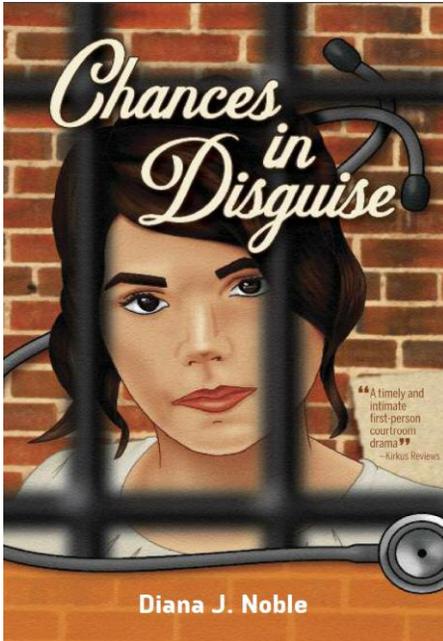


CHANCES IN DISGUISE

STUDENT LEARNING GUIDE



The *Chances in Disguise* Student Learning Guide was created to help you:

- learn about an often forgotten period in US history in which widespread, state sanctioned anti-Mexican violence took place on the Texas-Mexico border.
- think critically about the complex issues the story raises (see themes below).
- determine if and how the book's plot, characters and events apply to you.
- build life skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, curiosity, creativity and reflection.

Young Adult Historical Fiction, ISBN: 978-1-55885-930-2, Format: Trade Paperback, Pages: 192, Imprint: Piñata Books

SUMMARY

Seventeen-year-old Evangelina and her family left their ranch home in Northern Mexico during the revolution to start over in a small Texas border town. The local doctor there has mentored the young woman, giving her several years of medical training. But when a doctor from a neighboring community finds her helping an Anglo woman in labor, he calls her a dirty Mexican field rat and throws her out. The next day, Evangelina is arrested for murder. While waiting for her case to go to trial, Evangelina must deal with the unwanted attentions of the sheriff, patients who desperately need her help and her forbidden relationship with a young Lebanese man. Soon *La Liga Protectora Mexicana* assigns Joaquin Castañeda to represent her in court, but can he convince the jury that Evangelina is not a murderer?

THEMES

civil rights, overcoming adversity, gender disparity, justice system inequities, power of advocacy and protest, interracial relationships, emigration in times of war, violence at the Texas/Mexico border, empathy, hope, family, a sense of personal purpose, service to others, responsibility, racial tensions, stereotypes

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BEFORE READING – STORY CONTEXT, THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

Read pages 3-4.

The Mexican Revolution (1910–20), a long and bloody struggle, resulted in the end of the 30-year dictatorship of President Porfirio Díaz and the establishment of a constitutional republic. While historians have some dispute, most agree the civilian and military casualties numbered between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000.

The Revolution began with a call to arms on November 20, 1910, to overthrow President Díaz. Eager to develop Mexico into an industrial and modernized country, Díaz worked to implement capitalism. The government built factories, dams, railroads and roads. At the same time, the working class, particularly farmers, suffered greatly because of displacement and new aggressive and unjust land laws.

Until that time, Mexican peasants tended their own small plots of land or, more commonly, worked on village land they owned as a group. To feed themselves and their families, farmers grew crops and grazed their livestock. But under the new Diaz capitalist economy, large *hacienda* owners, called *hacendados*, wanted more land to increase profits from their cash crops and beef-cattle exports. Encouraged by Diaz, the *hacendados* used methods, including bribery, trickery and violence, to take land from peasants and villages.

The loss of their land forced many Mexicans to work as low-wage laborers (often referred to as peasants) for the *hacendados* or to migrate to cities in search of work and safety. Newly landless peasants increased the labor pool, which brought lower wages, higher unemployment and more poverty. Less land for growing crops like corn led to higher food prices. Starvation became the norm. Infant mortality, illness and early death rates increased dramatically.

“Debt peonage” trapped many landless peasants. They lived and worked on *haciendas* as laborers under brutal conditions for what amounted to pennies a week. The only place they were allowed to buy goods was the *hacendado*’s store which led to debt. Unable to pay off their debt with such low wages, they remained tied, nearly as slaves, to the *hacienda* for the rest of their lives.

Under the leadership of Francisco Madero, landless peasants, factory workers, miners, ranchers, business owners, teachers, scholars and even some outlaws formed two major groups as the Revolution unfolded in 1910. First was the primarily middle-class who were educated and interested in strengthening political liberties like free elections. The second was a much larger group of farmworkers. They sought essential social and economic changes: the return of stolen peasant land, worker rights, schools and an end to poverty and famine.



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BEFORE READING – STORY CONTEXT, THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

continued

Francisco “Pancho” Villa was 32 when he joined Madero’s revolutionary movement. Villa made his living rustling cattle from wealthy *hacendados* in Chihuahua and became the general of a powerful Revolutionary army in the north. Mexicans revered Villa as a sort of Robinhood, stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. However, his methods proved brutal to *hacendados* and their families. The “Villistas” murdered landowners, stole livestock, forced reluctant men to fight (or face execution), kidnapped women and burned property to finance their battles and achieve their goals.

Emiliano Zapata was a small landowner from Morelos, a village that lost its best farmland to the nearby *hacienda*. In 1909, Zapata was elected village chief and led a band of armed villagers to retake their stolen land from the local *hacendados*. Zapata became the Revolutionary leader of the Morelos peasants in the south, called “Zapatistas.” Zapata’s cry of “Land and Liberty!” became the motto of the Mexican Revolution.

In May 1911, with Villa, Zapata, and other revolutionaries hitting President Diaz from all sides, Diaz fled to France as a political exile.

After years of bloody conflict and leadership takeovers, the newly written Constitution of 1917 put controls on foreign investment, restored ownership of minerals to the nation, established worker rights, and outlawed debt peonage. It also required *hacendados* to give up land, with government compensation, to the peasants. Following the adoption of the new Constitution, Venustiano Carranza won the election as President but did little to carry out the reforms.

Not until the election of President Lazaro Cardenas in 1934 did the government distribute land to the peasants and fulfill the other revolutionary reforms of the Constitution of 1917. Cardenas distributed land to more peasants than all previous presidents before him. He also did away with capital punishment and nationalized the railways, electric utility companies and the oil industry. Most importantly, Cardenas began a tradition of transferring power by democratic election, which continues in Mexico today.

Sources: Constitutional Rights Foundation, Britannica



BEFORE READING – STORY CONTEXT, LA MATANZA, THE KILLING TIME

Go to www.refusingtoforget.org and read “THE HISTORY” page. Take notes; you’ll need them for an assignment later. Include what information you think is most important in telling this largely unknown part of American history.

CHANCES IN DISGUISE

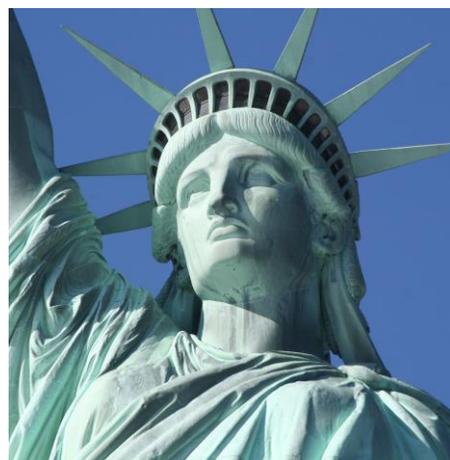
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BEFORE READING – STORY CONTEXT, DISCUSSION

Inscribed on a plaque and placed on the inner wall of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in New York reads, the *New Colossus*, a poem by Emma Lazarus, written in 1883.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”



 What does the poem mean to you? If you're not an American Indian (Indigenous American), your ancestors emigrated to the US. From where did they come?

BEFORE READING – STORY CONTEXT, DISCUSSION

 Refer to your notes about *La Matanza* or The Killing Time. What about *La Matanza* surprises you? What lessons can be learned from that period in US history?



CHANCES IN DISGUISE

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BEFORE READING – VOCABULARY LIST

Choose 10 words from the vocabulary list and write their definitions on page 7.

1. Rehabilitate
2. Reluctant
3. Agitate
4. Shrewd
5. Credibility
6. Vigilante
7. Vixen
8. Prevail
9. Protégé
10. Unfounded
11. Reprehensible
12. Strategy
13. Fate
14. Mobilize
15. Speculation
16. Perpetrator
17. Vulnerable
18. Penance
19. Deliberate
20. Bigotry
21. Corroborate
22. Pungent



CHANCES IN DISGUISE

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BEFORE READING – VOCABULARY continued

Choose 10 words from the vocabulary list on page 6 and write their definitions below.

WORD	DEFINITION
1	
2	
3	
4	
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9	
10	



CHANCES IN DISGUISE

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WHILE READING – CHAPTER BY CHAPTER DISCUSSION

CHAPTER #	QUESTION
1	What about this chapter intrigues you? What questions about the story come to mind as you're reading it?
2	Would-be journalist, Cora Cavanaugh tells Evangelina, "We've got to tell the truth, and everybody has to hear it. The right words put together in the right way can shift people's thinkin'." How can words shift people's thinking? Share an example.
3	What dangers would Evangelina's family have faced if they stayed in Mexico? If you and your family faced those same dangers during a time of war, would you stay or go? Why?
4	"Challenges are chances in disguise." What does this mean to you? How can you apply it in your life?
5	Why is Evangelina's father fired from his job? Do you agree or disagree with the brick factory owner's justification for firing him? Explain your rationale.
6	An allegory is a story, poem or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one. Evangelina remembers a bullfight in Mexico City. Why did the author choose this particular allegory?
7	Selim is a Lebanese Muslim and Evangelina a Mexican Catholic. Both sets of parents and society, in general, do not accept their relationship. How have things changed or not changed since then?
8	"Change what you can. Let go of the rest." What are the advantages of following this advice?
9	Sheriff Pearl lets guilty Anglos out of jail if they do him a favor or pay him. The term for this is, "reciprocity," as in, "I'll do <i>this</i> for you if you do <i>that</i> for me." When is reciprocity okay and when is it not?
10	"Many small steps become long distances with determination and hard work. You just have to know where you want to wind up." Why is it important to know where you want to wind up (the result you want) before setting out on a personal journey, such as choosing a career or repairing a troubled relationship?



CHANCES IN DISGUISE

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WHILE READING – CHAPTER BY CHAPTER DISCUSSION

CHAPTER #	QUESTION
11	Evangelina stops eating after the sheriff assaults her. Why does she respond in this way?
12	What are Cora Cavanaugh's personality traits? In what way is she a role model (or not) for Evangelina?
13	Evangelina is proud of her Mexican roots but too afraid to show it. Should someone's outward appearance affect whether they "fit in" or not? Why or why not?
14	Why does Evangelina risk her freedom to see patients in the middle of the night?
15	Cora's first article gets published in multiple newspapers. Newspaper readership today is declining, putting many newspapers out of business. Why is readership declining? Is there value in having <i>independent, objective journalism</i> , e.g. newspapers, magazine, online resources, in a democratic society? Why or why not?
16	"It's not what happens to you, <i>m'ija</i> ; it's what you choose to do with what happens to you that determines your fate." Summarize what this means in your own words. If a person lived by this mantra, how would it affect them?
17	In this chapter, Evangelina makes a promise to Doc Taylor that she knows she won't keep. When is it okay to do that? Or is it never okay?
18	" <i>La Liga Protectora Mexicana</i> estimates that for every murder they come to know about, there are four more unreported cases." In 1915, anyone could enter the US without documentation. People came and went as they pleased. Why would immigrants from Mexico at that time be afraid to report violent crimes against them committed in the US?
19	Teresita Olmos has made choices in her life that turned challenges into chances (turned negatives into positives). What's one example of this in her life story?
20	Doc Taylor wants Evangelina to take over his medical practice when he retires one day. In Seneca, Texas, could Evangelina successfully practice medicine in Doc Taylor's clinic without him there? Why or why not?
21	Sheriff Pearl uses his power for bad, but it can also be used for good. Give a current day example of each.



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WHILE READING – CHAPTER BY CHAPTER DISCUSSION

CHAPTER #	QUESTION
22	Can a peaceful protest, without meaningful follow-on action drive the change protesters want to see? Why or why not?
23	Evangelina's grandfather travels to Seneca to see her. How can a loving, trusting relationship with a family member or friend impact a person's life?
24	Evangelina chooses to wear traditional Mexican clothing for her first day in court. What does this choice represent?
25	Hamish Cavanaugh is a prominent businessman in Seneca, Texas, employing 100+ people. He's also wealthy. When the prosecution calls him as a witness, do you think the jury will find his testimony to be more credible than someone with little money or power? Explain.
26	People with hard to pronounce names (whether they're from the US or from a abroad), often shorten or change their names. Should they feel obligated to do so to make it easier for others? Why or why not?
27	What do you think of Judge O'Leary's treatment of Joaquín Castañeda and Joaquín's response to it?
28	It was uncommon in 1915 for women in small towns across the US to wear pantaloons. What does it tell you about Cora Cavanaugh that she chooses to wear them on her day of testimony?
29	What do you think of using a boycott as a means to pressure businesses into making a desired change?
30	Why does the prosecution want the jury to think that Evangelina killed Ramona Healy using Mexican witchcraft?
31	"You are up to the challenge." What happens when someone you respect and admire says they believe in your capabilities?
32	Why would a person who knows someone else did something seriously wrong—even unlawful, not report it? What would you have done if you were in Josiah's shoes?



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WHILE READING – CHAPTER BY CHAPTER DISCUSSION

CHAPTER #	QUESTION
33	Joaquín Castañeda is not a licensed attorney (there weren't any licensed Mexican-American attorneys in 1915). What do you think of his performance as Evangelina's legal counsel?
34	Throughout the trial, the prosecution and defense have offered evidence, testimony and theories that contradict each other. How would you handle this if you were one of the jurors deciding the verdict?
35	Joaquín Castañeda ties Evangelina's arrest to the murders of Tejanos and Mexicans happening across the Texas border (<i>La Matanza</i>). Do you believe he is right to do so? Explain.
36	In the final scene, Evangelina raises a clenched fist into the air. What does it mean? How does it symbolize a change in Evangelina's character from the beginning of the book to the end?

AFTER READING – INDIVIDUAL LEARNING, THEME APPLICATION A

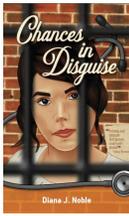
Go to page 1 and pick a topic from the list of themes. Write a 1-page, double-spaced paper on that topic. Include:

- topic name
- how and where that topic appears in the story and its impact on Evangelina. Give examples from the book.

AFTER READING – INDIVIDUAL LEARNING, THEME APPLICATION B

Go to page 1 and pick a topic from the list of themes. Write a 1-page, double-spaced paper on that topic. Include:

- topic name
- how that topic relates to society today. Give examples.



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AFTER READING – INDIVIDUAL LEARNING, ORIGINAL SHORT STORY

Write an original story using 5 of the vocabulary words on page 5. The story must include the following story elements:

- Setting: WHERE the story takes place
- Character/s: the WHO of your story—usually people or animals but you can get creative!
- Plot: the WHAT of your story—usually begins with a problem and ends in a resolution/conclusion
- Conflict: a challenge or problem that drives the action of the story
- Theme: the underlying insight, the moral or idea that you're expressing through the story—it's often thought of as the 'message' of the story



AFTER READING – INDIVIDUAL LEARNING, HISTORY

Jovita Idar was the inspiration for the character Teresita Olmos in *Chances in Disguise*.

Go to <https://unladylike2020.com/profile/jovita-idar/> and watch the 11-minute video produced by PBS. Using the video and other available resources:

- create a timeline of Jovita Idar's life.
- document her achievements.
- explain the impact she had on Mexicans and Tejanos in south Texas *then* and how her life can be a source of inspiration and action *today*.





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AFTER READING – INDIVIDUAL LEARNING, CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Create an art piece using a medium of your choosing to highlight and honor one of the powerful Latinas below. Display your masterpiece in class.

Sonia Sotomayor - First Latina U.S. Supreme Court Justice

Rita Moreno - First Latina recipient of the Peabody, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony awards.

Isabel Perón - First Latina female president (Argentina)

Ellen Ochoa - First Latina astronaut in space

Evangelina Rodriguez - First Dominican female doctor

Gabriela Mistral - First Latina to win the Nobel Prize in Literature

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen - First Latina & Cuban-American to serve in Congress

Frida Kahlo - Feminist icon and Mexican artist

Dolores Huerta - Labor leader, civil rights activist

Antonia Novello, MD - First US Surgeon General

María Jesús Alvarado Rivera - Peruvian women's rights champion

María Teresa Ferrari - First female university professor in Latin America

Argelia Laya - Afro-Venezuelan educator and women's rights activist

Rigoberta Menchú - Nobel Peace Prize recipient



Sonia Sotomayor



Ellen Ochoa



Dolores Huerta



Frida Kahlo



Rigoberta Manchú

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AFTER READING – INTERACTIVE LEARNING, CROSSWORD & PRESENTATION

- Work in pairs. Fill in the crossword on page 14. The answers will come from the vocabulary list on page 5.
- Create and deliver a 5-minute presentation about *racial justice. The presentation must include 5 of the 8 crossword puzzle words.
- Your presentation can be in the form of a speech, short play, video, display board, etc.

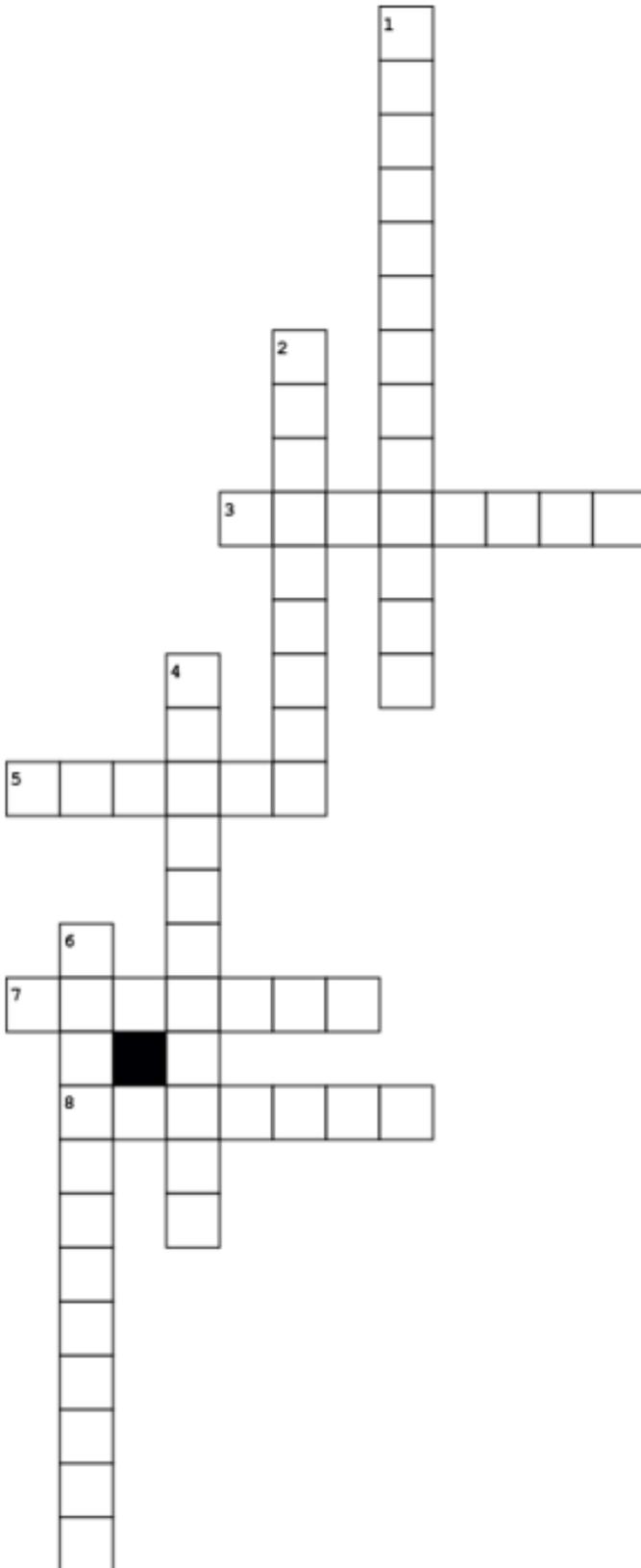


*Racial justice is the systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. It means that all people are able to achieve their full potential in life, regardless of race, ethnicity or the community in which they live.



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Down

1. Deserving of reproof, rebuke, or censure; blameworthy
2. Without foundation; not based on fact, realistic considerations, or the like
4. The contemplation or consideration of a subject; a conclusion or opinion reached by such contemplation
6. To restore to former capacity, character, standing, rank, rights or privileges

Across

3. To marshal, bring together, prepare (power, force, wealth, etc.) for action
5. Having or showing astute or sharp judgment in practical matters, sometimes at the cost of moral compromise
7. A punishment for wrongdoing
8. To disturb or excite emotionally; perturb



CHANCES IN DISGUISE

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AFTER READING – INTERACTIVE LEARNING, BOOK REVIEW

- Form small groups of 3-4 students.
- Individually, write a 100+ word book review of *Chances in Disguise*. What did you like? What didn't you like? What did you learn? Would you recommend it to others? How many stars would you give it out of a possible 5 stars? Book review examples can be found online.
- Share your book review with the group.
- Compare and contrast your reviews. Where are the reviews alike? Where do they differ? How can there be differences of opinion on the same subject?

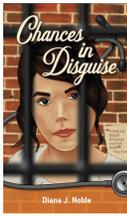


AFTER READING – INTERACTIVE LEARNING, SITUATION-ACTION-RESULT

- Work in groups of 3.
- Discuss a current societal challenge or problem and how it could be a chance, in disguise, to address the challenge and achieve a positive outcome. Choose something you think you can affect through your own actions and/or the actions of those around you.
- Write down your desired outcome (the result you want).
- Document what steps your group would take to make the result a reality.
- Present the group's plan to the class.



**The secret to success;
stop wishing, start doing.**
~Steve Jobs



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RESOURCES

Essential History of the 1910-20 Violence and Its Legacies

- [War Along the Border: The Mexican Revolution and Tejano Communities](#) – Texas A&M University Press (2011)
 - Edited by Arnolde De León
 - Contributions by Sonia Hernández, Thomas H. Kreneck, Gerald Horne, Margaret Stevens, George T. Díaz, Juanita Luna Lawhn, Trinidad Gonzales, Paul Hart, Roberto R. Treviño, Miguel Antonio Levario, Raúl Ramos, Tatcho Mindiola, Richard Ribb, and John Eusebio Klingemann
- [Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans](#) – Yale University Press (2003)
 - By Benjamin H. Johnson
- [The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas](#) – Harvard University Press (2018)
 - By Monica Muñoz Martinez

[Reverberations of Racial Violence](#) – University of Texas Press (2021)

Critical Reflections on the History of the Border

- Edited by Sonia Hernández and John Morán González
- A trenchant collection of essays that details systematic, extralegal killings of Mexicans along the US southern border in the 1910s and explores the role of officially sanctioned violence in the history of US nation-building.

Literary and Filmic Reckonings with the Violence

- [The Son](#) – Ecco (2014) *Pulitzer Prize Finalist*
 - By Philipp Meyer
- [George Washington Gomez: A Mexicotexan Novel](#) – Arte Publico Press (1990)
 - By Américo Paredes

Anti-Latino Violence

- [Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928](#) – Oxford University Press (2013)
 - By William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb

Mexican American Civil Rights and History

- [Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986](#) – University of Texas Press (1986)
 - By David Montejano
- [No Mexicans, Women, or Dogs Allowed: The Rise of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement](#) – University of Texas Press (2009)
 - By Cynthia E. Orozco

PBS Documentary

- [UNLADYLIKE2020](#)