomer farmers backed Republican

[87] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 29, 31, 32, 33, (passage quoted, 34).
[88] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 15, 17, 32, 34 (passage quoted, 36).

political parties known as Good Government Leagues, which were individualized Republican political factions who often feuded with each other to win county elections to become the official representative republican government. When elected, they resorted to discriminatory practices, making it difficult for ethnic minorities to turn out at the polls and reverse the new status quo. The decline of the Democratic political machine resulted from newcomer farmers electing political candidates that looked out for their best interest, campaigning on the perceived corruption of the Democratic machine, and, when successful, instilling favorable policies for newcomer farmers. In the years that succeeded 1904, the gradual decline and eventual demise of the Democratic political machine were clear. As one Valley newspaper author observed the situation, "with the new ideas, resources, and lofty ambitions, [they] will not hesitate to fleece us…of the representation that we have collectively exercised in banking, commerce, society, and politics."[89]

Due to these dispossessions and maltreatment from 1904-1915, Mexican-American and Mexican National activists sought to highlight Anglos racist violence directed towards ethnic Mexicans. Mexican nationals Enrique Flores Magón and Ricardo Flores Magón created a popular newspaper called *Regeneración* that primarily focused on the situations in Mexico. They also had a column in their paper called "In Defense of Mexicans" that was highly critical of the treatment of ethnic Mexicans in Texas. The Mexican-American Idar Family created a newspaper in Laredo, Texas, called *La Cronica*, which focused on the Mexican-Americans' economic, social, and political conditions in the Valley. Also, politician J.T. Canales was a crucial figure in Texas politics who used his hard-earned political position to lobby for the criminal investigation of the Texas Rangers organization to seek punishment for the atrocities committed against

[89] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 36, 46, 70 (passage quoted, 36).

Mexican-Americans[90] However, despite the initiatives towards activism, most of these campaigns to thwart racist violence fell short of their intended efforts, and lynching continued on a very high level.

Monica Muñoz Martinez claims scholars have made great strides in dispelling Texas Rangers' role in what she coins "The Texas Creation Myth," which romanticized Texas Rangers across Texas popular culture throughout history. Walter Prescott Webb and other authors have contributed to this mythology by painting Texas Rangers as necessary enforcers of frontier lawlessness. She believes there is still much work to be done, as this myth still thrives in particular pockets of society, such as museums, school lessons, public memorials, celebrations, and pop culture.[91] Despite the glorification by the Anglo populations in Texas, there was nothing glorious about the Texas Rangers. Benjamin Heber Johnson exemplifies this by stating, "Conquest has its victims," and [ethnic] Mexicans quickly came to learn the extent of Texas Ranger's power and capabilities.[92]

Between 1904 and 1915, many ethnic Mexicans implemented resistance against the harsh conditions Anglos were imposing on them. Ethnic Mexican opposition took many forms as some took to civil institutions to attempt to institute legal reforms, and many others who saw that route as ineffective took up armed self-defense.[93] Two incidences come to mind, the first being when 150 Mexicans stormed a jail in Oakville, Texas, on December 1914, demanding county officers release two prisoners they intended to hand to an Anglo mob.[94] They succeeded in saving only one man but successfully unified to resist racist Anglo treatment and thwart extralegal

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[90] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 41, 43, 60, 61, 171 (Quoted passage, 176).
[91] Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 214.
[92] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 12.
[93] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* 97.
[94] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* 106.

violence.[95] The other incident was when Gregorio Cortez shot a sheriff in self-defense who had sought to arrest him for horse theft. Eventually, authorities arrested him, but local Mexican-American outrage unified and formed a legal defense fund to fund his trial defense. Although unsuccessful, the governor of Texas ultimately pardoned Cortez in 1913.

Although forms of resistance arose against Anglos, the lack of unified rebellions in the Valley resulted from a cooperative economic and hierarchical system before 1915, which promoted dependence between Mexican-Americans and Anglos. However, the Valley was not a racial utopia. With the rise of the commercial agricultural industry, Anglo newcomer farmers wanted to manage and control the entire region of the Valley without interference. Valley Anglos' disenfranchisement of Mexican-Americans' sociopolitical prominence and acquisition of Mexican-Americans' owned territory did not satisfy Anglos' desires of conquest, and they began subjecting Mexican-Americans to racist violence because of their perceived inferiority.

When Basilio Ramos crossed the Rio Grande from Mexico in early January of 1915, his arrest led to a discovery of a manifesto in his possession known as "The Plan De San Diego." The plan called for armed rebellion against the Southwest United States to begin on February 20, 1915, for the liberation of Blacks, Mexicans, and Native Americans and the independence of states previously a part of Mexico. The revolution ordered the indiscriminate executions of all Anglo males of sixteen years and up. Ramos, however, would not be the man to lead these armies because of his arrest in the Valley. Still, the judge could not fathom an organized revolt and decided to give him a modest bail, and Ramos fled to Mexico and never returned.[96] That said, it is impossible to determine the masterminds behind this manifesto. Historian Trinidad Gonzalez noted:

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[95] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 11, 12, 21 (Quoted Passage, 12).
[96] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 13, 20, 21, 22 71, 73.

> The authors of the Plan De San Diego and the authors of the Revolution of Texas were different [entities] at least in a sense that there was no credible evidence to link the two revolutionary groups and their plans together, but what it did do was create heightened alertness for Anglos in the Valley.[97]

Nothing resembling "The Plan De San Diego" rebellion took shape for months after its discovery. Anglo locals remained vigilant, but the citizens of the Valley slowly eased up on their fears that violence was imminent. As explained by a U.S. Army General Tasker Bliss stationed along the Nueces Strip:

> Every time a Mexican gets 'tanked up' with mescal and informs the bystanders in forcible but rude and impolite language what he proposes to do to the gringos when the proper time comes… everybody in the community thinks that Huerta is just around the corner.[98]

However, in August 1915, violence did emerge from a group known as the Sediciosos that had adopted the policies within the Plan De San Diego. The group leaders were Aniceto Pizaña and Luis De La Rosa. Respectable Brownsville Rancher Aniceto Pizaña was very passionate about the unjust treatment by Anglos of ethnic Mexicans and eventually joined the Sediciosos because of a personal vendetta against neighboring rancher Jeff Scrivener. Scrivener contacted the U.S. military, state, and local police to investigate Pizaña's properties and accused Pizaña of harboring Mexican fugitives that had burned a railroad trestle on a nearby ranch. The search led authorities to initiate a firefight with 50-60 Mexicans on the ranch, and Pizaña had no choice but to flee, leaving his mother, brother, and son behind. Abandoning his own family was too much for Pizaña, so he decided to take action and cast his choice with the Sediciosos.

Successful local Rio Hondo butcher Luis De La Rosa wanted to join Pizaña's movement and command his own forces. Luis De La Rosa believed in Marxist ideology, and his hero was

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[97] Trinidad Gonzalez, "The Mexican Revolution, Revolución De Texas, and Matanza de 1915," in War Along the Border: The Mexican Revolution and Tejano Communities, ed. Arnoldo De León (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 112.
[98] Johnson, Revolution in Texas, 74.

revolutionary journalist Ricardo Flores Magón. He was a successful Valley businessman, but he thought it was imperative to take action against all the injustices happening to ethnic Mexicans in the Valley, so he joined Pizaña's forces and commanded one-half of them. Pizaña would be accountable for the southern portions of resistors in the Valley, including Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr County, and De La Rosa, who would be responsible for the northern area. These men would be called the Sediciosos and target Anglo infrastructure and power between August 1915 and July 1916. Soon violence would emerge within multiple counties of the Valley, and Anglos quickly responded to the insurrections.

On July 8, 1915, suspicious activity began surfacing in the Norias Division of the King Ranch. On August 8, 1915, associates of King Ranch Manager Robert Kleberg reported bands of ethnic Mexicans hiding in the Sauz Division of the King Ranch and requested a group of Texas Rangers to investigate. Upon arrival, Texas Rangers were confronted by a group of 50-80 ethnic Mexicans on horseback trekking towards them, carrying a red flag. As ethnic Mexicans began to near, they allegedly started firing their rifles toward the officers. The ensuing firefight led to the killing of several workers and one soldier in the main ranch house, including George Forbes, Frank Martin, Manuela Flores, and one U.S. army soldier. On the other hand, the Texas Rangers managed to kill around four ethnic Mexicans and wound twelve. One bandit, in particular, was captured, and he somehow revealed his party's non-lethal intentions before he died, as he reportedly stated:

> the men were not expected to find anyone at the ranch except three of four cowboys, they were going to rob the ranch, and the southbound train. They were also going to find supplies, saddles, guns, ammunitions, and they were going to burn the ranch house and the train.

The morning after the raid, Texas Rangers, disgruntled by the Anglo casualties, took photographs lassoing the dead bodies of Mexican-American combatants. Photographer Robert

Runyon captured the photos to glorify the Texas Rangers and profit off these photos in the form of postcards sold across the state. Eventually, authorities identified the victims as Abraham Salinas, Eusebio Hernandez, and Juan Tobar. Even months after the Norias Raid, Brownsville Lawyer Frank Pierce claimed Texas Rangers killed at least three ethnic Mexicans one month after the raid, including Catarino Rodriguez, Juan Sanchez, and Gregorio Cantu. Although he does not detail specifics on the incident, he stated the perpetrators left the men's bodies in the brush so long their stench was so unbearable it was challenging to get close to them.[99]

A month later, on September 24, 1915, Sediciosos attacked the James McAllen Ranch. Texas Rangers responded to Hidalgo County's request and suspected that neighboring rancher Sam Lane was harboring Sediciosos. Two ranch hands, Jesus Bazan and Antonio Longoria, camping on Lane's ranch, had witnessed a horse theft and had chosen to report it to Texas Rangers for fear of being blamed. They encountered Texas Ranger Henry Lee Ransom, made the report, and as they were trekking back to the ranch, Ransom drove up to them in a Ford Model T, shot both men dead off their horse, left them to rot, and unphased by his atrocity went back to camp to take a nap. Henry Lee Ransom did not allow Longoria or Bazan's friends or relatives to bury their bodies. He warned if they touched them, they would suffer the same fate, which displayed how Texas Rangers' wanton nature in administering lynching made no ethnic Mexican safe.

Just four days later, on September 28, 1915, Texas Rangers got into a firefight with forty Sediciosos in Ebenoza, Texas, now known as the modern-day Alamo, Texas. The Texas Rangers took about a dozen ethnic Mexicans captive after their victory and hung them. The bodies remained suspended for months, and even politician Jim Wells came across the bodies while

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[99] Frank Pierce, *Partial list of Mexicans Killed in the Valley Since July 1, 1915,* Records of the Department of the State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Mexico. 1910-1929. National Archives. Microfilm Publication, M274, Vol 51, File No 812/17186. Image number 0175.

traveling. Witnesses described seeing beer bottles shoved down the throats of the victims' bodies. Democratic Political Boss Jim Wells stated, "he came across four dead Mexicans laying side by side, the buzzards had picked their face-off, and the victims had bullet holes right above their eyes so large you could put your fingers in them."[100] Often the Texas Rangers issued dire warnings to the families of victims who were intent on giving their kin a proper burial. Texas Rangers threatened to lynch anyone in close relation to the victims attempting to obtain possession of the bodies.

Several gun battles erupted near Mexican-American Rancher Florencio Saenz's properties in Progreso, Texas, between September 5th and 24th. Sheriff A.Y Baker began investigating, and when he heard ethnic Mexicans playing guitar across the river, he jumped out of the brush, attempting to catch their attention. The ethnic Mexicans supposedly fired upon him and thought their shots landed, but several of Baker's deputies fired upon the ethnic Mexicans, killing and injuring an unknown amount. The appalling reality that Texas Ranger A.Y. Baker held such complete immunity that he was able to assassinate a couple of ethnic Mexicans across the border and continue about his daily life with no investigation or trial summarized the violence of La Matanza.[101]

On September 24, eighty ethnic Mexicans crossed the Rio Grande and attempted to blow up Saenz's general store in Progreso, Texas. They killed a U.S. soldier responding to the fire and pinned ten more U.S. soldiers under fire until reinforcements arrived. A gunfight lasted over two hours, and the attackers decided to withdraw when local law reinforcements arrived. They kidnapped U.S. Army Private Richard Johnson cut off his ears, decapitated him, and left his head

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[100] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas,* 115.
[101] Elliott Young and Samuel Truett, *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S. Mexico-Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 286-289.

on a pike on the south side of the river nearby Toluca Ranch.[102] This event bolstered the Anglo myth that ethnic Mexicans were as innately brutal as Anglos thought. According to Sheriff John R. Peavy, who was working in the Valley during the killing, "From then on, many a Mexican paid with his life for that barbaric act… It had been open season on Mexican bandits for local officers for some time, with no quarter given."[103] This one-off brutal display of ethnic Mexican violence was all Anglos needed to partake in all sorts of atrocities against ethnic Mexicans. However, Anglos had instituted violence such as this much earlier and possibly worse for years.

In the following days, on October 5, 1915, a group of ethnic Mexicans partook in a raid on a local pumping plant in Mercedes, in which a firefight ensued. However, the U.S. Cavalry reported no ethnic Mexican casualties from these engagements. Still, Peavy indicates that several ethnic Mexicans were killed and wounded. Nothing but silence in the press followed.[104]

One month later, on October 19, 1915, the Sediciosos attacked and derailed the S, B, & M Railroad near the Olmito Station in Brownsville, Texas. The entire train overturned, killing the engineer, and the steam engine severely scolded the fireman. The Sediciosos began robbing and shooting passengers, including ex-Texas Ranger Harry J, Wallis, and Dr. E. S. McCain, a state quarantine officer, but selectively sparing all ethnic Mexicans. Wallis managed to survive his wounds, but McCain died the next day. Sediciosos also attacked District Attorney John Kleiber, who only survived because he had so much blood from other victims that they mistook him as dead.[105]

In the immediate aftermath, Sheriff W.T. Vann, his deputies, and Texas Ranger Henry Lee Ransom arrested four ethnic Mexicans they believed were involved in the train attack,

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[102] John R. Peavy, *Echoes from The Rio Grande: From the Thorny Hills of Duval to the Sleepy Rio Grande* (Brownsville: Springman-King Company, 1963), 117.
[103] Peavy, *Echoes From the Rio Grande,* 117.
[104] Peavy, *Echoes From the Rio Grande,* 118.
[105] W. C. Jameson, *Border Bandits, Border Raids* (Montana: TwoDot Publishing, 2017), 73.

despite having no concrete evidence. The arrests reaffirmed Khalil Gibran Mohammed's theory of collective guilt. Captain Ransom approached local county Sheriff W.T. Vann and casually stated, "I am going to kill these fellows. Are you coming with me? If you haven't got the guts, I will do it myself...?" Sheriff W.T. Vann responded, "Yeah, four fellows with their hands behind their back… sure takes a lot of guts to do that."[106] After Vann failed to participate, he left the vicinity to search for other suspects, as Ransom marched four suspects in his custody into the brush and shot them. The ethnic Mexican men killed were Trinidad Ybarra, Manuel Ybarra, Severo Garcia, and Santiago Salas.[107] When Vann returned with two more suspects, whom he claimed to believe were also responsible for the train attack, he was dismayed by Ransom's actions for killing the ethnic Mexicans. Vann argued with the Texas Rangers that the few remaining suspects were his to be taken into custody because he believed in the due process of the law. However, as shown by the discussion of the lynching in Rio Hondo in the next chapter, Vann was also capable of much racist violence.[108]

Although not as frequent, local law enforcement was just as susceptible to administering racist violence against ethnic Mexicans. As was the case with Sheriff Deputy John R. Peavy, who was ambushed in Santa Maria on one uneventful evening in 1918, his partner Demacio Longoria was shot and killed. Seeking retribution for his partner's death, he organized with other deputies to plan a retaliatory strategy. The following day, as Peavy rode back to Santa Maria from Brownsville, shots rang out on the south side of the river. Peavy realized he was being ambushed and immediately surrounded. Peavy felt that these men killed Longoria, but he had no solid proof, and as he was shot in his hand and off his horse, he took cover in the brush as they

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[106] Robert M. Utley, *Lone Star Lawmen: The Second Century of Texas* Rangers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42.
[107] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 216.
[108] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116.

encircled him. He loaded two .30-06 explosive rounds into his trusty Winchester and surprised the party by shooting the midsections of two ethnic Mexicans and cutting them in half. Peavy returned to Fort Brown, and his superiors gave direct orders to release no information to the press about the incident.[109]

Vigilante justice by citizens and local and state entities continued until the early months of 1916 when General Funston became angered that law enforcement officers were not following orders to restrain the violence. Funston petitioned for reinforcements to Texas Governor James Ferguson, issued a formal declaration to the Texas Rangers to refrain from vigilante killings, and proclaimed that any killings found tied to them would be prosecutable.

Rangers disregarded legislative decrees prohibiting racist violence as they continued killings in a sparser, more reduced fashion for at least three more years, despite no mass raids after 1916. Several killings of ethnic Mexicans still occurred until 1919, the largest being the Porvenir Massacre. This event occurred in Porvenir, Texas, on January 28, 1918. A posse of Texas Rangers, local Anglo ranchers, and U.S. Army Cavalrymen lynched fifteen male ethnic Mexican individuals, two of whom were children. Texas Rangers supposedly believed them responsible for the Brite Ranch Raid, which burned down a general store and killed three Anglos. In 1919, J.T. Canales launched a state investigation into the Porvenir Massacre and the atrocities of 1915. Still, impunity for officers remained strong, as the state charged no officers for the Porvenir Massacre or any other crimes covered in the state investigation. The only success for justice was that the state disbanded the Texas Ranger company responsible for Porvenir and reduced the force entirely to a fragment of its former self.[110] Contemporaries who implemented reforms against the Texas Rangers measured the Valley's social milieu through the visibility of

[109] Peavy, *Echoes from the Rio Grande,* 164-165.
[110] Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 126.

wide-scale ethnic and racist violence, and with cease in violence after 1915, they claimed the Valley was back to a peaceful state, but as will be showcased in the 1920s racist violence and lynching was still present.

Texas Rangers degraded the Sedicioso leadership to the point where they could no longer mount significant offensives, and international efforts unified to clamp down on Sedicioso raids. Enforcement agencies became so widespread that the Valley's façade of peace was inevitable. However, racist violence persisted in the Valley in the 1920s because it was not an organization or an entity. It was an ideology, something much more difficult to suppress. The emergence of Juan Crow practices, which caused stringent segregationist policies towards ethnic Mexican society, was one of the primary catalysts that spurred racist violence in the 1920s. In addition, extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan were beginning to emerge in the Valley. They utilized fear and intimidation tactics and aligned themselves with local institutions to promote an "All-American" Anglo society. By the 1920s, Anglo farmers' political parties had almost entirely reoriented the hierarchical system in the Valley and placed ethnic Mexicans amongst the lowest levels of society.

The following two chapters will examine case studies of racist violence from 1921-27 to demonstrate how racist violence persisted, transformed, and remained a vital part of the Valley's society. Violence in the Valley in the 1920s targeted ethnic Mexicans and had a lasting impact on many residents who had no choice but to relive it through the institutional bigotry that remained ever-present.

CHAPTER III

THE MURDER OF MARIA SCHROEDER AND LYNCHING IN RIO HONDO, 1921

Rio Hondo was a small border farming town of around six hundred citizens in Cameron County, just 50 miles from the Texas coast. During La Matanza, so-called "bandit raids" occasionally occurred in Rio Hondo. Still, with the drawdown of violence across the Valley in 1916, no significant violence resembling those turbulent years in the Valley thereafter emerged from Rio Hondo until 1921. In that year, racist violence would re-awaken, not in the form of the bloody battles that scoured the county in previous years, but in the form of institutional racist violence enacted by county police and Anglos, which targeted ethnic Mexicans through lynching, torture, subjugation, and extortion.

On February 27, 1921, Cameron County law enforcement began a county-wide search for a 15-year-old schoolgirl named Maria Schroeder after her parents notified authorities that she had not returned from school and had been missing for several days.[111] Cameron County law enforcement began scouring Cameron County and enlisted hundreds of concerned men from nearby counties to assist in the search.[112]

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[111] "Farmers Hunt for Missing School Girl," *San Benito Light,* February 26, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, Brent Campney's Research Collection on Race Relations in South Texas, Part of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Special Collections and Archives, Edinburg Campus Repository. Hereafter cited as, BCRC.
[112] "Discovery of the Bodies Follows Day and Night Search by Rio Hondo Men," *San Benito Light,* Februry 28*, 1921*, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.

By two o'clock on February 27, word of Maria Schroeder's disappearance traveled rapidly. As the search for the young girl grew, nearly the entire town of Rio Hondo and thousands of other citizens from cities such as San Benito and Harlingen descended upon the scene in curiosity. Many were maintaining a fragile restraint over their sentiments regarding the disappearance of Maria Schroeder.[113] Several unsubstantiated rumors were circulating the massive crowd, which led most people to insist that Schroeder's disappearance was the work of several ethnic Mexicans in an old-fashioned buggy seen in the vicinity during her disappearance. The crowd was infuriated over the possibility that an ethnic Mexican culprit may be responsible for Maria Schroeder's disappearance. The posse became pissed, angry, and eager for racist vengeance.[114] The atmosphere was one of curiosity, but subtle anticipation lingered for evidence indicating the disappearance of Maria Schroeder involved something more ominous.[115]

Citizens and local law enforcement relentlessly scoured Cameron County for days in search of Maria Schroeder. On March 1, 1921, authorities found her body on a solitary road in an abundance of brush overgrowth on the outskirts of Rio Hondo, one mile from the Brown Tract Rio Hondo Schoolhouse.[116] Cameron County law enforcement, led by sheriff W.T. Vann, discovered the body and concluded foul play was at work by observing the state of Maria Schroeder's body. The men participating in the search did find the murder weapon stashed in a thicket fifty yards away from the girl's body, a bloodied club with the young girl's hair attached to it.[117] Schroeder's body had blunt-force trauma from an unspecified weapon's repeated blows

[113] "Crime More Shocking Than Any Staged in Valley During Bandit Trouble," *San Benito Light,* February 28, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[114] "Excitement Runs High When Hundreds Take Part in Hunt for Murder Clues," *San Benito Light*, February 28, 1921, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[115] "Crime More Shocking," February 28, 1921, BCRC.
[116] "A Mexican Was Murdered Near Rio Hondo," *La Prensa*, March 1, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[117] "Club Used in Slaying of Maria Schroeder Found; Sheriff and Deputies Keep Up Search for Men Who Attacked and Killed Rio Hondo Schoolgirl," *San Benito Light*, February 28, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.

to the head.[118] Physical evidence suggested an intense struggle for her life that ripped her fingernails from her fingers.[119] Also, the culprit positioned her after her death with her hands over her chest. Schroeder's body had a scarf tightened securely around her neck, indicating someone had asphyxiated and raped her.[120] Authorities attempted to gather as much evidence as possible to find a suspect.

As the search for suspects continued, Cameron County law enforcement issued a statement that initially suggested that the culprit was a "renegade Anglo youth" recently released on bail for horse theft. Cameron County law enforcement stated he had operated with local gangs in the vicinity and committed acts of violence known to officers.[121] Sheriff W.T. Vann swiftly dismissed this theory with a blatant and racially discriminatory public statement. The statement from the sheriff by the *San Benito Light* proclaimed that Cameron County law enforcement "are strong of the opinion that if Mexicans did the attack and murder, it would be easier to fasten the guilt."[122] The ludicrous nature of this statement displays Cameron County Sheriff Vann's racially discriminatory approach in attempting to solve this case. In times such as these, when authorities maintained a certain level of prestige and power, Cameron County Sheriffs in the 1920s could undoubtedly dictate the terms and direction of the investigation, so they quickly dismissed the idea of an Anglo suspect.

Two days after discovering Schroeder's body on March 3, Sheriff Vann and his deputies had come across several local Anglo schoolboys near the vicinity of the crime, who had also attended school with Schroeder.[123] The officers questioned the schoolboys' accounts of events

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[118] "Club Used in Slaying of Maria Schroeder Found," February 28, 1921, BCRC.
[119] "Discovery of Body," February 28, 1921, BCRC.
[120] "Discovery of Body," February 28, 1921, BCRC.
[121] "Crime More Shocking," February 28, 1921, BCRC.
[122] "White Man is Sought in Rio Hondo Murder," *San Benito Light*, Mar 1, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[123] "A Mexican Man Was Murdered," March 1, 1921, BCRC.

leading up to Schroeder's disappearance. When Maria Schroeder was reported missing, the schoolboys stated they had seen several ethnic Mexicans in the area.[124] Cameron County Sheriff W.T. Vann had no substantial evidence besides a bloodied club and the unreliable testimony of the young schoolboys to build his case. The testimony from the school boys was anecdotal but allowed Cameron County authorities to further validate to the Anglo populace their desire to pursue ethnic Mexican suspects.

After the interview, the posse composed of Sheriff Vann, Cameron County deputies, and infuriated Anglos began targeting ethnic Mexican neighborhoods. They had rounded up fifty ethnic Mexicans from the onset of the search. These mass arrests epitomize Khalil Gibran Mohammad's concept of collective guilt and showcase that all that was necessary to be considered guilty was being an ethnic Mexican. However, regardless of the Anglos' and officers' efforts, most suspects were released after being questioned because they had no tangible evidence to keep them detained. Vann managed to keep arrested six suspects he "wholeheartedly" believed were involved in Schroeder's death.[125]

While making these arrests, the posse came across a Mexican National man named Salvador Saucedo, whose home was near the Schroder's crime scene.[126] When they called Saucedo over to question him, they noticed he was wearing blood-stained clothing.[127]

The posse detained Saucedo, and when they attempted to question him saw, Saucedo was stricken with fright and terrified of interaction, but this does not denote guilt. Any ethnic Mexican within the vicinity would have been horrified had the posse personally identified

[124] "A Mexican Man Was Murdered," March 1, 1921, BCRC.
[125] "Club Used in Slaying of Maria Schroeder Found," February 28, 1921, BCRC.
[126] "A Mexican Man Was Murdered," March 1, 1921, BCRC
[127] "Petitions To Ask a Special Trial Court: Mexico Said to Be Looking into Death of Suspect in Schroeder's Case," *San Benito Light*, March 12, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.

them.[128] As the posse questioned him, Saucedo began to flee, and the posse shot, injured and killed Saucedo. The fashion in which the posse killed Saucedo paralleled the "escape law" that Texas Rangers had utilized during La Matanza to kill countless ethnic Mexicans.[129] In the case of Saucedo, the quick-triggered posse, regardless of intent, lynched an ethnic Mexican man on a whim within seconds of his fleeing, irrespective of the fact that he posed no threat to the officers' lives. The lynching of Mexican National Salvador Saucedo was a deliberate response by a posse to kill an alleged ethnic Mexican transgressor and restore the Anglo supremacist code. Regardless of the mob composition, the law enforcement and Anglo community supported this lynching. The perpetrators took justice into their own hands by determining the guilt of their perpetrator with a bullet. They partook in this action because they feared no personal consequences from the legal justice system.[130]

Saucedo's lynching was not an anomaly. Although not as frequent as in 1915, during the 1920s, there were several other unsubstantiated reports of law enforcement killing ethnic Mexicans in the Valley similar to Saucedo. On October 2, 1922, a lynching took place in Mercedes, Texas, when a posse of Anglos and Hidalgo County officers, while hunting for a fugitive suspected of killing an officer, attempted to enter a house while searching in the Mexican quarter of town. As they made entry, they mistook a 14-year-old girl named Virginia Becerra for a fugitive and opened fire, killing her instantly. This lynching reaffirms that malice and unprofessionalism followed when officers and Anglos conspired as posses, as was seen in the lynching of Saucedo, posses would stop at nothing to acquire their suspect. The fact that no court investigated Becerra's death showcases the impunity they continued to hold in the 1920s.

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[128] "Petitions To Ask a Special Trial Court," March 12, 1921, BCRC.
[129] "Six Mexicans Imprisoned and One Dead in Rio Hondo," *La Imparcial De Texas*, March 3, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[130] "White Man is Sought in Rio Hondo Murder," March 1, 1921, BCRC.

Any Mexican was susceptible to being a victim of lynching if they were suspected of a crime or had been near one.[131] Sometimes a racially motivated lynching could occur based on the slightest infractions against the Anglo moral code.

On February 4, 1922, a posse who had taken offense to Harlingen tenant Manuel Duarte's supposedly disrespectful behavior lynched him at his own home. One division of the posse terrorized him into fleeing from his property on horseback, and the other branch of the posse appeared off the road in a speeding vehicle and shot him several times in the abdomen. He was found and rushed to the hospital but succumbed to his injuries. Duarte's lynching indicates that although crime heightened the likelihood of being lynched by a posse, all that was necessary was disrespecting Anglos.[132]

However, because the story of the lynching of Saucedo had reached Mexico on March 9, 1921, Mexican consulate Ismael M. Vasquez had become involved on behalf of Saucedo's death and the six men initially detained by Cameron County jail for the murder of Schroeder. Vasquez visited the Brownsville jail where authorities had detained the six men and interviewed all the inmates, specifically Salvador Saucedo's uncles Leandro and Pedro Saucedo. Vasquez confirmed that although Cameron authorities believed Saucedo and his uncles were Mexican-Americans, they were Mexican Nationals and, therefore, could receive consular representation.

According to Consulate Vasquez, Saucedo's uncle's stories differed from the original version printed in newspapers. They claimed that a posse had gathered in the surrounding neighborhoods near the crime to enact racist violence against individuals they perceived as possible suspects for the crime against Schroeder. The uncles claimed a posse of Anglos searched theirs and Saucedo's home for evidence. When the Anglos found no evidence, Salvador

[131] "Twelve Mexicans Killed on the Border in Eleven Months" *The Austin-Statesmen*. November 18, 1922, Pg. 2
[132] "Twelve Mexicans Killed on the Border in Eleven Months" *The Austin-Statesmen*. November 18, 1922, Pg. 2

and his uncles were forced into a police vehicle by three unknown Anglo men and driven to the original crime scene of Maria Schroeder. There was nothing but dead silence as the individuals removed Saucedo from the car and forcefully marched him to a thicketed undergrowth far from where they had parked. A few minutes passed as Leandro, and Pedro Saucedo waited in the car when they heard a sudden burst of gunfire. The officers returned to the car without Salvador Saucedo, started the vehicle, and returned to the city, where they placed the uncles in the county jail.[133] The uncles were lucky not to be lynched by Cameron County police alongside their nephew. After Consulate Vasquez interviewed all the detained inmates, they collectively vouched that Saucedo was innocent. They stated he was a hard-working, honest man who had no run-ins with the law and said he was nowhere near the vicinity of the crime when it took place and did not even know Maria Schroeder. The uncle's version of Saucedo's lynching reinforced Vasquez's belief that Saucedo was innocent. He requested a second investigation by his superior consulate official Enrique D. Ruiz to discover who was responsible for Saucedo's death.

Mexican Consulate Ismael M. Vasquez's investigation was concluded by March 17, 1921. He submitted his report to his superior consul officer in San Antonio, Enrique D. Ruiz. The latter officially reported that he believed that Cameron County police officers investigating the death of Maria Schroeder were responsible for lynching Salvador Saucedo.[134] Enrique Ruiz submitted the report to the Mexican Embassy in Washington.[135] Consulate Vasquez also concluded that Saucedo's uncles' account of events was more credible than the preliminary news accounts. As a result, he requested that the U.S. government launch a separate investigation.[136]

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[133] "It Becomes Clear How He Was Killed S. Saucedo Near Rio Hondo," *La Prensa,* March 9, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[134] "Informs the Mexican Consul About the Death of Saucedo," *La Imparcial De Texas*, March 17, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[135] "Informs the Mexican Consul," March 17, 1921, BCRC.
[136] "On the Murder and Crime Committed Itself. Saucedo" *El Epocha*, April 3, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.

Unsatisfied by his findings and their difference compared to the initial reports, Vasquez felt that Cameron County authorities should submit their reports so he could use them for cross-comparative purposes. Considering the death of Saucedo occurred on U.S. soil, it was also rather strange the American report was not submitted firsthand, but this just emphasized the racial neglect Mexican nationals faced when local law enforcement committed atrocities against ethnic Mexicans. This lynching became quite publicized and grabbed the attention of Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes, who requested Texas Governor Pat Neff initiate a state investigation and then forward the report to Washington.[137]

There would never have been a report if the Mexican Government did not ask for one. Sheriff W.T. Vann's report closely resembled the preliminary newspaper reports. The report stated officers killed Saucedo when they encountered him with blood-stained clothing and nervously fled police custody. Vann's report did not mention police vehicle detainments or home searches of Saucedo or his uncles. The crucial piece left out of the newspapers that Sheriff Vann finally acknowledged was the names of the policemen: deputy Joe Ballinger, deputy Joe Taylor, and deputy Ray S. Wait.[138] The Cameron County report was the first and only time Vann acknowledged the names of those who shot Saucedo, as Sheriff Vann did everything in his power to conceal the involvement of his deputies in Saucedo's death.

Charles E. Hughes, Secretary of State, intended to appease the Mexican Foreign Ministry with the Vann's local report so that investigation into the matter would be closed, and local authorities could proceed in finding the "actual murderer" of Maria Schroeder.[139] However, the investigation did not satisfy the Mexican government. The consulate requested a second

[137] "The Death of Salvador Saucedo will be investigated by the Governor of Texas at the request of Mr. Hughes. The Secretary of State was asked to inform you about the case of the innocent victim who died tragically near Brownsville," *La Prensa*, Mar 24, 1921. Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[138] "A Report Is Made on The Death of Salvador Saucedo. Sheriff Vann Says Saucedo Was Killed While Trying to Run Away," *La Prensa*, April 9, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[139] "A Report is Made on the Death of Salvador Saucedo," April 9, 1921, BCRC.

investigation by Adjutant general Thomas D. Barton, who respectfully obliged and placed the State Texas Ranger Force in Brownsville in charge of locating who was responsible for the death of Salvador Saucedo.[140] Texas Ranger William L. Wright was selected for the secondary investigation and was dispatched to San Benito to gather additional evidence on the incident. Unfortunately, Wright's investigation was relatively non-productive as he interviewed the three deputies allegedly responsible for Saucedo's death. They stuck to their "escape law" story and stated they were by duty right to shoot him for fleeing. Wright questioned one witness in the vicinity whose sight of the crime events was blocked. These were the only details submitted by Adjutant General Barton by Wright and did not impact the case.[141]

The last primary source evidence was the newspaper article requesting a second investigation, and from there, the trail of who murdered Salvador Saucedo evaporates into thin air. The federal government had not filed any secondary reports, and no local or state courts had indicted any Anglo perpetrators in the following years. The lynching of Salvador Saucedo is an unfortunate event that reaffirms the racist violence that had remained integrated within Cameron County because of the procedural actions taken by Cameron County law enforcement. Still, the fact that the trail of Saucedo's death disappears indicates that the impunity and protection these Anglos were often afforded officially took its course. In the end, Saucedo's death investigation withered away, and local county sheriffs did not receive any consequential repercussions for their actions. They continued their investigation to find the murderer of 15-year-old Maria Schroeder. The four of the six men held at the local county jail under the inquiry of consul Vasquez had been vouched for, deemed innocent, and released.

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[140] "Probe Mexican Murder for Criminal Assault, April 29, 1921," *The Waco-News Tribune*, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[141] Richard B. McClaslin, *Texas Ranger Captain: William L. Wright* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2021), 152.

However, two of the men were not released. Those men were Federico Ortego and Lupe Rinconnes. On March 3, 1921, the same day authorities lynched Saucedo, Sheriff Vann and his deputies illegally performed searches on "Mexican shacks in the vicinity [of where Maria Schroeder was murdered]" and came across two Mexican nationals named Federico Ortega and Lupe Rinconnes. They arrested and detained them in the Cameron County Jail along with Saucedo's uncles and two other unidentified men on suspicion of murdering Maria Schroeder.[142] This violence petrified the local Mexican populace and indirectly confirmed Salvador Saucedo's innocence since authorities had now deemed the two detained men the actual killers of Maria Schroeder. If Saucedo was the real killer, would not the case have been closed? Authorities announced Federico Ortego and Lupe Rinconnes as the new suspects responsible for Schroeder's murder in the following days, and all the resources of Cameron County would now entirely be impressed upon these new ethnic Mexican men.

On March 8, 1921, the day of the suspects' capture, after individually interrogating the suspects for over twenty-four hours, authorities claim Lupe Rinconnes confessed the day of Maria Schroeder's murder on February 27, 1921, that Federico Ortego admitted to him that he had murdered her. Rinconnes claimed Ortego was infatuated with Maria Schroeder and proceeded to make advances toward her earlier in the day.[143] As a result of the girl's rejection, he lay in wait in the brush later in the day, and she returned home from school on her horse and ambushed her.[144] Ortego allegedly pulled her from her horse by her ponytail. He then wrapped a scarf around her throat and proceeded to rape and bludgeon her to death with a club.[145]

[142] "Sherriff's Posse Captures Mexican Who Confesses Killing Schoolgirl," *The San Benito Light*, March 8, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[143] "Sheriff's Posse Captures Mexican," March 8, 1921, BCRC
[144] "Sheriff's Posse Captures Mexican," March 8, 1921, BCRC
[145] "Sheriff's Posse Captures Mexican," March 8, 1921, BCRC

However, historian Ignacio M. Garcia argues that "the whole notion of law enforcement in the 1920s was to keep [ethnic Mexicans] intimidated and regulated." Garcia argued that authorities often counted on Mexican-Americans to confess to avoid harsher punishment. Ignacio M. Garcia's examination of critical 1920s criminal court cases against Mexican-Americans was that the confession was just as valuable for authorities in the accused party's conviction compared to any evidence they had acquired of the crime.[146] As stated by Garcia, "in several of the cases [of the 1920s], the authorities argued that the defendants "confessed," to the crimes while the accused argued that they had not or had been coerced or misunderstood."[147] In every one of the high-profile Mexican court cases of the 1920s and *Texas v. Hernandez* in 1954 examined by Ignacio M. Garcia, the confessions of the accused stood firm. They caused the conviction of the defense, regardless of how officers obtained it, and it undermined their defendant's legal defense entirely.[148]

On March 21, 1921, after continued questioning and confinement, Lupe Rinconnes reaffirmed his admission to aiding in the attack of Maria Schroeder. Still, he refused to admit to killing her and said it was strictly Ortego responsible for her death. Following Rinconnes's admission, and local rumors beginning to swirl about a mob assembling, both men were rushed to a San Antonio jail for a brief period to prevent the possibility of a mob enacting racist violence. Cameron County Sheriffs believed it highly feasible as many of the populace again became enraged by the graphic confessions printed in local papers.[149]

Cameron County courts initially set the trial for both suspects on April 1, 1921. Still, the presiding district court judge deemed the case not ready to be tried due to the overly passionate

[146] Ignacio M. Garcia, *White but Not Equal: Mexican Americans, Jury Discrimination, and the Supreme Court* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2022), 157.
[147] Garcia, *White but Not Equal*, 157.
[148] Garcia, *White but Not Equal*, 157.
[149] "Rinconnes is Rushed to San Antonio Jail After Telling of Aiding Ortego in Attack," *San Benito Light,* March 21, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.

populace resulting from the men's confessions.[150] Judge Timon, one of the neutral agents in the story of these two men, believed it was fundamental to have a fair and impartial jury before deciding these men's fate. On September 1, 1921, Judge Timon assembled a special grand jury to investigate the evidence presented by the district attorney and local county sheriffs to present formal indictments to begin building a trial for the Maria Schroeder murder.[151]

On September 21, 1921, the special grand jury finally submitted their report to Judge Timon requesting the charge of murder for Lupe Rinconnes and Federico Ortego based on their investigation. Both men entered court that day to make their plea, and both pleaded not guilty to the charges of murder. Immediately after their plea, their attorney requested a change of venue because they would be unable to obtain a fair trial in Cameron County due to jury bias. District Attorney W.R. Jones of Brownsville objected to the notion that the venue needed to be changed. However, Judge Timon accepted the request to schedule a hearing to listen to evidence and argument for a change of venue.[152]

When the change of venue hearing arrived, the attorneys for both Rinconnes and Federico Ortego made a formal complaint to judge Timon. They claimed that the police had used torturous methods to acquire verbal confessions from both men. The Cameron County officers used violent interrogation methods known as the third-degree to obtain confessions under duress, which in any modern court would be inadmissible. The merciless third-degree interrogation tactic constituted intense coercion on suspects to produce confessions. These methods often utilized prolonged interrogations, torturous methods, and verbal threats.

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[150] "Judge Timon, Answering Plea for Special Term, Declares Cases Are Not Ready to Try," *San Benito Light*, April 1, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[151] Judge Timon Answering Plea for Special Term, April 1, 1921, BCRC.
[152] "Ortego and Rinconnes Plead Not Guilty and Ask Change of Venue," *San Benito Light*, Sept 21, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.

Still, Cameron County law enforcement went even further in their torture methods against Ortego and Rinconnes, as the media claimed the officers tortured them for twenty-four hours straight.[153] The attorneys were adamant in their request for a venue change or a dismissal of the case altogether because there was substantial physical evidence on their clients' bodies that officers had tortured them. The suspects' attorneys compared the interrogation methods to the brutality of the Spanish Inquisition and claimed authorities severely beat both men. The men's attorneys argued the head and limbs of both defendants were repeatedly bound and tightened with a tourniquet cord. They used a method called "sweating," indicating having the suspects sweat for a prolonged period in an unventilated room. The last process included using ether to cause semi-consciousness, disorientation, and psychological distress. The *San Benito Light* printed on September 19, 1921, that Rinconnes's defense attorney also claimed authorities had administered "blood-letting" tactics during interrogation.[154] Of course, law enforcement and the physician immediately denied all allegations of torture presented to the judge by the two men's attorneys.[155]

Dr. G.R. Yantis said he was invited to the jail by Cameron County officers to examine the defendants after their confessions were acquired.[156] However, Dr. Yantis examined both defendants after their obtained confessions and stated that they were partially unconscious from using ether.[157] After completing physical examinations on both men, the doctor claimed he saw no physical violence toward the prisoners.[158] However, Dr. Yantis's judgment was highly

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[153] George Connor Thomas and Richard Leo, *Confessions of Guilt: From Torture to Miranda and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 122.
[154] "Attorneys for Ortego and Rinconnes Hope to Prove Confessions Were Wrung from Them by Merciless Third Degree," *San Benito Light*, September 19, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[155] "Attorneys for Rinconnes and Ortega Charge Conspiracy of Citizens for Conviction," *San Benito Light*, September 17, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[156] Attorney for Rinconnes and Ortega Charge Conspiracy, September 17, 1921, BCRC.
[157] Attorney for Rinconnes and Ortega Charge Conspiracy, September 17, 1921, BCRC.
[158] Attorney for Rinconnes and Ortega Charge Conspiracy, September 17, 1921, BCRC.

unreliable, considering the deputies invited him to examine the prisoners. Considering all the evidence of torture on Cameron County authorities presented by the attorneys, collusion was likely between the sheriffs and the doctor. Of course, law enforcement and the physician also denied these allegations.

The defense attorneys at the change of venue request hearing also cross-examined Sheriff Fred Wynn, who was responsible for the arrests and interrogations that led to the confessions.[159] They framed a question to attempt to entrap sheriff Wynn to admit that when Rinconnes and Ortego had asked for the removal of their handcuffs, it also included the cords and bandages the officers had wrapped around their clients. Still, to no avail, Wynn denied any presence of those instruments.[160] Wynn was not a deputy you would turn to as the epitome of the professional and moral standard of policing. In J.T. Canales's 1919 state investigation of the Texas Rangers, they allude to him being responsible for clubbing to death an ethnic Mexican in Donna. By this point, three years had passed, and he had been acquitted and was still employed in law enforcement.[161]

On the same day, Judge Timon granted the change of venue request after reviewing the evidence that Cameron authorities had forcibly obtained the suspects' confessions.[162] Judge Timon also agreed that public sentiment had reached a fever pitch in Cameron County, making it impossible to have a fair trial.[163] He also indicated that a demographic of "influential citizens" were determined to obtain the defendants' convictions in Cameron County, making it incapable

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[159] "Attorney Reveals Plan for Mexicans Defense," *San Benito Light*, September 19, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[160] Attorney's Reveal Plan, September 19, 1921, BCRC.
[161] Texas State House of Representatives. *Proceedings of the Joint Committee of the Senate and the House in the Investigation of the Texas State Ranger Force*. J.T. Canales et al. Volume 2. Austin, Texas. Texas State Library and Archives Commission.
[162] "Change of Venue for Alleged Slayers Given," *San Benito Light*, September 19, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[163] Change of Venue for Alleged Slayers, September 19, 1921, BCRC.

of administering a fair trial.[164] As a result, Judge Timon approved the change of venue request for both Rinconnes and Ortego and ordered authorities to relocate the trial to Floresville, Texas, in Wilson County.

The *San Benito Light* characterized this town as a neutral site with a relatively significant share of the Mexican-American population located just south of San Antonio.[165] However, one of the most important breakthroughs was that Judge Timon, in his change of venue request, also ordered that the confessions obtained by both defendants be inadmissible in the new district court venue.[166] District Attorney W.R. Jones, on September 20, 1921, also indicated that this would be a substantial blow to the case if approved. However, he counter-argued that the court still had enough circumstantial evidence to make a solid case for conviction.[167] While District Attorney W.R. Jones had a firm belief, he wasn't necessarily right in his assumption that they would have enough evidence to try both Rinconnes and Ortego for murder.

On November 10, 1921, Judge Timon, before the trial transfer, decided to split the trial of both defendants in Floresville on the evidence that authorities claimed both defendants had confessed separately.[168] In actuality, Ortego himself never admitted to being responsible for the murder of Maria Schroeder, although the state had still charged him with murder.[169] Rinconnes admitted to aiding Ortego in the attack but claimed he was not the one who ultimately killed her and said Ortego delivered the final blow using a blunt club.[170] Judge Timon set their trials to take place consecutively on November 14, 1921. Sheriff Vann transferred both suspects from the

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[164] Change of Venue for Alleged Slayers, September 19, 1921, BCRC.
[165] "State Ready to Continue Prosecution," *San Benito Light,* September 20, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[166] State Ready, September 20, 1921, BCRC.
[167] State Ready, September 20, 1921, BCRC.
[168] "Alleged Slayers of Girl Not to be Tried Jointly," *San Benito Light*, November 10, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[169] "Alleged Slayers of Girl," Nov 10, 1921, BCRC.
[170] "Alleged Slayers of Girl," November 10, 1921, BCRC.

Brownsville County jail to Floresville at the outset of the criminal trial.[171] Lupe Rinconnes's confession did not contain a personal murder confession, so Judge Timon should have reduced his murder charge but did not. Ortego's confession should not have counted since he did not confess to murdering the girl.

On November 14, 1921, the long-awaited anticipation was over. The fate of the two men was now in the hands of the Floresville district court. When both men awoke from their prison cell in Floresville awaiting their trials, they feared the worse. When they arrived at the courthouse, they were stunned to hear that the District Attorney of Floresville, Mr. Murray filed a motion of postponement due to lack of admissible evidence towards convicting the pair.[172] However, Judge Thomas, the Floresville judge, disagreed with his request because both defendants had been in jail since February. It was already September, and such a postponed trial hinged on violating the defendant's rights.

Additionally, the judge alleged it was a logistical nightmare to re-gather fifty state witnesses to one location for a re-scheduled trial as most were arriving from outside Wilson County.[173] District Attorney Murray, as a response, moved to strike a dismissal of the indictments and the trials, which Judge Thomas approved, and both defendants were ultimately released.[174] Mr. Murray reviewed the evidence the week before the trial and believed that most of the evidence would not have been admissible in court, leading to an acquittal of both men.[175]

Mr. Murray reviewed the evidence that brought upon consideration to dismiss the trial. Because Ortego's confession was not reduced to writing and not adequately acquired, the

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[171] "Murder Case Set for Next Monday at Floresville," *San Benito Light*, November 7, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[172] " Evidence Not in Shape for Trial says District Attorney in Dismissing Murder Cases," *San Benito Light*, November 15, 1921. Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[173] *"*Evidence Not in Shape Says District Attorney,*"* November 15, 1921, BCRC.
[174] *"*Evidence Not in Shape Says District Attorney,*"* November 15, 1921, BCRC.
[175] *"*Evidence Not in Shape Says District Attorney,*"* Nov 15, 1921, BCRC.

Floresville Prosecutor could not question officers about it.[176] Without Ortego's confession, and because Cameron County forcefully obtained Ortego's admission of guilt through Rinconnes, any physical evidence found at the scene was minuscule and would reduce the likelihood of Floresville County convicting Ortego or Rinconnes.[177]

On November 15, 1921, both suspects had the charges dropped against them. They were released and escorted back to Brownsville, where they quickly, with relatives, took a train to Laredo and headed for Mexico, where American society would never see them again.[178] With the trial concluded and the men freed, some San Benitans were shocked and could not come to grips with the trial's outcome.[179] Some of the city's citizens requested an immediate investigation into how and why the men were acquitted.[180] However, no probe was ever mounted.

The evidence presented by defense attorneys during the build-up to the trial of Lupe Rinconnes and Federico Ortega, in conjunction with the suspicious and unsolved death of Salvador Saucedo, destroyed any semblance of credibility and accountability Cameron County law enforcement held in their procedural methods in acquiring suspects on the Maria Schroeder case. From the advent of the trial, it seems as if there was incredible public pressure on local officers to obtain suspects responsible for the murder of a young Anglo schoolgirl. Police officers, as protectorates of the Anglo community, knew the only way to satisfy the public's desire for vengeance was to create their suspects. In addition, in his own words, the Cameron County sheriff believed it would be easy to condemn a Mexican suspect.

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[176] *"*Evidence Not in Shape Says District Attorney,*"* Nov 15, 1921, BCRC.
[177] *"*Evidence Not in Shape Says District Attorney,*"* Nov 15, 1921, BCRC.
[178] "Ortego and Rinconnes Freed and Floresville," *San Benito Light*, November 14, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[179] "May Ask Probe of Collapse of Murder Cases," *San Benito Light*, November 16, 1921, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[180] May Ask Probe of Collapse, November 16, 1921, BCRC.

To recall, many Rio Hondo and San Benitans, along with the officers, had for a short period suspected a "renegade Anglo youth" on bond for horse theft of being responsible for the crime. In addition, there were never at any point suspicions by the officers of the Anglo schoolboys being possibly responsible. It was evident that there was a social privilege in being Anglo and a social disadvantage in being a Mexican National or ethnic Mexican accused of a crime in the 1920s.

The analysis of this case shows that brutal racist violence and lynching were still present in the Valley. Deconstruction of these events in any which way does not change the fact that Cameron County lynched Salvador Saucedo, two other men were beaten and tortured, and widespread terror was administered through unreasonable searches and seizures.

A year after the trial of Lupe Rinconnes and Federico Ortego in Floresville, Cameron County law enforcement now claimed that a suspect named Alfredo Luna was the "actual murderer" of Maria Schroeder. This claim showcases that Saucedo, Rinconnes, and Ortego were all innocent of their suspected crime against Schroeder. The posse orchestrated witch-hunts that led to their arrests were once again on the heels of another ethnic Mexican.

On Thursday, March 27, 1923, officers were hunting for Luna, who allegedly committed several violent crimes, including killing Guadalupe Moreno and taking captive Hortencia Moreno. The officers allege while Moreno was captive at Luna's camp, he admitted to killing multiple people, including Maria Schroeder.[181] However, did the officers have any evidence to dispute that the mass murder confession may not be true, or did they even care? Cameron County deputies discovered the position of Luna, and they had every resource necessary for a clean arrest against one man. Regardless, they got into position for an ambush against Luna, but Luna

[181] "Alfredo Luna, Murderer and Kidnapper, Shot by Deputy East of Rio Hondo," *The Brownsville* Herald, April 1, 1923, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC

spotted them in the brush, busted out from his tent, and began to flee. On the pretext of the "escape law," deputies began repetitively firing on him as he attempted to escape.[182] Deputy Victor Ortega fired on him from about 15 feet away with a .30 caliber rifle.[183] Luna stumbled fifty yards into the brush but ultimately collapsed and died from his wounds.[184] Authorities transported Hortencia to the local jail, where officers were more than delighted to acquire a sworn statement from Moreno, indicating Alfredo Luna as the crazed murderer responsible for Maria Schroeder and many other local Rio Hondo citizens' deaths.[185]

The search for the murderer of Maria Schroeder had turned into a farce by Cameron County Law enforcement. Officers gathered Hortencia Moreno's supposed statement after Sheriff Sam Robertson assured her that nothing would happen to her. Not to say that Hortencia Moreno did not experience the death of her husband, but there was reassurance and security for a traumatized victim to give law enforcement the information they wanted to hear. Therefore, she confessed every last detail of Alfredo Luna's criminological existence, but what did she know? She was speaking for yet another dead ethnic Mexican who could not speak for himself and provide any refutation of events on his behalf. Officers stated the testimony was convincing, considering they had suspected Luna of being responsible for all the murders since the murder of Mr. and Mrs. Ehlers. They claimed they connected the nature of Mr. and Mrs. Ehler's death to the crime of Maria Schroeder because of the similar styles of attack. However, forensic science in the early 1920s was not the modern marvel it is today, and taking a traumatized victim's word as irrefutable evidence of Luna's guilt is baseless. What did officers have to gain from Moreno's statement? Their motivation to obtain confessions was to reaffirm to the local Anglo populace of

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[182] "Slayer of Maria Schroeder Killed," *San Benito Light*, April 1, 1923, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC.
[183] Slayer of Maria Schroeder Killed, April 1, 1923, BCRC.
[184] Slayer of Maria Schroeder Killed, April 1, 1923, BCRC.
[185] Alfredo Luna, Murderer and Kidnapper, April 1, 1923, BCRC.

Cameron County that they continue to do their job to the highest degree by purging fugitives who violate the Anglo supremacist code. This charade Cameron County officers partook in by searching and hunting down the "true murder" of Maria Schroeder was an extended campaign to appease the people of Rio Hondo and surrounding regions for the release of Federico Ortego and Lupe Rinconnes.[186]

As far as the assessment of this case is concerned, Cameron authorities had found the actual murderer Maria Schroeder four times. Khalil Gibran Mohammed's theory was in full force here, and officers did not care for the lives of the ethnic Mexicans they destroyed. They were all collectively guilty. Alfredo Luna may have been some local sadistic serial killer, but the concrete proof they had against him being Schroeder's actual murderer remained non-existent. Since the death of Salvador Saucedo, the testimony of the young school boys and a bloodied club was all the evidence Cameron authorities had. With that sort of anecdotal evidence, any Mexican within the broader Southwest could have been responsible for Maria Schroeder's death.

Cameron County law enforcement became blinded by their enthusiasm for obtaining retribution against a particular demographic for an outrageous crime rather than true justice for the death of a young Anglo schoolgirl. An outraged county populace placed added pressure on these officers to find a culprit, possibly distorting their judgment. The reality of this investigation is that officers were predisposed to fix the crime to an ethnic Mexican because the social environment made it easier and more supportive to do so.

[186] "Alfredo Luna, Murderer and Kidnapper, Shot by Deputy East of Rio Hondo: Slayer of Maria Schroeder Killed," *The Brownsville* Herald, April 1, 1923, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 1, BCRC

CHAPTER IV

THE LYNCHING OF FIVE RAYMONDVILLE PRISONERS AND THE RAYMONDVILLE PEONAGE SCHEME

Raymondville, in the 1920s, was a small Valley town mostly known for being the county seat of Willacy County and for its agricultural production of cotton and citrus crops. During this period, Anglo newcomer farmers' who held control of the majority of Willacy County politics had the utmost priority in maintaining the production of their agricultural industries. They left nothing to chance, ensuring crops at any cost would be cleared and processed by their ethnic Mexican laborers. Texas's free-wage labor system indirectly impeded Willacy's great demand for labor because it allowed laborers to seek the highest wages for their services statewide.[187] Due to competitive northern wage offers, Raymondville's authorities were not always willing to be the highest bidder.[188] Anglo farmers and officers had to devise ways of dictating how to retain ethnic Mexican laborers.

The rise of Juan Crow practices in Willacy County in the 1920s added further tensions to Raymondville's social environment. Most Anglo Raymondville residents only interacted with ethnic Mexicans when Anglos needed physical labor to clear their crops and sought to maintain segregated communities. Because of their political dominance, they had no reason to associate

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[187] David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans: In the Making of Texas 1836-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 200.
[188] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 200.

with ethnic Mexicans aside from exploiting them for labor fulfillment. Had it not been for two high-profile criminal cases that simultaneously took place between eight months from the Fall of 1926 to the Spring of 1927 in Raymondville, contemporaries and modern historians might not have had any documentation of the racist discrimination that occurred during this period. Instead, they may have dismissed it as nothing more than copious amounts of procedural subjugation. Society would have seen it as nothing more than necessary procedures to facilitate the advancement of the citriculture industry.

This case study will analyze the mysterious killing of two Willacy County officers that led to the detainment of twenty-five ethnic Mexicans. And the eventual arrest and vengeance lynching of four of these twenty-five ethnic Mexican prisoners, and one Austrian prisoner, by eight Willacy County officers.[189] This lynching will demonstrate that Anglo officers used racist violence against ethnic Mexicans to seek retribution for offenses against Anglos. Most of these officers enjoyed impunity with the legal system and had the overwhelming support of the Anglo populace. The case of these men's lynchings would bring substantial resistance in seeking justice for the deceased by relatives through international diplomacy from Mexico. Furthermore, local county politics would play a vital role in influencing this trial. This lynching will also showcase the perception of local law enforcement regarding the value of ethnic Mexican life and the overtly racist decisions of the legal system in handling the lynching of these four Mexicans.

Simultaneously, some of the same authorities involved in lynching the five prisoners had fabricated an extensive peonage scheme in Raymondville, whereby laborers were forced against their will to remain on local farms and laborers away to process the various crops Anglo farmers

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[189] "County Officers Released: Bond is Fixed at $1500; Will Hold Hearing Monday," *The Brownsville Herald*, January 8, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, Brent Campney's Research Collection on Race Relations in South Texas., University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Special Collections and Archives, Edinburg Campus Repository. Hereafter, cited as BCRC.

needed cultivating. When they were unwilling to do so and attempted to escape the county, they were arrested and coerced into working to have their legal fines dropped. These laborers consisted of ethnic Mexicans, blacks, and whites, and Anglos exploited them due to Raymondville's extreme demand for labor. Anglo farmers colluded with Willacy County political authorities to permanently subjugate, extort, and threaten laborers to retain their work and keep them rooted within county lines. Any attempts to evade this system would have cyclical consequences for these extorted ethnic Mexicans. The scheme's discovery ultimately led to a high-profile federal trial in Corpus Christi, Texas, that indicted fourteen Anglo men on conspiracy to commit peonage.[190]

These two cases are inextricably intertwined for the straightforward reason that the same men who committed the lynching of five prisoners were also operating the illegal scheme that caused the unfair and horrendous treatment of ethnic Mexican laborers. The indictment of eight Willacy County officers for the lynching occurred on January 8, 1927. The timing was important because one month before the lynching, on December 13, 1926, Sheriff Raymond Teller and Deputy Frank Brandt had also been indicted by U.S. Federal District Courthouse. Federal prosecutors charged them with peonage and conspiracy along with twelve other Willacy County officials. Well before federal prosecutors indicted the peonage conspirators on December 13, 1926, the scheme operated for an unspecified but extended period of time, spanning months or even years. During this time, participants in the peonage scheme were responsible for the daily subjugation of ethnic Mexicans.

[190] "Indicted Fourteen on Peonage Charges: Willacy Probe is Completed by Grand Jury," *The Brownsville Herald*, December 13, 1926, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.

These cases are a great template to illustrate what we originally intended to argue that racist violence, subjugation, and lynching were still all present in the 1920s. These cases will also do a great job exemplifying Anglo ideological philosophies that demonstrate political issues were far more important than the safety and lives of ethnic Mexicans.

Even before the peonage scheme's discovery, the treatment of ethnic Mexicans in Raymondville was poor. In the 1920s, Anglos codified Juan Crow practices against ethnic Mexicans in most farm counties. They had implemented increasingly discriminatory policies in work, education, politics, and daily living. Anglos segregated Raymondville using the ethnic Mexican north side of the railroad tracks and the Anglo side south of the railroad.[191] Anglos barred ethnic Mexicans from entering the business district on the Anglo side of town on weekdays.[192] Furthermore, they were discouraged from owning vehicles to prevent laborers from being mobile.[193]

When ethnic Mexicans had celebratory events, they were often disturbed by Anglos attempting to resolidify their control. These disruptions were not a coincidence, as Texas Rangers had a long history of hatred towards the Mexican celebration known as the "fandango." As characterized by Texas Ranger Captain Leander H. McNelly and some of his forces stationed in Brownsville in 1875, "half a dozen of the boys would leave camp after dark and make their way to Matamoros… If we could find a fandango or Mexican dance, we would enter the dance hall and break up the festivities by shooting out the lights."[194] This act, to be sure, was not a one-off occasion. Once, a Texas Ranger with the surname Boyd became inclined to disrupt a fandango. He soon found himself in a predicament where angered Mexican national fandango

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[191] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 162.
[192] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 168
[193] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 200.
[194] N. A. Jennings, *A Texas Ranger* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1899), 142.

participants captured him, and he needed rescuing. As referenced by Jennings, "some heads had to be broken," indicating unnecessary violence against Mexican nationals to recover Boyd.[195] Similar to the Texas Rangers' killing of Severo Lopez in 1906, as referenced in my introduction, violence always ensued when Anglo law enforcement officers disrupted ethnic Mexican celebratory events.

Although Anglo authorities in the Valley in the 1920s were swift in disrupting ethnic Mexican dances, they knew the risk involved in venturing into the Mexican side of town to shut them down. Ethnic Mexicans were not fond of local law enforcement due to the longstanding orchestrated violence, oppression, and subjugation of ethnic Mexicans. During the 1910s, ethnic Mexicans from segregated Valley towns conspired to support Mexican and local revolutionaries, sometimes causing ordinary citizens to hold dances to raise funds and recruit for both domestic and international rebellions.[196] By the 1920s, the Mexican Revolution had ended, but this did not change Anglo authorities' sentiments regarding these events as criminal and immoral gatherings. Additionally, the rise of Juan Crow segregation in the 1920s caused Anglos to intervene when ethnic Mexicans chose to host fiestas. Ethnic Mexicans, through their celebrations, made clear to Willacy officers that they would encounter stern resistance in trying to regulate their way of life.

On September 6, 1926, Sheriff Louis "Slim" Mays and Deputy Constable Leslie Eugene "Bill" Shaw were responding to an alleged disturbance at a dance in the Mexican district of Raymondville. The officer's reports claimed that four officers arrived at the scene and ventured closer to investigate the disturbance. Allegedly, they heard someone firing shots, and as they turned the corner of a nearby building, they were ambushed by "unknown men" who fired a

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[195] Jennings, *A Texas Ranger*, 147.

[196] Arnoldo De León, "The Mexican Revolution's Impact on Tejano Communities: The historiographic Record," in *War Along the Border: The Mexican Revolution and Tejano Communities,* ed. Arnoldo De León (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 34.

barrage of gunfire. Mays and Shaw were killed instantly, and deputy Frank Brandt was injured in the stomach as the others retreated to safety. Willacy County law enforcement quickly assumed the assailants were ethnic Mexicans, having no hard evidence but the fact that the crime occurred at an ethnic Mexican dance. By the time the investigation was over, twenty-five ethnic Mexicans they believed were present at the dance were arrested under suspicion of murdering the officers.

Considering the lack of evidence and the abundance of men initially arrested by Willacy County officers, Khalil Gibran Muhammad's theory of collective guilt was employed in arresting the ethnic Mexicans. Willacy authorities targeted these twenty-five men for arrest only because of their race and proximity to the crime against Anglos.

Mike Crowell, a former Mayor of Raymondville, had a firsthand account of the events in 1926 of the slain officers and men arrested. He was nine years old when the officers' murders occurred. Interviewed many decades later, Crowell believed that twenty-five to thirty men were arrested and transported to the Willacy County Courthouse, where officers chained them to a staircase. Crowell recalled that the authorities chose to transport the men to an Edinburg jail. Still, as they were doing so and happened to be in the vicinity of the Raymondville salt lakes, the authorities claimed the men had attempted to escape, so they had to open fire, killing all five of the men as they fled.

Crowell stated in the 2003 documentary *Valley of Tears*, "the authorities pulled all of the deceased back into town in a two-mule wagon." Crowell witnesses the brutal imagery of multiple men riddled with bullet holes placed in front of the Raymondville Courthouse and stated, "there wasn't hardly any room on their bodies for the bullet holes that were in em,' they were shot real bad!" When asked if he believed the men were trying to escape, Crowell responded by saying, "no, of course not, nobody thought so, they were just assassinated, in my

opinion… They had already decided who the killers were, but they didn't have enough evidence to bring them to trial."[197] The former mayor held no doubt in his mind that Willacy County police had orchestrated the lynching.

The Brownsville Herald had a different account and claimed that after interrogating the twenty-five men at the courthouse, the authorities whittled down the number of detained men to five. As soon as officers made their suspects public, Governor Miriam A. Ferguson made Texas Rangers investigate the five men's national citizenship to discredit the slain men's nationality since being a Mexican citizen increased the likelihood of diplomatic intervention from Mexico.[198] The state authorities claimed that all the men slain had poll tax receipts and had voted in local elections at some point in their life, thus making them American citizens.[199] These fallacious attempts to persuade the general public held no weight since many ethnic Mexicans voted in legal elections during this period.[200] Certain parties often encouraged them to increase their numbers. The democratic political machine would have likely voted for ethnic Mexicans since they relied more on the ethnic Mexican vote to bolster their numbers.[201] This report by the U.S. State Department did not meet the satisfaction of the Mexican Embassy in Washington, three of whom the Mexican Government claimed as Mexican Nationals, including Tomás Núñez and his sons Jose and Delancio. Another non-related man named Cineo González could have also been a Mexican national, but it remained unconfirmed. There was also one remaining prisoner, an Austrian named Matt Zaller. These five would remain arrested for the murder of the Willacy County officers. However, Matt Zaller's newspaper accounts do not mention Matt

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[197] Perry Hart, "The Valley of Tears," November 28, 2003, YouTube Video, 22:40-24:50, 1hr 21 min, February 28, 2018.
[198] "Willacy Sheriff, 7 Deputies Held," *San Antonio Express*, January 8, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[199] "Willacy Sheriff, 7 Deputies Held," January 8, 1927, BCRC.
[200] Timothy Bowman, *Blood Oranges: Colonialism and Agriculture in the South Texas Borderlands* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 132.
[201] Bowman, *Blood Oranges*, 117.

Zaller's story much. He may have been guilty by association as Anglos did not favor Austrian immigrants because Austria aligned with the axis powers in World War I. Many within law enforcement or political positions were often veterans.[202]

Willacy County officers, after interrogation proceedings, decided to released Tomás Núñez. He claimed he had an alibi in which he was at his home the entire time of the murder. Tomás Núñez made his way to his house, where his daughter Teresa Núñez met him, and as she inspected the condition of her father, she noticed that he had a severe bruise on the side of his ribcage. Teresa Núñez asked her father how he obtained the bruise, and he stated, "Sheriff Raymond Teller had struck him."[203] On the contrary, officers alleged that Tomás Núñez acquired these bruises through a physical fight with Austrian prisoner Matt Zaller while detained in the local county jail.[204] Tomás Núñez release was strange, considering it was not very common for officers to believe ethnic Mexicans outright, but his dismissal may have had ulterior motives.

Meanwhile, as Teresa Núñez tended to her father's wounds, her brothers remained in jail. After hours of interrogation, officers claimed Tomás Núñez's sons fully implicated themselves, their father, ethnic Mexican Cineo González, and Austrian Matt Zaller by fully confessing that they were all responsible for the murder of the two officers. The officers alleged that the sons willingly admitted to knowing the location of the cache of stashed arms and were responsible for killing the two officers. Tomás Núñez was re-arrested by officers when he returned to the Willacy County jail to deliver his son's food, unaware that his son had just confessed to the murder of the two officers. The acquisition of the confession itself was highly questionable, considering a full admission would have either led to life imprisonment or death, as the courts

[202] "Two Officers are Killed at Raymondville," Sept 07, 1926, BCRC.
[203] "Willacy Case May Continue Rest of Week: Court Recessed Until Thursday morning on Account of Illness of Judge," *The Brownsville Herald*, January 12, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[204] "Willacy Case May Continue Rest of Week," January 12, 1927, BCRC.

were not in the business of protecting ethnic Mexicans from long prison sentences. Considering Tomás Núñez had received bruises under interrogation and the speed at which they confessed after their father left the jail, it is feasible that officers may have subjected the sons to "third-degree" interrogation tactics by officers. Considering what happened to Federico Ortego and Lupe Rinconnes in the previous case study, the frequent use of the third-degree was a common tactic amongst law enforcement officers in the 1920s, and it was an easy way to secure the guilt of a perpetrator.[205]

On September 8, 1926, the arrested suspects were rounded up by eight Willacy County officers, placed in police vehicles, and transported to the northern outskirts of Raymondville, where the officers alleged that the suspects claimed the location of the cache of arms was buried responsible for the officer's death. Officers told the five suspects to get out of the vehicle and march 100 yards in a straightforward direction. The officers forced the suspects to lead the way as the officers trailed far behind them. The suspects halted, and the officers claim twenty-five ethnic Mexicans ambushed them and fired a volley of shots from the brush.

According to the officers, they took cover and returned fire on the ambushing party, but the five prisoners were caught in the crossfire and killed instantly. They also claimed that the officers shot and wounded some of the bandits. When the gunfire cleared, Willacy County officers began their investigation of the scene. They allege that the ethnic Mexican ambushers had fled and had taken all of their wounded compatriots, making the officers incapable of making any arrests. The officers also claimed that the ambushing party's blood was splattered all

[205] "Willacy Case May Continue Rest of Week," January 12, 1927, BCRC.

over the brush and that they found the ammo cartridges of the assailants along with Winchester .30-.30 rifle ammo.[206] However, the reader must take the officers' accounts with a grain of salt.

The remnants of ammunition and weaponry were not convincing evidence that an ambushing party was present, as Mexican Revolutionaries and Texas Rangers utilized the same weaponry during la Matanza. The blood discovered at the scene could have been of the five prisoners they killed. Local authorities could have easily planted the Winchester rifles because they had easy access to weapons. There could have been no ambushing party, considering no officers were shot or injured. This evidence was anecdotal at best, considering Valley authorities did not have an exemplary track record and frequently lynched Mexican nationals or ethnic Mexicans for over eight decades. Quite often, newspaper reports were at the discretion of county officers who filed the police reports, and the officers could have quickly muddied the facts of the case. Furthermore, nobody in a position of power was going to investigate anyway, and the people who could investigate were the people who conspired to paint a narrative that all these men died due to ethnic Mexican-induced gunfire.[207]

Additionally, local law enforcement often had such disregard for ethnic Mexicans that if they were not partaking in the violence of ethnic Mexicans directly, they were often complicit in their lynchings. For example, on November 16, 1922, a Mexican National named Elias Zarate was seized by a mob and shot through the heart on an old road five miles outside Weslaco. An Anglo named J. F. Sullivan stated that Zarate had been careless in loading lumber and had dropped some of it and damaged it. As a result, the foreman on their employment site fired Zarate, and out of outrage at losing his job, Zarate returned to the worksite and allegedly attempted to attack Sullivan with a two-by-four piece of wood. Angered by the attack on

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[206] "Five Slain in Sequel to Willacy Killing: Officers with Prisoners Fired On; Latter Dead," *San Antonio Express*, Sept 8, 1926, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[207] "Five Slain in Sequel to Willacy Killing," Sept 8, 1926, BCRC.

Sullivan, Weslaco's populace assembled a mob of unknown size and composition, intent on seeking vengeance for the assaulted Anglo man, they pulled Zarate from his jail cell, took him to a discreet road, and lynched him.

The Hidalgo County authorities claimed they were unaware of Zarate's seizure from jail because officers were holding him in a separate jail building due to inmate overflow. However, during this period, it was common for jailers to allow the undeterred seizure of suspects. Even after his death, the mob's hatred was so severe that they threatened the life of Mexican Consulate Francisco Pelez, Zarate's posthumous legal representation. According to *The Brownsville Herald*, Pelez was so intimidated that he never submitted his report to the Mexican Embassy.[208]

This corruption-embedded racist violence motivated local resistors to maintain a high level of skepticism that local county authorities were acting on behalf of the interests of ethnic Mexican citizens. After hearing Willacy authorities had lynched her family Teresa Núñez was devastated. In collaboration with Mexican Consulate Manuel C. Gonzales, she filed formal charges with her mother and wife of Tomás Núñez against the eight officers responsible for the slain men's deaths. Special officer R.H. Compton was assigned to the case and took the initiative to arrest the eight Willacy County authorities suspected of lynching the five prisoners.[209]

On January 7, 1927, Sheriff Raymond Teller and seven other Willacy County authorities were arrested without bail and charged with the murder of the five prisoners.[210] Among the men detained were Special deputy Leon Gill, Game Warden N. M. Ragland, Game Warden Frank Cowsert, Roy Collins, Special Deputy Charlie Wroten, Deputy Frank Brandt, Jailer Arturo Flores, and Sheriff Raymond Teller.[211] Following the formal charges against Willacy authorities

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208 "Body of Zarate Found in Road Near Weslaco," *The Brownsville Herald*. November 16, 1922, Pg 1.
209 "Bond is Fixed at $1500," January 8, 1927, BCRC.
210 "Bond is Fixed at $1500," January 8, 1927, BCRC.
211 "Bond is Fixed at $1500," January 8, 1927, BCRC.

on January 8, 1927, Willacy law enforcement countered by arresting Teresa Núñez on January 9, 1927. Willacy authorities arrested her on unwarranted vagrancy and immorality charges. She was forcefully carried against her will to jail and held overnight.[212]

Vagrancy laws varied state by state, but generally, they made it a crime to wander without having the visible means to support yourself. Therefore, it was illegal in Texas to partake in being drunk, immoral, or idle. It was a catch-all statute that could have the majority of migrant farmworkers detained during this time. However, Teresa Núñez had a permanent home, was never wandering Willacy County, and was not evidently involved in immoral behavior.[213]

Additionally, a sinister political rivalry was attempting to penetrate the court's proceedings and influence the trial's outcome. The ranching and the farming-dominated order of Willacy County had clashed for years because, since the beginning of the 1920s, the farming-dominated order had swept local county politics and destroyed the fabric of ranch life in Willacy. Politicians reorganized Willacy County in 1921. The dichotomous split between factions partly stemmed from political representation, land ownership, and Anglo's perceived role for ethnic Mexicans in ranchers' and farmers' society. Democratic ranchers had previously controlled politics in Willacy before 1920, and ranchers had maintained a political machine reliant on Mexicans to bolster their votes in exchange for social favor. However, because of the large influx of Midwestern farmers overrunning ranchers, it was no longer necessary for farmers to be dependent on ethnic Mexicans' votes, so they became thrust to the lowest tier of the Valley's social hierarchy.

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[212] Submit More Testimony in Willacy Case: Teresa Nunez Recalled to Stand Today in Habeas Corpus Proceedings, *The Brownsville Herald,* January 11, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[213] 1920s Complete Texas Statutes: Penal Code, *Texas Historical Statutes Project*, Texas State Law Library (Kansas City: Vernon Law Book Company, 1920), 86.

For Teresa Núñez, political rivalries entangled her family's lynching amid a much larger scheme that dealt with the importance and non-importance of ethnic Mexican labor in Willacy County. By the 1920s, the farming-dominated order primarily influenced and controlled Willacy County law enforcement. Having deemed ethnic Mexicans the lowest tier of Valley society, they had no hesitation in doing what they saw fit, especially when law enforcement labeled them criminals.

For this reason, Teresa Núñez and Mexican consulates Manuel C. Gonzalez's roles in challenging mob violence were courageous. Their determination to seek the truth was the only defense in assuring there would be some attempt to hold these officers accountable for their heinous crimes. One of the most recurrent themes examined in this paper is intimidation and the inability of individuals to summon the courage to voice their truth primarily out of fear of lethal repercussions. Teresa Núñez was extraordinarily bold and disregarded her own safety to pursue justice and have Willacy authorities face legal accountability.

Teresa Núñez resisted the tactics of law enforcement, the legal system, and the court of public opinion within Willacy County. Willacy County had directed their complete animosity towards Núñez for being proactive in challenging the officers' narratives on the murder trial. Much of the historical scholarship focuses on the valiant efforts of prominent Mexican-Americans like J. T. Canales and Jovita Idar in curbing racist violence on a regional or even state level. However, the actions of Teresa Núñez at the ground level were just as vital to attempting to hold local law enforcement accountable, although rarely successful.

Moreover, the work that Mexican Consulate, such as Manuel C. Gonzalez, partook in was valiant and under-recognized. Over several decades, Mexico's embassy inundated consulates with many cases in which they must have felt powerless to impact the lives of

victims' families positively. Many Mexican Consulates thought they had a sacred duty to attempt to initiate a thorough investigation into the killing not only for the sake of the family but also to set the precedent that there would be consequences for the lynching of Mexican citizens on foreign lands.

The credibility of the lynching case of the five prisoners was further damaged when authorities, on January 10, 1927, considered arresting Gonzalez. Although Willacy County never presented any formal charges, the words from Judge Cunningham are as follows:

> Announcement made tonight by Judge Cunningham, that no warrant has been issued for the arrest of Manuel C. Gonzalez, the attorney representing the Mexican Government, alleged to have been instrumental in securing the issuance of complaints against eight officers by Teresa Núñez.[214]

That the legal justice system even considered issuing a warrant for the arrest of a Mexican diplomatic official for filing formal legal complaints against Willacy authorities shows the complete, utter disregard authorities had for the due process of the law and ethnic Mexican representation. The general intimidation emanated from local law enforcement and county court proceedings instilled high levels of distress and fear amongst Teresa Núñez and Consulate Manuel C. Gonzalez, the few individuals willing and determined to seek the truth.

On January 11, 1927, the habeas corpus hearing for the eight men suspected of killing the three related Mexican nationals, ethnic Mexican Cineo González, and Austrian Matt Zaller, was held, and Teresa Núñez took the stand for the first time. In her testimony, she dismissed the notion that her father had gotten into a fight with Austrian Matt Zaller, as the police alleged. She explained to the courtroom that she discussed with her father how authorities were responsible for his physical state after they released him from jail.[215] She also detailed how she, in

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[214] "Habeas Corpus Application to Be Heard by Judge Cunningham," *The Brownsville Herald*, Monday, January 9, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[215] "Willacy Case May Continue Rest of the Week," January 12, 1927, BCRC.

conjunction with her sister Tomása Núñez, had returned to the crime scene of the five lynched prisoners and began investigating, gathering clues at the scene. The initiative Teresa Núñez took must have caught the ire of Willacy County police because it led to her arrest.[216]

In addition, before her testimony, she was approached by the defense and propositioned to settle the case. Judge Cunningham's opening remarks stated that "her testimony was being heard due to many alleged attempts to effect a settlement with her."[217] She testified that Chief Defense Attorney A.B. Crane attempted to force her to sign a statement on the day of her arrest. She claimed Crane persuaded her to file the complaints against the officers, not on her own accord, but in the personal interest of her Mexican Consulate, Manuel C. Gonzalez. This scheme introduced by the officer's defense intended to frame Núñez as not genuinely acting on her behalf but in the personal interest of Consulate Gonzalez.[218] So not only was Manuel Gonzalez almost arrested for nothing but he was also used as a pawn in defense attorney Crane's scheme to get Núñez to sign false settlement documents so that she could not testify on her family's behalf.

Conflicting preliminary newspaper reports alleged an angry local mob had stormed into the jail, beheaded Tomás Núñez, and killed the four other men. As a result of these rumors, the Mexican Government called for the exhumation of Tomás Núñez's body as a part of their alternative investigation.[219] The reports were proven false with the ordered exhumation of Tomás Núñez. However, he did have many gunshot wounds in the head, chest, and arms and visible physical injuries that matched the beating Willacy authorities gave him before his death.[220] Officers often selected coroner's juries to be racially biased in their examination of deceased ethnic Mexicans so trials could be expedited, and juries could acquit the accused.

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[216] "Eight Officers Get Sound Grilling: State Warns on Intimidation of Witnesses in 5 Willacy Slayings, Arrests Also," *Fort Worth-Record Telegram*, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, January 12, 1927.
[217] "Submit More Testimony in Willacy Case," January 11, 1927, BCRC.
[218] "Eight Officers Get Sound Grilling," *Fort Worth-Record Telegram*, January 12, 1927.
[219] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 152.
[220] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 152.

On January 27, 1927, the jury deliberated at the Willacy County District Courthouse after a two-week investigation by the grand jury. It issued a no-bill to all the officers involved, exonerating all men in the deaths of the five slain prisoners.[221] The resistance Teresa Núñez and her remaining family members attempted to mount with the assistance of Mexican Consulate Manuel C. Gonzalez was brave but, in the end, did not result in a conviction. The determination by the court asserted that there was insufficient evidence to convict the accused. Willacy County officials' questionable behavior was undoubtedly evident as the officers tortured and intimidated suspects, arrested and harassed Teresa Núñez, suspiciously acquired confessions from Núñez's sons, and lynched five prisoners. Local county authorities instituted this lynching as a form of vengeance for the killings of Willacy County officers Bill Shaw and Slim Mays.

Months before this criminal investigation, Raymondville's authorities had established an illegal peonage scheme. Peonage is a system devised by employers, in this case, farmers, designed to subjugate laborers by using physical force or coercion to get workers to pay off debts that farmers argue the laborers incurred.[222]

Newcomer Anglo farmers who controlled politics and the agricultural industry in Willacy County believed peonage was necessary to meet the shifting market demands of their crops. Any attempts to evade this system would have cyclical consequences for the targeted victims. Federal investigators may have never discovered the scheme had it not been for the schemers' mistakes in sweeping up into peonage a few prominent Anglo youths from northern regions of the United States who had become entangled within the scheme and who had connections capable of publicizing the affair. As a result, when Raymondville attorneys managed to catch wind that Anglo farmers were holding laborers against their will, they formally reported this scheme to the

[221] "Raymondville Men Cleared in Shooting," *The Harlingen Star*, January 28, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[222] "Willacy Probe is Completed by Grand Jury," December 13, 1926, BCRC

U.S. Department of Labor and Department of Justice, which led to its discovery. The scheme's discovery ultimately led to a high-profile federal trial in Corpus Christi, Texas, on January 31, 1927.[223] The Department of Labor found enough substantial evidence to indict fourteen Willacy County farmers and officials on conspiracy to commit peonage.[224]

Seven Anglo men and six African-Americans had become enveloped by the system. The Anglos caught in the scheme were from the northern United States and enjoyed some influence compared to the racial minorities entangled in the scheme. One of the men was a former page at the House of Representatives, an advocacy program for scholars interested in pursuing political careers. These Anglo men included A.H Nichols, Walter V. Newman, Leonard Swanson, Wilson Graham, H.A. Barclay, Albert Hollingsworth, and Henry Orr.[225] There was also a large and indeterminant number of ethnic Mexicans who Anglo Farmers had trapped in the scheme. However, in the Campney Collection, ethnic Mexicans caught in the scheme are never mentioned on a first-name basis. Anglo youths caught in the system garnered significant outrage and attention from Anglos. However, Mexicans did not because labor Anglos viewed labor as their primary role and anything necessary to get them to fulfill their position was not off-limits by Anglos.[226]

Many of these farmers, because they were former plantation owners in the South or farm owners in the Midwest, had long developed the tactics necessary to control labor forces. However, Texas's free-wage labor system made it difficult for Anglos to control ethnic Mexicans in the Valley because they had the privilege of free-lancing their services to the highest bidder.

[223] "Indicted Fourteen on Peonage Charges: Willacy Probe is Completed by Grand Jury," *The Brownsville Herald*, December 13, 1926, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[224] "Washington Witness on Stand Today," *The Brownsville Herald*, January 1, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[225] "Trial Peonage Case Underway: Peonage Case Trial Brings Out Charges," *The Brownsville Herald*, February 2, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[226] Trial Peonage Case Underway, February 2, 1927, BCRC.

So, Raymondville's Anglos had to devise illegal tactics to maintain their retention rates of ethnic Mexicans. As a result, Raymondville's peonage scheme came into existence, and the schemers immediately revoked ethnic Mexican laborers' freedoms, preventing them from leaving the county for higher-paying opportunities.[227]

The fabricated labor controls of Willacy farmers and authorities were aided by the vision of boosters in the Valley who had marketed a vision toward farmers of a capitalistic agricultural haven that viewed ethnic Mexicans as less than people. Instead, they were more like an extension of the natural resource of the land, equivalent to water, land, plants, and animals.[228] Much of the booster propaganda created in the Valley since the advent of the railroad had a recurrent theme that proposed Anglos subjugate ethnic Mexicans in the same way the immigrant farmers would conquer the land, vegetation, and river on arrival.[229] Print media and booster companies dehumanized the Mexican farmworker as a subservient laborer, ready to work at the whim of their superiors and content with the minor compensations that their life and land provided without any desire toward upward mobility.[230]

Popular 1920s Valley Agricultural Economist Paul Schuster Taylor interviewed Paul Stokes, a local farmer from Nueces County. He perfectly characterized Anglo philosophies towards labor control as he stated, "Have a regular Mexican to watch them… if the cotton pickers to whom I advance started to move, one of my regular Mexicans would get my foreman out of bed, and he would talk to them or threaten them or do anything else to keep them from

[227] Bowman, *Blood Oranges,* 113.
[228] Wimberly, Cory, et al, "Peons and Progressives: Race and Boosterism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1904–1941," *The Western historical quarterly* 49, no. 4 (2018): 441.
[229] Wimberly, Cory, et al, "Peons and Progressives: Race and Boosterism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1904–1941," (2018): 446.
[230] Wimberly, Cory, et al, "Peons and Progressives: Race and Boosterism in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 1904–1941," (2018): 447.

moving off."[231] This quote epitomized the culture of local growers who interacted with local ethnic Mexicans within Willacy County, and this philosophy was actively practiced in the Raymondville peonage scheme.

Anglos were constantly justifying the employment of their tactics with the inferior perceptions they held of ethnic Mexicans. Anglos believed ethnic Mexicans were "dirty, filthy, and lousy," yet hardworking. When asked about his opinion of the ethnic Mexican, one local school authority explained, "The Mexican here is a servant class, a laborer, a peon, a slave. The Anglo child looks on the Mexican as on the Negro before the Civil War, to be cuffed about and used as an inferior people."[232] This quote aptly summarizes participants' attitudes within Raymondville's peonage scheme. The politically influential Anglo citizens and authorities that needed the rapid fulfillment of labor shortages held no qualms with using any measure necessary to meet their agricultural goals. As for the farmers and law-affiliated participants of the scheme, in the eyes of federal prosecutors, their action went too far and impeded several Anglo youths from working with the law's protections. Consequently, federal prosecutors charged the most highly involved with a conspiracy to commit peonage.

Raymondville's peonage system was not a comprehensive scheme between all parties involved but resulted from a widespread independent local agreement between local farmers and county officials. The farmers on trial as defendants were not interconnected in the scheme and participated independently. In addition, some victims and their experiences were also not interlinked. Therefore, the Federal District Court in Corpus Christi issued an umbrella-like indictment that targeted the most involved participants in the scheme in one fell swoop.

[231] Bowman, *Blood Oranges*, 115.
[232] Bowman, *Blood Oranges*, 111 (Quotes found in 111, 115).

Raymondville's scheme should never have occurred in the first place, as the peonage abolition act of 1867 prohibited anyone in the United States seeking to liquidate a specific debt or obligation to someone from participating in service or labor involuntarily under threat or force.[233] Regardless of this law, peonage was still heavily practiced in Valley agriculture and specific Southwest areas many years later. Willacy County had illegally practiced peonage since the advent of commercial agriculture there without any significant interference from the law.

It was easy to coerce ethnic Mexican laborers, many of whom were uneducated and illiterate, and the grave conditions in Mexico induced widespread desperation among them to secure a better living.[234] When laborers arrived off the railroad, they would quickly be met by their respective contract laborers and transported to a specific farmer to settle and begin work.[235] After their arrival, settlement, and work, many laborers learned that farmers had changed the terms and conditions they had initially promised by paying lower wages and providing poorer living conditions.[236] Sometimes farmers committed to paying the respective wage but overcharged for room and board, creating an impossible debt to pay.[237]

Laborers who refused to work under these conditions would sometimes be allowed to leave. However, this did not cause farmers to fret over their loss of workforce because those who did go would quickly be sought out and arrested for vagrancy. As prisoners, officers would notify the prisoners of their legal fees. The fees usually amounted to being fined double the amount owed for transportation and food costs supposedly set aside by the farmers to maintain the laborer's cost of living. The authorities gave the prisoners the option of staying in jail or

[233] Christopher M. Richardson and Ralph E. Luker, *Historical Dictionary of the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 364.
[234] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 249.
[235] Bowman, *Blood Oranges,* 41.
[236] Bowman, *Blood Oranges,* 66.
[237] "Laborers Forced to Work Under Guard in Valley Jury Told: First Arrested, Then Sent to Cotton Fields; Anglos and Negroes Agree in Peonage Trial Evidence," *San Antonio Express*, February 3, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.

working off the fines by picking cotton or grapefruits crop for the recruited farmers. Considering the option of being left in jail for an unspecified time with mounting legal fees, most chose the labor route.

When laborers were able to pay fines off and complete work, they often found themselves trapped in a dead-end web of labor controls that would continually rearrest them for vagrancy. In conjunction with the pass system and a perimeter of make-shift checkpoints, these laws made it nearly impossible for unauthorized laborers to flee from Raymondville County. Only laborers with specific passes written by farmers in association with authorities were granted free passage out of the county.[238]

The politics that had infiltrated this trial resulted from the rivalry between the old ranching-dominated order and the new farming-dominated order, which established good government leagues to dominate local county politics. Good government leagues, instead of one sole entity, were a variety of independent coalitions all vying for the privilege of being the exclusive Republican party of Willacy County, previously controlled by democrats.

The victor could implement what they thought was the best form of Republican representation, and they were always in opposition to the Democrats. In the previous decade, Mexican-American Democrats established a political machine in collaboration with Anglos which heavily relied on the dependence of the ethnic Mexican families' vote. In direct competition, the newcomer farmers saw the political machine as the prime example of the corruption of Valley politics. They believed the old order was responsible for county fund mismanagement, fraud, illegal voting, bossism, and betraying American democracy.[239]

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[238] "Called Tickets Through Lines to Liberty by U.S.: Passes Sworn To; Laborer's Passes in Peonage Trial." *San Antonio Express*, February 5, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[239] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 133.

At the state level, the Democratic party, due to the influx of ethnic Mexicans within Texas, initiated policies such as white primaries, poll tax requirements, and the elimination of voting interpreters to keep county voting Anglo.[240] Before 1911 Cameron County was a vast county dominated by ranching. Still, with the introduction of the farming industry in 1904, by 1911, the county was reorganized into Cameron and Willacy County with the hopes that ranchers could retain political and economic control of the newly coined Willacy County. However, because of a very entrepreneurial land company known as Raymond Town and Improvement Company, farming spread further north, infiltrating and dominating Willacy's politics, causing severe tension amongst both groups.[241]

These partisan disputes became so severe that Cameron County, by 1921, would eventually be split into three different counties, including Cameron, Willacy, and Kenedy, to alleviate the divisiveness amongst county politics. For over a decade, rival politics between farmers and ranchers remained ever-present because there was no federal oversight in county funds till 1931, and whoever controlled local politics controlled the advancement of their industries and respective populace.

Therefore, by 1921 Willacy County decided to reorganize again by carving out Kenedy County, which appropriated most ranching lands within Willacy into Kenedy County. By the 1920s, the Republican farmers who had taken complete control of Willacy County politics used this power to oppress ethnic Mexicans further. They did this by segregating county towns, implementing pass systems, changing voting laws, utilizing vagrancy and immorality laws, and establishing an elaborate scheme of peonage.[242]

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[240] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 143.
[241] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 141.
[242] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans,* 205.

Most of the ranching-dominated order in Willacy County had been ostracized and relegated to the jurisdiction of Kenedy County due to the Willacy County reorganization of 1921. However, not all ranchers were willing to admit defeat so quickly, and there was still a remnant of the old ranching-dominated order that had seen their land, power, and prestige decrease over the years. Due to the circumstances around the federal trial of Raymondville's peonage scheme, the old order was opportunistic in seeking the possibility of reclaiming its former glory. The democratic orders' attempt to infiltrate federal court proceedings was an attempt to send a message to the old order that, essentially, any farmers' loss would be ranchers' gain. Historian David Montejano best characterizes the old order and newcomer situation as he explains:

> When the newcomers defeated the old oligarchy, Mexican-Anglo relations changed dramatically to a manner better suited to the demands and interests of commercial farming. Not unexpectedly, when the farmer wrested control from the ranchers, one of their first measures was the disenfranchisement of Texas Mexicans… Who won the battle between the newcomers and old-timers, in other words, affected the local social order in fundamental ways[243]

The Willacy County peonage occurred amongst eight prominent local cotton farmers named Lloyd Bennett, Klice Stockwell, Carl Brandt, C.S. Stockwell, H.W. Stockwell, R. D. Rirsdoprh, C. A. Johnson, and L.K. Stockwell in collaboration with the Justice of the Peace Floyd Dodd, District Attorney Roger F. Robinson, Sheriff Raymond Teller, deputy Frank Brandt, deputy John Swanner, and deputy William Hargrove.

The federal trial of these Anglo authorities took place on January 31, 1927, and Judge J. C. Hutcheson administered the trial. The first peonage indictment alleged that conspiracy occurred based on "various acts designed to hold and arrest six men upon their arrival to the Rio Grande Valley." The second case charged the defendants for forcefully depriving victims of their

[243] Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans*, 148 (Quote found in 148).

liberty by causing them to perform agricultural services involuntarily by force of arms. There was also a third charge that was publicly undisclosed that mirrored the second charge.[244] These charges claimed that the authorities forced the scheme's victims into jail under unwarranted vagrancy violations and that when given the options to pay off their debts, authorities forced them to do so under armed unlawful restraint.[245] In addition, the threat of life or bodily harm was active and present under these coercive or forceful labor conditions.

When the parties selected the jury for this trial, Judge Hutcheson was adamant in instructing the jury to be entirely neutral and not succumb to exterior political influences that attempted to dictate the outcome of the federal peonage case.[246] The judge was aware that this was an extremely high-profile case that created a partisan split amongst the demographics of Willacy County. He was also aware of rumblings that a faction of citizens from the ranching-dominated order intended to smuggle weaponry into the proceeding to create disruption or intimidation within the trial participants.[247]

When the trial convened, the jury heard widespread testimony from many victims who Willacy authorities held against their will within the Willacy peonage scheme. One of the first to take the stand in the trial was a Washington D.C. scholar named Leonard Swanson, who was nineteen years old. He was one of the young Anglo boys enticed by labor contractors' promises as they migrated from northern states to the Valley in search of work opportunities. Swanson and Allen Nichols, Walter Newman, and Wilson Graham testified that they were recruited in Houston, Texas, for work in the cotton fields of Raymondville, with the promise they would receive a $1.25 per hundred pounds of cotton picked and accommodated room and board. They

[244] "Willacy Probe is Completed by Grand Jury," December 13, 1926, BCRC.
[245] "Willacy Probe is Completed by Grand Jury," December 13, 1926, BCRC.
[246] "Audience Disarms in Willacy Trial: Court Orders Arrest of All Who Bring Weapons to His Courtroom: Judge Charges Politics in Preliminary Instructions to Jurors," *The San Antonio Express*, February 3, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[247] "Audience Disarms," February 3, 1927, BCRC.

traveled to local farmer A.C. Johnson's farm in Lyford, nearby Raymondville. When discussing the pre-arranged conditions, they realized Johnson was not inclined to honor their agreements.

Johnson attempted to pay them lower wages and not provide the men with food, so they quit. The laborer's flight did not lead Johnson to partake in any aggressive behaviors in retaining them because he had pre-determined agreements to re-obtain laborers with Willacy County authorities. When the trial commenced, the boys testified that Johnson and a sheriff's deputy instantly arrested them for vagrancy. The laborers were arraigned by Justice of the Peace Floyd Dodd and released upon the coercive demands that if they worked for Johnson to pay off their debts, authorities would drop the vagrancy charges and legal fines. As Johnson transported the laborers back to his farm, prominent Raymondville attorneys caught wind of the story that Johnson was holding several Anglo laborers against their will. The authorities dropped the charges against the laborers to attempt to prevent the lawyers from filing legal complaints, but the discovery had come to light. Local Raymondville attorneys made it their prerogative to alert the federal investigators to stop the abuses of white Anglo laborers.[248]

Another witness called to the stand was Willie Lee, a black man. Lee stated that Willacy authorities immediately arrested him and eight other men when they arrived on a freight train to Raymondville. They were then subsequently marched to the farm of Klice Stockwell against their will to labor picking cotton. Lee stated that once they arrived at the farm, a guard named Jack Chadwick boasted that Willacy authorities had deputized him as he patrolled on horseback, carried a shotgun, and oversaw the work of the laborers. Lee testified that Chadwick had made grave threats toward the laborers on a routine basis. Chadwick had routinely stated, "I wish someone in this bunch would run away… I would like to see how good I can shoot. I haven't

[248] "Peonage Case Trial Brings Out Charges: Raymondville Attorney Asserts He Had Seen Prisoner in Chains," *The Brownsville Herald*, February 2, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.

done any shooting for a long time." Jack Chadwick sole purposes was to keep laborers cultivating crops and he was elated to terrorize ethnic Mexicans confined to Stockwell's farm.

H.A. Barclay and Albert Hollingsworth, two Anglo men from Corrigan, Texas, also testified that they were held against their will by Jack Chadwick on the Stockwell Ranch. Both men testified that while working under guard, the laborers were referred to as "convicts" by Chadwick. Barclay insisted that the farmers composed a chain gang that included Anglos, Mexicans, and blacks. In addition, Arthur Dickinson and Bruce Morgan were two black men from Sugarland, Texas, who had come to Raymondville to pick cotton. Still, when they left an unspecified farmer's property with poor cotton yields, they were arrested as vagrants and transported to farmer Carl Brandt's farm, where Brandt forced them to work under armed guard. Unlike many other laborers caught in the grip of labor controls, the men managed to escape Brandt's property at night when all the guards were sleeping.[249] Escaping was a courageous feat considering farmers often took laborers' clothes at night so they could not escape.

Amongst the defendants, several prominent county authorities testified and stated the arrests of ethnic Mexicans were necessary to maintain civility within Raymondville, claiming they had caused uncontrolled lawlessness in Raymondville, which could not be further from the truth. County Judge A.B. Crane, one of the defendants' attorneys and the same man who tried to blackmail Teresa Núñez, testified that many lawless ethnic Mexicans were responsible for numerous "small depredations" within the county. Lamar Gill, the head of a colonization project within Raymondville, claimed that he oversaw 6,500 laborers in clearing land for farmers and growers. He stated many acts of lawlessness had occurred due to laborers committing burglaries, although he had no proof. However, others could not specify what crimes had happened when asked about the specific actions of laborers breaking laws within Willacy County. In summary,

[249] "Laborers Forced to Work," February 3, 1927, BCRC.

many of the defendants' defenses attempted to illustrate that arrests were necessary to maintain the city's civility and stamp out the inevitable crime of maintaining such an ignorant and unregulated labor force.[250]

In his defense, Lyford farmer A.C. Johnson who had held the Anglo youths against their will, testified that he had the men arrested because they charged groceries to his account without his consent when given the task of going to the store. Sheriff Deputy William Hargrove who made the initial arrest, stated he took the boys to county attorney R. F. Robinson to ask him what he should do with the boys. Robinson instructed him to file vagrancy charges, so he did.

Hargrove, who had initially arrested the men for charging groceries to Johnson, backtracked while on trial when grilled about the definition of vagrancy. Hargrove testified that he stopped and arrested the boys, not for the report of the groceries but because the boys on the highway had no visible means of support, indicating they broke vagrancy laws. However, because the sheriff had to ask the county attorney for guidance on the charges, and the fact that he stated he did not arrest them for the groceries proves, he arrested them for no other reason besides being ethnic Mexican.[251] Although not a mass arrest, this proves Khalil Gibran Mohammad's theory of collective guilt by demonstrating that all that was necessary for Anglos to arrest ethnic Mexicans in Willacy County was the color of your skin and for authorities to pin any crime whatsoever on you.

On February 4, 1927, deputy Frank Brandt testified that once, a local farmer named W.T. Hilderaand brought in money to the deputy's office, which was said to be to pay fines for the boys picking cotton for him. Brandt testified that he denied the money and would not take it.

[250] "Government Grills Peonage Defendant," *San Antonio Express*, February 4, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[251] "Four Defense Witnesses on Stand Today: Claim Arrest of Various Persons Last Fall Was Necessary; Not Peonage," *The Brownsville Herald*, February 3, 1927, February 3, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.

Local attorney George Westervelt supported these denials with his testimony. He insinuated that Frank Brandt and Carl Brandt were not partaking in a conspiracy to hold laborers under armed guard to pay off their vagrancy fines. George Westervelt claimed he traveled to many farmers' fields where he claimed no wrongdoing was occurring, and farmers were not keeping laborers under armed guard.[252] Aside from the authorities and the farmers, not many witnesses came to the indicted's defense. The defendants extended every effort to maintain denial of practicing peonage, but the testimony by the plaintiffs quickly amassed.

Justice of the Peace Floyd Dodd testified that he had arrested the four Anglo boys because they loitered in the streets. He also emphatically denied that Johnson and other farmers were in the business of securing labor from their arrests. When cross-examined and asked if he had ever told detained laborers to plead guilty or rot in jail, Dodd insisted this never occurred. Yet, many plaintiffs insisted they spent days overnight in prison before being coerced into having their charges dropped if having labored for farmers. Dodd told the court that the book containing his criminal arrest's comprehensive proceedings "mysteriously vanished." The defense likely destroyed this court docket before federal prosecutors could obtain it because it included convicting evidence Dodd did not want to make transparent.[253]

District Attorney Clarence Kendall also detailed that whenever authorities encountered laborers with less than a quart of intoxicating liquors, officers arrested them as vagrants. The district attorney questioned Justice of the Peace Floyd Dodd as to whether having a minor possession of liquor was grounds for vagrancy arrests based on state law. Floyd Dodd responded that it was not and explained that it was a custom within his section of the state to file vagrancy charges. The court was shocked by Dodd's explanation, and an "oh!" reverberated in the

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[252] "Deputy Says Jail Inmates Disappeared: Was Unable to Locate Some Members of Party of 15 He had Arrested," *The Brownsville Herald*, February 4, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.
[253] "Government Grills Peonage Defendant," February 4, 1927, BCRC.

courtroom.[254] These inconsistencies between state law and these local county implementations reiterate that local county officials were creating and enforcing their practices regarding the regulation and policing of ethnic Mexican laborers. For example, although it states officers could arrest vagrants for drunkenness, minor possession was not a violation according to 1920s vagrancy statutes.[255]

Furthermore, District Attorney Kendall pressed Floyd Dodd on the stand and asked him if he knew the six boys arrested for vagrancy were no more guilty than Floyd Dodd. Dodd responded by avoiding the question and stating, “I saw them loitering in the streets.” District Attorney Kendall responded by stating, are you in the habit of arresting boys every time they are standing around on the streets of Raymondville? Floyd Dodd responded by saying that he was not in the business of capturing every loiter. However, his statement held relatively little weight, considering the authorities arrested most uncompliant laborers for that same charge.[256]

The three black men plaintiff’s testimonies, such as that of Bruce Morgan, Arthur Dickman, and Willie Lee, who farmers forced under peonage on the Klice Stockwell farm, were a far cry from the testimony of denial fabricated by Justice of the Peace Floyd Dodd. The men stated, “When they were picked up for vagrancy charges and transported to jail, the authorities gave them the option of working off their fines or being left to rot.”[257]

For days the testimony of a diversity of plaintiffs that ranged from Mexican, black, and Anglo individuals was heard and contributed to the considerable oral evidence that built a strong case against the defendants. The abuses went from vagrancy arrests, working under duress, verbal and physical threats, being held under armed guard, forced removal of clothing to prevent

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[254] “Government Grills Peonage Defendant,” February 4, 1927, BCRC.
[255] Vernon, Sayles. *Texas Historical Statutes Project.*1920s Complete Texas Statutes: Penal Code. Texas State Law Library, Kansas City: Vernon Law Book Company, 1920, 29.
[256] “Government Grills Peonage Defendant,” February 4, 1927, BCRC.
[257] “Laborers Forced to Work,” February 3, BCRC.

escape, fines, and pass systems, amongst other abuses.[258] When the trial commenced, and once the testimony of these plaintiffs began piling up day after day, it became increasingly difficult for the defendants to mount a defense.

When sheriff deputy Frank Brandt took the stand, the trial's Chief Prosecutor Clarence Kendall questioned Brandt about the proposed pass system stating, "were you in the habit of issuing passes to permit men to get out of town?" Brandt responded by saying. "I was not. None was needed." Kendall responded by stating, "What sort of condition did you have in Raymondville at that time that it was necessary for a man to have a pass to leave town? You were not under martial law, were you?" Brandt refused to engage, stating, "I do not know anything about any passes." In addition, Prosecutor Kendall presented evidence of receipts to the jury showcasing the acceptance of fines for multiple cotton pickers from farmer Tom Hilderaand which amounted to 6 dollars for three cotton pickers. Brandt also testified that he refused any acceptance of funds as well.[259]

After the plaintiffs presented extensive evidence on the abuses of Willacy authorities, the jury convened on February 5, 1927, at 7:30 pm, and convicted Sheriff Raymond Teller, Justice of the Peace Floyd Dodd, farmer Carl Brandt, farmer and deputy Frank Brandt, and farmer L.K. Stockwell. The men acquitted were farmer C.S. Stockwell, County Attorney R.F. Robinson, farmer R. G. Riersdorph, and farmer Lloyd Barnett.

On February 6, 1927, the Federal Government sentenced Sheriff Raymond Teller to 18 months in Leavenworth prison on charges of peonage and conspiracy to commit peonage. Willacy County's legal system fined him $1,000 dollars. Frank Brandt, Teller's former deputy, was sentenced to one year and a day and a fine of $500 dollars. Justice of the Peace Floyd Dodd

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[258] "Laborers Forced to Work, February 3," BCRC.
[259] "Called Tickets Through Lines to Liberty by U.S," February 5, 1927, BCRC.

was sentenced to four months in local jail and fined $1,000 dollars. Farmer L.K. Stockwell was sentenced to 90 days in jail and fined $500. Farmer Carl Brandt was given a 30-day jail sentence and fined the same amount.[260]

The Willacy County authorities suspected of lynching the five prisoners and partaking in the Willacy County peonage scheme were convicted for the sole violation of entrapping Anglos within a scheme designed explicitly for racially inferior laborers and not for the scheme itself. In all likelihood, other counties during these eight months from 1926-1927 were holding their breath, hoping federal prosecutors would not find out about their own illegal yet standard peonage practices. Entrapping the Anglo boys was an indignation to the Anglo moral code, which is why Anglo Raymondville lawyers reported the authorities involved to federal prosecutors. When the trial commenced, the ranching-dominated order, which had lost much of its power within Willacy County, opportunistically sought to influence the outcome of a primarily farming-dominated trial to attempt to alter the landscape of Willacy County politics. The fact that the legal system acquitted them on the charges of lynching the three Mexican nationals, one ethnic Mexican and one Austrian, proves that the importance of Anglos caught in a peonage scheme was of more importance than the death of these prisoners. The disregard of this lynching reaffirms that an ethnic Mexican life only temporarily held value to Anglos when providing an undeniably necessary economic service. Anglos in the 1920s, much like in the 1915s, were free to violate ethnic Mexicans' human rights at their discretion.

The conjoined outcome of these cases was egregious in that it was just another case of many that highlighted the inferiority of ethnic Mexicans' lives in the Valley. In addition to the extreme dehumanization of ethnic Mexicans, both cases demonstrated the maintained impunity

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[260] "Teller Gets Eighteen Month Sentence: All Convicted Men Are Given Terms in Jail," *The Brownsville Herald*, March 12, 1927, Container 179, Box 1, Folder 9, BCRC.

Anglos held regarding the legal justice system. Sheriff Raymond Teller and his cronies served minimal jail time for committing physical assault, lynching five men, and administering Willacy's elaborate racist labor schemes. Teller and his officers once again proved that not much had changed since the era of La Matanza and that racist violence was still present in the valley. This violence remained present in the form of nefarious and violent tactics employed by local law enforcement against ethnic Mexican violators of the moral code.

In the end, the scheme did not impact local county politics much, and Leavenworth Prison released Sheriff Raymond Teller on July 12, 1928. Local sympathizers and Willacy County farmers had a huge celebratory welcome for Teller. The populace disregarded his role in the peonage of Anglos and remained loyal to Teller even after the conviction.[261] They were eternally grateful for the benefits of the secured and endless amount of ethnic Mexican labor received during Teller's tenure.[262]

The significance of these trials was that they once again proved ethnic Mexicans and Mexican Nationals were still susceptible to violence by Anglos because they continued to employ racist ideology against what they perceived as innately inferior ethnic Mexicans and Mexican nationals. Anglos labeled ethnic Mexicans as inferiors or criminals, effectively validating the necessity to rid them of society to advance society's social and moral progression.

[261] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead*, 154.
[262] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* 154.

CHAPTER V

THE CHAPTER THAT NEVER CLOSES

One thing was clear to ethnic Mexicans who had experienced violence in Texas and the Southwest, the law was not working, and it remained that way through the late 1920s. Reforms during La Matanza and the subsequent period of the 1920s provided a false sense of security that allowed outlying agencies such as local county police and citizen mobs to prolong racist violence and lynching in the Valley.

When outlining the criteria of this case study, it had two main objectives in mind. The first objective was to prove that racist violence persisted and transformed into a more enigmatic form of violence chronologically between the period from 1904-1915 to the main focus period of 1921-1927. The second objective was to showcase how, chronologically, the primary role of the perpetrators of racist violence had also transformed and how Texas Rangers, who were the primary initiators of racist violence and lynching, could no longer fill that role due to state reform. As a result, local law enforcement agencies adopted this primary role with the full support of the Anglo populace, who also often partook in the violence against ethnic Mexicans.

Beginning with examining the period from 1904-1915, we set the stage for demonstrating the economic, political, and social atmosphere that ethnic Mexicans had to contend with during the emergence of the two most impactful Anglo classes in the Valley, the Anglo rancher, and the

newcomer farmer. Both groups played a vital role in the disenfranchisement of the Mexican-American social class. These unfavorable conditions directly correlated with the outstanding disgruntlement of Mexican-Americans and led to the creation of a revolutionary group known as the Sediciosos, which intended to cause havoc within the new and discriminatory Anglo-dominated order. The attacks they managed to orchestrate led to reciprocation by Anglos to put an end once and for all to the anarchy they believed was transpiring. As a result, violence ensued, leading to the countless lynchings of hundreds, if not thousands, of ethnic Mexicans and the continued impunity and unaccountability that had preceded Texas Rangers divisions in previous years. The lynching and racist violence went unchecked until it peaked in 1915. Because of the chaos, it was causing on the border, state, federal, and international authorities felt obligated to increase measures to finally attempt to eradicate the wanton violence Texas Rangers were instituting. Because of their ideological philosophies, institutions at all levels tried to quell the threat of Sediciosos raids by placing blame on anyone but the Texas Rangers. This strategy worked until the Porvenir Massacre of 1918, where a posse of Texas Rangers, Anglos, and U.S. Army cavalrymen killed fifteen innocent ethnic Mexicans, which led to state reforms by politician and lawyer J.T. Canales. Partially successful in his endeavor, he managed to effectively reduce the force of the Texas Rangers, increase the prerequisites for becoming one, and increase the compensation of the Texas Rangers to acquire officers of a higher professional standard. Still, he did not manage to get anyone convicted. Although these reforms targeted the institution of the Texas Rangers, reformers did not undertake implementing a far more extensive campaign and investigation of racist violence and lynching. Reformers did not account for the high levels of embedded racism within Anglos and local law enforcement in the valley.

The unfinished reforms of racist violence and lynching lead us to our primary focus period between 1921-1927. Beginning with the mysterious murder of a fifteen-year-old school girl named Maria Schroeder, we quickly realize that the racial profiling and targeting of ethnic Mexicans is in full effect within this decade. Although officers briefly suspected an Anglo suspect, they quickly lynched one Mexican national named Salvador Saucedo, harassed and tortured two ethnic Mexicans named Lupe Rinconnes and Federico Ortego, and killed another named Alfredo Luna. During this investigation period, officers implemented *La ley De Fuga* better known as the "escape law," collective guilt by rounding up mass suspects, violated constitutional rights by implementing unreasonable searches and seizures, and orchestrated third-degree torture methods. With Anglo's support, these tactics showcased that local police were almost unlimited in their brutal tactics against ethnic Mexicans, including assembling quasi-legal posses to enact lynchings against victims such as Salvador Saucedo, Virginia Becerra, and Manuel Duarte. While Cameron County officials demonstrated their utter lack of professionalism and inclinations toward racist violence and lynching, they were not the only county that had to contend with police forces of this nature.

Willacy County law enforcement was not immune to the racist ideology widely practiced and adhered to amongst Anglos of ethnic Mexicans. The mysterious killing of two Anglo local county police officers by an unknown party of individuals in 1926-27 and an extensive peonage that spanned eight months since its discovery led to the lynching, torture, and maltreatment of countless ethnic Mexicans. Willacy County police, in the investigation death of the two officers, also utilized collective guilt in rounding up twenty-five ethnic Mexican suspects. They also implemented third-degree measures against Tomás Núñez and used lynching by effectively marching five ethnic Mexican suspects into a field and executing them. These officers went

virtually unpunished, reiterating that a high level of impunity remained from the 1915s and extended well into the 1920s. Simultaneously while the trial was in process, some men responsible for the lynching had to contend with a federal indictment for orchestrating a peonage scheme in Raymondville. As previously noted, this peonage scheme subjugated, oppressed, extorted, verbally threatened, and confined many ethnic Mexicans within Raymondville. The most notable aspect of this peonage scheme trial was that its verdict proved the entrapment of four Anglos was far more vitally important to local and federal governments than the lives of five likely innocent men.

Using lynching criteria in this study, mobs in the 1920s lynched at least nine individuals, eight ethnic Mexicans and one Austrian. In addition, there were individuals who local county officers tortured into false confessions, one woman who was wrongfully detained, and a multitude of other ethnic Mexicans and other racial minorities subjected to routine violence.

This data is enough to conclude that lynching remained present and did not dissipate, as scholars have implied. Despite the state congressional investigation of the Texas Rangers, it was soon evident to the Valley populace that Texas Rangers' consequences after the hearings were merely a band-aid to a much deeper-rooted problem of longstanding racist violence towards ethnic Mexicans. Instead, the rise of an overwhelmingly anti-ethnic Mexican conditional environment in the 1920s promoted racist violence and lynching. The rise of Juan Crow, Prohibition, the Ku Klux Klan, prohibitions in voting, the dependence on wage labor, the adoption of racist police tactics, and continued Anglo domination all played a role.

I wrote this thesis to examine racist violence in the 1920s in its full scope and entirety. The purpose was to encourage the accuracy of local Valley History and to help advocate for social awareness of state and local racist violence against ethnic Mexicans. To support scholars

in their future search for evidence of continuing racist violence, I will conclude this thesis with a golden nugget of evidence indicating that violence persisted at least until 1927. On November 18, 1922, Consulate General Enrique D. Ruiz published a list in the Associated Press. *The Brownsville Herald* covered it locally, displaying a list of 5 ethnic Mexicans aside from the victims in my case study who Anglos killed in the Valley. They were the victims of anti-ethnic Mexican violence on the border within the previous seven months.[263] These ethnic Mexican deaths went unpunished as only two cases were brought to trial, and county justice systems dismissed both. In disappointment, Consulate General Ruiz stated, "No matter how convincing the evidence might be, and no matter how horrible the circumstances under which the crime was committed, the accused parties are invariably set free by the local juries."[264]

The names of the confirmed lynched were Tomás Núñez, Jose Nunez, Delancio Nunez, Cineo Gonzalez, Salvador Saucedo, Manuel Duarte, Virginia Becerra, and Elias Zarate. The names of the ethnic Mexican victims possibly subjected to anti-ethnic Mexican violence but have yet to be confirmed or investigated are Alego Quintanilla, Salome Lerma Del Galvan, Macario Martinez, Arevalo Manuel, and Cesario Garcia.[265] These may not be all the individuals who had anti-ethnic Mexican violence perpetrated against them during this period. Still, considering the low populations in these vicinities during this time, they were more than enough to declare that violence was still present. This thesis intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the violent events identified as lynchings by applying the thesis criteria and providing greater clarity on the events that transpired during these times.

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[263] "Mexican Consul General Gives List of Mexicans Whose Deaths Unpunished," *The Brownsville Herald,* November 18, 1922, Pg. 1.
[264] "Mexican Consul," November 18, 1922, pg. 1.
[265] "Mexican Consul," November 18, 1922, pg. 1.

My thesis argues that racist violence persisted but also reaffirms that the lethal violence orchestrated against the eight victims previously mentioned in my case studies were all lynchings by definition of my outlined criteria. All of these lynchings had the unwavering support of the Anglo community, as proven by the lack of protest and often direct participation by law enforcement officials. Anglos orchestrated appeals on what they believed were unjust verdicts, such as in the case of Ortego and Rinconnes' dismissal or the conviction of Sheriff Raymond Teller. They also promoted subordination of ethnic Mexican populations with expedient and non-sensational lynchings of ethnic Mexicans. And throughout the 1920s, they maintained the utmost impunity and were rarely, if ever, punished. Also, most of these lynchings examined maintain a vague and ambiguous nature and were all orchestrated by an unclear posse composition.

Although we cannot determine when violence ceased in the Valley due to a lack of historical data, it is evident that, to this day, racist violence has had a profound effect on several direct living descendants of victims. Many survivors, such as Kirby F. Warnock, have tried to raise social awareness, provide closure for victims, and promote long-awaited social justice and accountability for those state and local institutions that were never held liable.[266]

One of the most influential social justice groups is a grassroots organization known as Refusing to Forget. This group was an association of professional historians that have utilized state channels such as the Texas Historical Commission to apply for Texas Historical Markers in locations where documented atrocities against ethnic Mexicans have taken place.[267]

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[266] Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves you: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 295.
[267] Sonia Hernández and John Morán González, “Our Team,” Refusing to Forget, August 23, 2022. https://refusingtoforget.org/bios/.

Political Science Professor Katherine Hite believes the work of Refusing to Forget is essential in an era where society is contending with a revolution of historical condemnation towards historical figures that represent injustices.[268] As Historian Margaret Koch demonstrates, nothing inspires a historian more than attempting to fight the proliferation of historical inaccuracies, misinformation, and lack of context, which is widespread in the public domain.[269] Koch explained that the Bullock Museum, because of its extensive historical and monetary resources, is capable of the historical accuracy necessary to tell the story of racist violence in the Valley more than any other institution.[270] Koch achieved the museum's objective of promoting accuracy by interviewing victims' descendants and obtaining stories passed down by family members of the incidents that occurred. Museum staff compares these stories with primary source documents obtained through research or donations.[271] Primary sources include photographs, court documents, government documents, artworks, three-dimensional objects, and poems that cause the visitor to transport to a destination of painful violence.[272]

Therefore, Refusing to Forget's work, along with the Texas State Bullock Museum, is vital in deconstructing fallacious cultural narratives of Texas Ranger heroism that blanket the state in various ways, such as sports teams and museums, restaurants, novels, and Hollywood films.[273]

The historical markers and sites erected by the Texas Historical Commission at the request of Refusing to Forget's state historical markers of factual, unfiltered history have forced

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[268] Katherine Hite, "Reckoning with the Past," in The *Reverberations of Racial Violence: Critical Reflections on The History of The Border* ed. Sonia Hernández and John Morán González (Austin: Univeristy of Texas Press, 2021), 273.
[269] Margaret Koch, "Stewarding the Personal Narratives of Painful History," in *The Reverberations of Racial Violence: Critical Reflections on The History of The Border ed.* Sonia Hernández and John Morán González (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), 245.
[270] Koch, "Stewarding the Personal Narratives of Painful History," in *The Reverberations of Racial Violence*, 247.
[271] Koch, "Stewarding the Personal Narratives of Painful History," in *The Reverberations of Racial Violence*, 256.
[272] Koch, "Stewarding the Personal Narratives of Painful History," in *The Reverberations of Racial Violence*, 247.
[273] Martinez, The Injustice Never Leaves You, 242-243.

the state to contend with their long-tenured brutal history towards ethnic Mexicans.[274] Katherine Hite argues that historical sites and markers promote critical pedagogy and empathic unsettlement, which causes passionate dialogue and mobilization adherence. [275] Many of these historical markers and sites pay homage to the atrocities that transpired during La Matanza. More work is needed to preserve historical atrocities committed by local county police and citizen mobs against ethnic Mexican victims.

The State of Texas has made progress in accepting that these atrocities occurred and were indeed state-sanctioned. Still, the local counties must take ownership of the violence that transpired between 1904-1927. The violence that occurred after 1915 did not dissipate. As proven in my thesis, the state investigation of the Texas Rangers marked the official passing of the torch of racist violence from state to local institutions. It continued until at least 1927 in the Valley. As stated by Kirby F. Warnock, the importance of admission and acknowledgment for these institutions is that it goes a long way to making official amends for the atrocities committed and provides closure for those living descendants who law enforcement officials assassinated in cold blood.[276]

By no means was every law enforcement official a murderous maniac. However, at the highest level, they were enforcers of Anglo domination, and Juan Crow came to the complex lives of law enforcement personnel. They viewed themselves as the defenders of the frontier or the supervisors of the white moral code. As such, there is an often-grey area associated with their legacies. Some Texas Rangers justified their atrocities with the widespread culture of hate directed at ethnic Mexicans. Then you had the rare but highly impactful murderous maniacs such

[274] Martinez, The Injustice Never Leaves You, 273
[275] Hite, "Reckoning with the Past," in *The Reverberations of Racial Violence*, 274.
[276] Kirby F. Warnock, "Hidden History: A Journey Through the Past, With Hard Lessons for the Present," in in *The Reverberations of Racial Violence ed.* Sonia Hernández and John Morán González (Austin: Univeristy of Texas Press, 2021), 217.

as Henry Lee Ransom. Ransom held no remorse for the pain he inflicted on ethnic Mexicans. To clarify, this is not a defense of the Texas Rangers. None of them had the right to commit atrocities, but explaining the duality of the Texas Ranger's institution is imperative. They protected and served their community. Unfortunately, for the era in which they lived, it was often for the Anglo community, who therefore glorified them. However, as proven through the examination of the 1920s, local law enforcement also carried the same gray area regarding their legacies.

At the onset of this thesis, I stated we would embark on a comparative process to answer the questions regarding the transformations of violence between 1904-1915 to 1921-1927. Now that we have concluded our inquiry, we should consolidate the findings. To begin, we can conclude that posses seized the primary role as lynchers in the 1920s and paralleled the values of the Texas Rangers regarding racist violence and lynching. Posses were much more reserved in administrations of racist violence because they did not partake in overt displays of racist violence or lynching. Instead, they participated in it covertly. When they did so, as illustrated here, it was under a justified and calculated pre-text. While Texas Rangers lynched to "protect the frontier" against lawlessness, quell revolutions, and, most importantly, instill fear, local officers and mobs lynched to protect the Anglo moral code expeditiously. As for where lynchings took place in the 1920s, we can identify a trend or pattern that posses undertook most lynchings in the farm counties of Willacy, Cameron, and Hidalgo County.

When these lynchings occurred also differed in comparison to the racist violence that been implemented during La matanza. Texas Rangers essentially lynched whenever they felt obligated to stamp out what they perceived to be rising insurrections of ethnic Mexican revolutionaries. Local police and citizens lynched ethnic Mexicans after discovering a specific

crime when they had thought they had apprehended a suspect responsible since other types of lynchings that Texas Rangers used to partake in were no longer warranted or supported by the 1920s.

There were many reasons posses lynched ethnic Mexicans. The most important reason was a culture of racist violence. Essential to having a culture of racist violence is that the justifications for it chronologically manifested in different ways. In the 1830s, racist violence was as Anglos saw it necessary to protect the frontier. In the 1870s, defending against "cattle rustling" and smuggling was essential, whereas, in the 1920s, it was required to enforce ethnic Mexicans' cheap labor. The culture of racist violence was the common denominator that had been present since Anglos first encountered Mexican nationals during the early settlements of Texas. It continued through three surging periods of violence in the Southwest during 1850-1860, 1870-1890, and 1910-1920. However, it took the region of the Valley longer to come to terms with their racist hatred than compared to the rest of the Southwest because of delayed transformations in social, political, and economic spheres becoming anglicized.

Many scholars in my study stop short or only briefly touch on the period of violence in the 1920s. Instead, they focus on the periods of reform that began with the Texas Rangers investigation of 1919 and extended well into the 1920s. Hopefully, by providing two in-depth analytical case studies of racist violence in the 1920s, we may encourage future scholars to re-assess the knowledge gaps and create a much more streamlined historiography. The victims who experienced the brutal violence of La Matanza and the 1920s should be honored and paid remembrance through history's accuracy.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

DEFINITIONS OF ANGLO, MEXICAN NATIONAL, ETHNIC MEXICAN

Anglo: Any white English-speaking, non-Mexican-American[277]

Mexican National: A person who originated from Mexico and maintained Mexican citizenship. They may have ventured to the United States after the U.S.-Mexico War in search of work but did not permanently reside in the United States and therefore did not have the legal ability to vote or participate in any processes a Mexican-American would.

Ethnic Mexican: A person of Mexican descent whose citizenship cannot be confirmed by U.S. or Mexican Government agencies.

Mexican-American: A person of Mexican descent who chose to remain in the United States and become naturalized after the U.S.-Mexico War or the War for Texas Independence. [278]

[277] De Leon, *Greasers*, XIII.
[278] Carrigan and Webb, *Forgotten Dead,* xiii.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Vincent Alexander Larralde attended Johnny Economedes High School and graduated in 2009. Afterward, he attended the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley from 2009-2014 and graduated with a 3.34 GPA and a bachelor's degree in Social Studies Composite. Afterward, Vincent Larralde actively taught and coached basketball with the Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District for five years. While teaching, he decided to pursue his Master of Arts in History with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley History Graduate Program. Vincent Larralde graduated with honors in December 2022. He intends to utilize his degree for dual enrollment and to be an adjunct professor. His permanent mailing address is 6814 Bandera Lane, Edinburg, Texas 78542, and his email is Vincentalarralde@gmail.com.