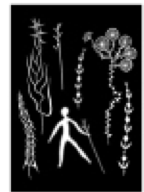
# Confronting the Whitewashing of (My) History: The Reparative Value of Latinx YA Historical Novels and Testimonio



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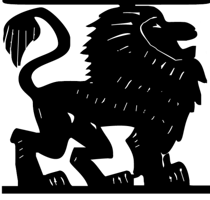

# Confronting the Whitewashing of (My) History: The Reparative Value of Latinx YA Historical Novels and Testimonio


## Jesus Montaño


In her essay, "The Historian as Curandera," Aurora Levins Morales urges that the role of the socially committed scholar is "to use history, not so much to document the past as to restore to the dehistoricized a sense of identity and possibility" (70). As she explains, "Such 'medicinal' histories seek to reestablish the connections between people and their histories, to reveal the mechanisms of power, the steps by which their current condition of oppression was achieved, through a series of decisions made by real people to dispossess them, but also to reveal the multiplicity, creativity, and persistence of their own resistance" (70–71). What I wish to trace in this article, following Levins Morales's directive, is the whitewashing of my history from our nation's past and my role as a scholar in resisting such oppression, thereby restoring a sense of identity and possibility. In this, I will share about my scholarly engagement with two Latinx YA historical novels *Shame the Stars* by Guadalupe García McCall (2016) and *El Rinche* by Christopher Carmona (2018), novels that creatively reillustrate the whitewashing of ethnic violence in Texas history. This is to say that my critical examination of these historical novels quickly became entwined with my personal history, leading me to think about my research as a kind of testimonio[1]—the Latin American and Latinx genre of bearing witness to injustice.

While my article does not directly treat House Bill 3979 in Texas and other such state-sponsored bills that limit how teachers discuss race and violence in the state's history, in other words the teaching of Critical Race Theory, my article casts light on the mechanisms of power that for a long time have erased and rewritten history, making it, in the words of Levins Morales, "an endless repetition of the perpetrator's story, in which crusad-


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ers are shining knights, not massacring mercenaries, wars are glorious and heroic, not massive assaults on human beings and the natural world for the sake of domination" (65).

As part of this perpetrator's story, we must consider the time when the Texas Rangers openly and with impunity killed and lynched Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Concerning this violence that took place in Texas during the Mexican Revolution (1910–20), Monica Muñoz Martinez explains that "the murder of ethnic Mexicans had become commonplace on the Texas-Mexico border, a violence systematically justified by vigilantes and state authorities alike" (6). In this, 1915 is described by William Carrigan and Clive Webb as "La Hora de Sangre" (The Hour of Blood), when, as they note, "from hundreds to thousands" were massacred by Anglos (86). This "race war" (the term used by Carrigan and Webb), in which the Texas Rangers played a prominent role, then, is the historical and cultural setting of my work and of the two Latinx young adult historical novels I examine in this study, *Shame the Stars* and *El Rinche*.

Yet, at play in my work is the belief that history, specifically history as told from the perspective of the oppressed, is reparative. My goals in this work, therefore, are first to bring awareness of this little-known or unknown chapter in American history. Partly a recovery project, or more precisely a form of cross-historical scholarly resistance, my work illuminates the ways in which these novels serve as counter-stories that "speak to the multiplicity, creativity, and persistence of our own resistance" (Levins Morales 71). Simply put, they tell a "story powerful enough to restore a sense of our full humanity to the abused" by bearing witness to the trauma, the grief and the rage, and then the defiance that follows (61–62).

Something happened in the course of my study of these novels, however. I encountered someone I was surprised to find: my grandfather. Much like the characters in *Shame the Stars* and *El Rinche*, my grandfather struggled against systemic violence and oppression at the hands of the Texas Rangers. Thus, in this way, my article concerns my search through historical documents and oral histories as I sought to find out more about his life and place in world events. In my search I began to experience how scholarship becomes testimonio, how the scholar's identity intertwines with diverse literary texts and, as such, how scholarship becomes another way of healing.

## *"Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear"*

At the beginning of each *Lone Ranger* television episode (1949–57), the announcer would ask the audience to "Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear."[2] For many, especially those who grew up watching the reruns

of this black-and-white television show, or who root for the Texas Rangers Major League Baseball team, or who simply have an irrational love of Johnny Depp, the role of the Texas Rangers in *Shame the Stars* and *El Rinche* may come as a surprise. The reason, of course, is that in popular lore, the Texas Rangers are mythic heroes.[3] No person is more responsible for their mythography than historian Walter Prescott Webb. As the Chicanx writer Rolando Hinojosa signals, Prescott Webb's *The Texas Rangers: A Century of Frontier Defense* (1935) is virtually "a life of saints."[4] The Rangers' "saintly" place in the collective memory of Texas and the United States is such that they have a Major League Baseball team named after them (The Texas Rangers) and numerous movies and books dedicated to them, specifically *The Lone Ranger* television series (1949–57), *Walker, Texas Ranger* television series (1993–2001, and 2021 reboot), and the film *The Lone Ranger* produced by Walt Disney Pictures in 2013. In many of these, the Ranger is celebrated as a (white, American) hero who fights against (often racialized) outlaws in the West, in the name of God and country. As Doug Swanson, in his recent book on the Rangers, notes, "with few other exceptions, [Webb's] Rangers were valorous, intelligent, skilled, and absolutely dedicated to duty. Webb's research was both wide and deep, but his depiction of the Rangers over the course of a century was broadly heroic. He sugarcoated the massacre at Porvenir, for instance, and papered over the atrocities of the Mexican War" (318). What the public relations firm of Prescott Webb began, Hollywood finished. Actors beloved by the American public such as John Wayne played a Ranger, as did Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and even Clint Eastwood (Swanson 2).

The thrilling days of yesteryear, in this regard, do not mean the historical past.[5] Instead, as the various television shows and movies make evident, the *return* entails moving farther away from factual events of the past and toward myths that wholeheartedly promote white supremacy. Put another way, the murder and lynching of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans is whitewashed to better align "history" with national myths in which white settlers are protected by the Texas Rangers. In this mythmaking the Texas Rangers go from violent to valiant, thereby enacting Levins Morales's observation that, for the dominant culture, the purpose of history is to recast massacring mercenaries as knights in shining armor (65).

Even as America veered toward the hagiographic vision of the Texas Rangers, Mexican American peoples refused to forget the truth of what happened. Nor could they forget, as Muñoz Martinez's evocative title of her monograph reminds us: *The Injustice Never Leaves You*. The aftershocks of trauma are indeed generational in reach. Even as we recognize gruesome acts and take account of the perpetrators and the victims (if known), what do we make, as Kidada Williams asks, of the uncounted women, men, and children who lived

through the violence?: "How did families and communities remember their lynching dead one, two, or three generations out? How were these deaths recorded in family Bibles and histories? Was a gruesome death by lynching illuminated or effaced in family omertà?" (858). In this recovery project, folklore, oral accounts, and storytelling, as well as art forms such corridos[6] (musical ballads popular in Mexican American culture), become significant, for "storytelling in this form acts as a source of knowledge exchange, as a process that refuses forgetting, and as a resource that allows residents to find some resolve by keeping these histories alive" (Muñoz Martinez 26–27).[7] In this vein, *Shame the Stars* and *El Rinche*, as well as my testimonio, offer a path forward by illuminating the ways that stories offer revised histories that center truth and justice. The dead have not been forgotten. Instead, counter-storytelling forges novel forms of resistance. Put another way, the thrilling days of yesteryear were not so much "thrilling" as they were painful cries for justice. This call for justice, I argue, has been heard and these stories are the response.

## *Our Heroes and Our Songs*

García McCall's *Shame the Stars* artfully paints a counter-story that musters Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into the textual justice project of bringing the Texas Rangers to accountability. In this *R&J* version, lovers Joaquín del Toro and Dulceña Villa find themselves divided over their allegiances as violence from the Mexican Revolution spills over the border.[8] Joaquín is initially guided by his father, who encourages him to see the Rangers positively. As multigenerational landowners in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the del Toro family's wealth and status, to his father's way of thinking, allows them to "work with" the Rangers.[9] Dulceña and her family, in contrast, own a newspaper press and remain steadfast in their resolve to publish articles critical of the Rangers. Thus, much like in *R&J*, the families in *Shame the Stars* are at loggerheads and Joaquín and Dulceña find themselves in the middle of this discord.

Violence against the families and other Mexicans and Mexican Americans quickly comes to the forefront as the local Ranger captain, Elliot Munro, recruits anyone with an "animosity for Mexican bandits and their willingness to do whatever Munro said without question" (28). The result is that, just as in the historical moment, young men are taken into custody for mere suspicions and then "legally" killed for resisting arrest or for trying to escape. For example, Gerardo, one of the del Toro ranch-hands, is taken by Munro and his men for supposedly burning down a mill. As Gerardo is led away, he mentions La Estrella, a semi-legendary soldadera, or woman soldier, whose

name has become synonymous with the rebellion against the Rangers. While some, including Joaquín, doubt her existence, Gerardo states that "someday, Joaquín, you will come to understand why everybody loves her. She's a hero. She would die for our gente" (33). Perhaps knowing that his fate is sealed, Gerardo invokes La Estrella as a final act of rebellion, that is, to declare that heroes who fight for "our gente" exist.

When history is whitewashed, as it has been in this case, painting over that whitewashing involves a process of remembering not only the "forgotten dead" but also recovering the "forgotten heroes" who fought for justice. As Aurora Levins Morales explains in *Medicine Stories*, "one of the first things a colonizing power, a new ruling class, or a repressive regime does is attack the sense of history of those they wish to dominate by attempting to take over and control their relationships to their own past" (69). Joaquín's mother, Jovita del Toro, helps us in this recovery project. As the novel unfolds, Joaquín learns that his mother secretly doubles as the resistance fighter, La Estrella. To this, Joaquín is greatly surprised, as "I'd never seen my mother in this light. She was like a soldadera, a true warrior woman, fighting in the Mexican Revolution. I had seen pictures of soldaderas in the paper the last few months, with their belts of ammunition hanging across their chests and rifles resting in their arms, solemn and grave and ready to go into battle to fight for justice" (132). Whether soldaderas trace their lineage from classical Amazons, according to María Herrera-Sobek, or to the Aztecs, as posited by Elizabeth Salas, the role of soldaderas in the Mexican Revolution is important for several reasons. Among these reasons is the idea that soldaderas provide contemporary activists with role models worthy of emulation.[10] As Salas points out, the legacy of soldaderas has had a profound effect on Chicanas, specifically in arenas undergoing a redefinition of social roles and gender (102–3). Salas's observations add to our purposes, as *Shame the Stars* positions soldaderas as instructive for modern readers. Chapter 10 in the novel, for example, shows a newspaper clipping from 1915 with the title, "Modern Amazons of Mexico Keep Armies Alive" (139). Such "forgotten heroes" are instructive, the novel underscores, for young readers wishing to build cross-historical bridges from their lives to past heroes, now "recovered" in the pages of a Latinx historical novel.

In a step further, not only does Jovita del Toro amplify the important role of women as resistance fighters in Mexican American history, her name, Jovita, directly alludes to historical figure Jovita Idár (1885–1946), a teacher and writer for her family's newspaper *La Crónica* and later *El Progreso* newspaper that frequently featured articles on the discrimination against Mexican Americans by white settlers and the Texas Rangers.[11] Dulceña likewise pays homage to Idár by writing opinion pieces under the pseudonym of A. V. Negrados. The pseudonym, Dulceña informs us, honors A. V. Negra,[12] the *nom de plume* that Idár used for when she wrote for *La Crónica*. At the core of

the Idár family newspaper project was stopping the overt extralegal lynching and murders that were taking place in Texas during the Mexican Revolution. Not only did they actively chronicle such injustices in their Spanish-language newspapers, but their opinion pages went to the heart of the problem: racism. As Gabriela González explains, the Idárs believed that reasons for the gruesome crimes could be found on "an intense hatred on the part of a sizable proportion of the Anglo-Texan population and in particular, members of the lower classes possessing far less education than more cultivated Anglos" (146). To combat the oppressions brought on by Juan Crow laws[13] instituted in Texas, Idár wrote about the value of literacy and the possibilities of education (González 148). Understanding that Texas schools would undermine the learning process of Mexican American children, Idár called for Spanish-language and bilingual instruction (González 150). Along with her anti-racist messages, Idár likewise wrote about the "ample horizon" offered to women ready to contribute to modern society (González 150). In these ways, Jovita Idár's notation in *Shame the Stars* helps establish "forgotten heroes" who used the pen to destabilize racial states. Resistance, the novel signals, can be found in the past. From a cross-historical understanding, the past can fund present-day activism, specifically via counter-storytelling for societal change.

Along with the soldaderas and Jovita Idár, *Shame the Stars* recovers one more hero: the corrido writer. When Joaquín's mother, Doña Jovita, upon being discovered as La Estrella by the Rangers, is shot by a sheriff's deputy, Tomás, Joaquín's brother and Catholic priest, strikes the deputy with the butt of a gun. For this, Tomás is jailed: "Whereas the deputy who shot my mother was not being brought up on charges, my brother, Tomás, was being charged with attempted capital murder for beating him up" (246). The novel thus winds toward the end with Tomás headed to the gallows for his attempted capital murder.

With little recourse to actual justice, Joaquín and Dulceña turn to a culturally important medium for resistance, the corrido, the popular narrative song or ballad in Mexican and Mexican American cultures.[14] As Dulceña tells Joaquín, "words are important, and passion lends them power. I truly believe that. If we do this right, if we get the public's attention, we could very well force the governor's hand" (264). In response to Dulceña's request, Joaquín writes the corrido, "The Martyr of Las Moras," He tells us,

> I scribbled furiously, passionately, I thought about what A. V. Negra and all those other fearless journalists would say at a time like this. How would they *address* the problem? What angle would they take? What angle would my own beautiful wife, the brilliant A. V. Negrados, take? Mimicking her style, I started by quoting the laws of man and the laws of God. I referenced history both recent and past, from both sides of the border. (267)

For some readers of *Shame of Stars*, this may be a surprising way to solve the dilemma. Some may even find this a bit incredible, that a song could commute

a death sentence. And yet, as a counter-hegemonic mode, corridos function as vehicles for communal solidarity. They are an integral component in the social imaginary of borderlands communities that allow peoples on both sides of the geo-political line to imagine the nature of their communal belonging.

In his move from "working with" the Rangers to writing a corrido that subverts them, Joaquín's growing understanding of the situation and corresponding shift in perspective model for modern readers the process of recognizing whitewashed history and how it benefits white supremacy. In *Child-Sized History* Sara Schwebel underscores the value of teaching historical literature, for it allows young students to wrestle with historical inquiry, to ponder that "while the past itself is static, history—the interpretation of that past—continually evolves" (5). Wrestling with the incongruities, juxtapositions, and varied perspectives from such historical reimaginings allows young readers to gain an understanding "about the constructed and contested nature of historical narrative" (33). At the heart of Schwebel's project, therefore, is a deliberate movement away from "heritage-based collective memory" that passes off itself as historical study and toward an understanding of the "ongoing and at times contentious debate about the American past and its meaning in the present" (131).

*Shame the Stars*, I argue, participates in this contentious debate by calling attention to the repression of the history of Latinx people in Texas during the Mexican Revolution and by offering a counter-story funded by resistance heroes such as Jovita Idár and by culturally relevant art forms such as the corrido. In this way, *Shame the Stars* offers a way forward for young readers by foregrounding the importance of these heroes and forms of resistance from the past for present day action.

### *"The truth will live on the lips that whisper the stories"*[15]

*El Rinche: The Ghost Ranger of the Rio Grande* by Christopher Carmona is the first of a three-part border trilogy that tells the story of a superhero "in the tradition of Joaquín Murieta, Zorro, and Batman" ("Christopher"). The superhero in this case, Ascensión Ruiz de Plata, or Chonnie as everyone knows him, has light skin and green eyes. His father, understanding that Chonnie is better suited for law because he loves reading more than ranching, sends him to study at the University of Texas at Austin. Chonnie initially resists, largely because he and his childhood friend and then girlfriend, Inez, had planned to elope. Unwilling to displease his father, however, Chonnie begrudgingly leaves for Austin. When he returns, several years later, the world he left has been turned upside down. Anglo prospectors, inspired by the arrival of the railroad into the Rio Grande Valley, push out Tejano ranchers with the help

of the Texas Rangers. While his father, Daniel, and Chonnie's older brother, Macario, have resisted threats from the Rangers to sell the Plata Rancho, land speculators and the Rangers devise a new plan to kill off the Platas and seize their lands. The result: Daniel and Macario are murdered by the Rangers and Chonnie is left for dead.

Though barely conscious, Chonnie gets picked up by Tal'dos Unahu, son of Mape'l Blue Flower of the Carrizo and Running Coyote of the Muskogee. Tal'dos is a sharpshooter who accompanies Bass Reeves, a Black federal marshal in search of the leader of the Mudd-Honey gang that terrorized people in the Texas-Oklahoma area. Given the dire situation, Tal'dos takes Chonnie to Hiro Akiyama, a down on his luck, former ninja who had trained under Fūma Kotarō, the legendary Shinobi ninja master. Hiro and his sister arrived in the South Texas area twelve years before, fleeing political persecution in Japan. Once recuperated, Chonnie begins his training with Hiro.

In much the same way that *Shame the Stars* utilizes the narrative architecture of *Romeo and Juliet*, *El Rinche* repurposes the narrative framework of comic book heroes to great advantage, beginning with the carefully engineered origin story of how Chonnie becomes El Rinche Fantasma, a kind of super-Ranger, ninja-fighter "ghost" who aids Tejanos. His training in high-skill martial arts evokes Batman while his "masked" persona places him within El Zorro stories. At the same time, *El Rinche* stands out for the ways it centers racism and race. As such, the novel puts forward the idea that the past was more multicultural and racially interconnected than dominant historical narratives of America promote. By bringing together a Black U.S. marshal, a sharp-shooting Native American, and a Japanese immigrant sensei, *El Rinche* reimagines a world in which the oppressed fight together against injustice. Moreover, the characters demonstrate an awareness of race and intersectional positionality. Reeves, for example, in his role as U.S. marshal, finds that law and justice do not work in concert: "Ever since Jim Crow started and he was forced to stand in the back of the room for meetings. Ever since he had to order from the back of restaurants and bring his own pail . . . Ever since black and brown folks were getting strung up for being on the wrong shade of white. He felt the law wasn't always right" (134). In this, *El Rinche*, complicates the usual "training" of the superhero, going beyond martial arts and ninja Shinobi training, to include, via his sensei and mentors, race consciousness.

Along with purposefully crafting a multicultural cast of characters, *El Rinche* actively engages with antiracism via protagonist El Rinche Fantasma (Chonnie) who takes advantage of his light skin and green eyes (and a uniform) to pass as a Texas Ranger. Thus, while Chonnie, early in the novel, believes that his newfound ninja skills will allow him to fight the Rangers by countering their violence with his, he quickly realizes the Rangers will

stop at nothing. Instead, El Rinche Fantasma goes "undercover." To Chonnie, the best plan is to be "like ghosts in the night . . . Create a monster for the rinches. Something they don't know is real or not" (137). To this, Reeves adds, "and those green eyes and white skin of yours can help" (137). Used to the inherent tropes of racism, specifically skin color and eye color, the Rangers do not know what to make of this "ghost Ranger" who looks like one of them. As Pablo Honey states, "that's the strange thing. As these boys tell it, he's a white man or the ghost of a white man. Something like that" (130). The Rangers, in this way, are defeated by their own racism, or, put simply, whiteness is weaponized to fight against whiteness.

Racial passing tests the boundaries of racial construction by highlighting the porous, unstable nature of this hierarchical system of identification and belonging. Passing challenges the visual protocols inherent in race construction, tricking the system into bequeathing privileges normally not granted the person passing. As Gayle Wald notes, racial passing reminds us "simultaneously of race's power and of the possibility that subjects may undermine, question, or threaten this power through practices that mobilize race for various self-authorized ends" (5). These "self-authorized ends" are at play in the way *El Rinche* deploys racial metamorphosis to challenge "the social boundary of race, to 'cross' or thwart the 'line' of racial distinction that has been a basis of racial oppression and exploitation" (6).

Superheroes, before they become superheroes, however, must understand that with great power comes great responsibility, if they are to use their powers for good. Even as *El Rinche* deploys whiteness to combat whiteness, early in the novel Chonnie's light skin and green eyes make him an outsider in his family and his community. Indeed, his brother, Macario, who is "tall, dark as coffee" (19), is seen as the favorite son and rightful heir of the Plata Rancho. In contrast, Tejanos and Mexicanos in the South Texas borderlands, see Chonnie's green eyes "as cancerous. The same way the Anglos viewed short thick curling jet black hair, thick lips, and wide nostrils" (24). Thus, while colorism in Latinx communities, historically and in the present, usually has entitled "whiter" members to vast privileges, in *El Rinche* Chonnie's first understanding of color paradigms is that he is disadvantaged because of his lighter features.[16] This becomes further exacerbated when Chonnie, as a child, learns the reason why he has lighter skin and green eyes: "He had heard the chisme. It was her abuela's affair with a local German boy back when Tejas was still Mexico" (23). Therefore, not only is Chonnie visually an outsider, his legitimacy, that is his sense of familial belonging, comes into question due to his grandmother's illicit affair. Chonnie is living proof of the transgression. As Chonnie comes to grips with the fact that the lighter features that made him an outsider in his youth are now part of the arsenal

for combating the Rangers, he also is better able to understand how to wield this awesome power.

*El Rinche* further highlights Chonnie's engagement with racial questions and his ability to strategically pass through the use of a super villain who, as in comic book narratives, plays a contrasting, doppelganger role in the storyline.[17] In the case of *El Rinche*, the role of super villain is ably played by Captain Pablo Honey, Texas Ranger. Captain Honey, as he tells it, was named Pablo by his grandmother because of her love of Mexicans. As terms of endearment, she would give his brothers and sisters "Mexican nicknames like Jose for Joe and Maria for Mary" (32). This supposedly innocent quirkiness, however, hid something else:

> All my grandma's kids, my aunts and uncles all have blond hair, blue eyes, the works. But my Daddy, he has black hair and black eyes because my Grandma loved a mongrel dog like you and now we all tainted. My Daddy always got teased on. Always called a greaser, a half-spic, the whole works. But he never believed he was one. My grandma always said, it was because we had Italian blood in us. But when I was born, my grandma finally told him the truth, and you know what my Daddy did? He hung himself in the barn with the chickens and horses. (33)

As a super villain Pablo Honey provides a mirror to El Rinche Fantasma by which to gauge the complexities and contradictions of whiteness, specifically in regards to multiethnic and multiracial identity. Honey's self-hatred stems largely from his grandmother's illicit affair, which gave him, like his father, darker skin and eyes, thus dovetailing, in contrast, Chonnie's grandmother and his light skin and green eyes. However, unable to embrace his liminality between cultures and races,[18] Pablo Honey channels his identity crisis into a life of crime as the leader of the Mudd-Honey gang and then as a Texas Ranger whose obligations are to grow the King Ranch empire with his extralegal killings. In this, Pablo Honey, as El Rinche Fantasma's "shadow," illustrates the corrupting effects of racism, especially when racism is turned inward.

*El Rinche* thus foregrounds the complexities and contradictions of whiteness. In passing as a Ranger, El Rinche Fantasma reveals fissures in the tenets of whiteness, exposing fraudulent claims of superiority by illustrating that a Tejano can confuse the system into bequeathing privileges reserved for whites. El Rinche Fantasma exposes the Texas Rangers for what they were, a policing force with the primary objective of white supremacy. As Reeves notes, "the law wasn't always right" (134).

*El Rinche* has much to teach us about the reciprocity between historical young adult literature and antiracism. Not only does *El Rinche* showcase a more complete multicultural history, the novel illustrates the ways in which racism can be destabilized via a Brown superhero who utilizes racial passing

in his arsenal and by a Latinx author who intentions are to "tell this story in my own voice, even if that story challenges what we think we know about history" (7).

### *Scholarship as Testimonio*

Along with righting our historical imagination, *Shame the Stars* and *El Rinche* open a space for readers to trace their historical identities. In her author's note, for example, García McCall explains that in the absence of Latinx history in schools and history books, readers should attempt to "discover their ancestral identity and presence in historical documents." To be honest, before my scholarly work on *Shame the Stars* and *El Rinche*, I had not looked for my presence in history. I took Guadalupe's instructions seriously. What I found is that my grandfather was born in Texas in 1894. He was in his teens when the Mexican Revolution began. Sometime soon thereafter he was "drafted" into Pancho Villa's army.

I also found that he was one of the "bandits" at the Brite Ranch raid in 1917.[19] Acting on orders from Villa, which locals believed to be the case, the raid most likely was a form of "payment" for the Brites and the Rangers (Means 15). In his memoir, Robert Keil, a U.S. soldier stationed in the Big Bend area during the time period, mentions that a wounded Brite Ranch raider "denied having any cause to harm Mr. Brite or anyone at the ranch" (19). The dying man goes on to add that the main reason one of the raid's orchestrators (Placido Villanueva) was involved is that a "cousin and two friends had been killed by ambush [by vigilantes] below Terlingua [Texas] two months earlier, and the raid on Brite's Ranch was planned in revenge" (19). As was the case in many of these instances, Keil notes, "whenever a Mexican retaliates, it was considered a terrible, cowardly crime. The newspapers responded to every killing of an American with loud, screaming publicity, but the killing of a Mexican was laughed off" (59).

A month after the Brite Ranch raid, the Texas Rangers, on the morning of January 26, 1918, murdered fifteen men at El Porvenir, Texas. According to eyewitnesses, the Texas Rangers took the men, all of Mexican descent and all unarmed, to a nearby hill outside the village and killed them. Of the fifteen murdered men, one was seventy-two-years-old and two were teenage boys, ages fifteen and sixteen. It is my argument, gathered from family oral histories, that the Porvenir Massacre should be understood as an act of terrorism. In other words, the Texas Rangers were less interested in justice and more interested in sending "messages," writ in blood, to foment terror. In all my grandfather lost an uncle, family friends, and the men of Porvenir to extralegal, though state-sanctioned, murder. These injustices, I have been

told, weighed heavily on him. My grandfather died when I was young. He has always existed in oral stories the adults in my family would tell. I never saw him, however, against the backdrop of war, one in Mexico and one waged against the Texas Rangers. By never thinking of looking for him in historical documents, I was not able to see how interconnected his life was with significant world events.

The research conducted for this article has given me a new perspective on being a scholar. I came to see that for Latinx scholars, we cannot forget that people like us suffer from state-sanctioned violence, in history and in the present. Therein is the rub, their pain is ours. As such, we must seek forms of research and academic writing that actively engage with the complex set of relationships, emotions, and hardships that arise in our scholarly work. For me, this means turning to LatCrit testimonio. By combining the basic elements of testimonio with Critical Race Theory, specifically Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) with its focus on the lived experiences of Latinx peoples and its intentional move toward social justice via counter-storytelling, LatCrit testimonios in the context of the academy

> function to (1) validate and honor the knowledge and lived experiences of oppressed groups by becoming a part of the research process; (2) challenge dominant ideologies that shape traditional forms of epistemology and methodology; (3) operate within a collective memory that transcends a single experience to that of multiple communities; and (4) move toward racial justice by offering a space within the academy for the stories of People of Color to be heard. (Pérez Huber, "Beautifully Powerful" 841)

From this lens, LatCrit testimonios reclaim forms of knowledge that otherwise would be dismissed by power structures in the academy. These testimonios open a space for scholars from which to disrupt silences, invite interconnections, and form collectivities in the service of social justice scholarship.

LatCrit testimonios, in these ways, holds promise for scholars of color, as reflecting on and sharing of the research journey allows us to "to demystify the research process and provide readers with an honest account of how the work we do as marginalized scholars in the academy can be uncertain, painful, messy, and at the same time, beautifully powerful" (Pérez Huber, "Beautifully Powerful" 840). What this means for me is that LatCrit testimonios become a critical tool whose utility resides in their curative properties, in other words, in their ability to heal the intergenerational trauma that has troubled my family for over a century. As Levins Morales observes, "I chose to make myself visible as a historian with an agenda, but also as a subject of this history and one of the traumatized seeking to recover herself. My work became less and less about creating a reconstructed historical record and more and more a use of my own relationship to history . . . my anger and sorrow and exhilaration, to testify, through my personal responses to them" (71–72).

The U.S. government and Texas Rangers marked my grandfather a bandit. The era, for example, is still called the "Bandit Wars" in some circles. As Nicholas Villanueva, Jr. notes, "allegations of theft played prominently on the minds of Anglo mobs when they organized to punish Mexicans . . . the lynchers often characterized their victims as 'bandits,' inferring that they were not only thieves but murderers and accomplices to murder as well" (65). My grandfather's struggles against systemic violence, against oppression, and against racism find echoes in my life: I have been followed in stores, I have been targeted by police officers, I have been given warnings for driving too slowly, as well as for driving two miles over the speed limit, I have been called an illegal as well as a w**back, I have even been called the n-word. All this because I likewise was stamped a bandit at birth.[20]

For this study, I easily could have hidden behind the cloak of objective scholarship, and in fact, it would have been much easier to do so. As Levins Morales explains: "Certainly to talk and write openly about our personal, emotional, as well as intellectual stakes in our work is frowned on and lets us in for ridicule and disrespect" (87). In reflecting on my work, however, it became necessary to share my scholarly journey as a way to disrupt the cycle of injustice that is repeating itself in our current world; systemic violence and racism indeed find echoes in our lives. This is to say that a hundred years later and my people are still labeled as "bandits" who maraud across the border, even if they are children. As such, I offer this testimonio as an honest account. My hope in positioning my LatCrit testimonio alongside *Shame the Stars* and *El Rinche* is to open a space for dialogue on forms of scholarship that allow Latinx scholars to account for and bear witness to the work we do, how we do it, and most importantly why we give our lives to it. The work is messy and painful and uncomfortable as well as beautifully powerful. May it be likewise for you.

## *Conclusion, or A Call to Action*

My grandfather was not a bandit nor a criminal and yet like me, as well as other Latinx people, we have been criminalized in the service of state-crafting. We are the "savages" whom the heroes must vanquish in a convoluted national myth. And yet, as Levins Morales tells us, the past "is a powerful resource with which to explain and justify the present and create agendas for the future" (59). This article is a quest not only for the truth of what happened to Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Texas during the Mexican Revolution but also for counter-stories in our present moment that de-Rangerize educational, public, and reading spaces. Thus, while Texas Ranger mythology has celebrated them as "shining knights" that made Texas safe, *Shame the*

*Stars* and *El Rinche* return to the thrilling days of yesteryear to tell more accurately what happened, and to create for young readers a space where the experiences Mexicans and Mexican Americans are re-historized, where young Latinx readers in particular reestablish a connection to their history.

Our moment calls for an active engagement with deleterious initiatives, such as House Bill 3979 in Texas, that seek to keep white supremacy in place by legislating what can be read and what can be taught. As teachers and scholars of children's and young adult literature, we play a leading role in the fight against policies and practices that whitewash history. My call is therefore simple: we must create pedagogies and curricula that illuminate the truth by centering stories and histories from minoritized communities. In these teaching and scholarly platforms, I further hope that testimonio is positioned as an important facet of truth-telling, specifically as those stories speak to the impacts of state-sanctioned violence and police brutality. Injustices, as shown in my article, are not forgotten, in fact they continue to cause trauma generations later. Healing from trauma, as Levins Morales instructs us, "requires creating and telling another story about the experience of violence and the nature of the participants" (61). Testimonios, in this way, are reparative in nature. As I found out in my own re-historizing project, seeking the truth is beautifully powerful.

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## Notes

[1] John Beverly best describes testimonio as "the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense" (14). In the literary genre of testimonio it is "the intentionality of the narrator that is paramount. The situation of narration in testimonio has to involve an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on, implicated in the act of narration itself" (14). With histerimonia, Levins Morales revises this term to reflect anatomical differences and deploys the genre to bear witness to her sexual exploitation at the hands of child traffickers. Bearing witness allows Levins Morales to see herself

as "an artist of needle and thread, looking for ways to mend this battered fabric. I am a curandera opening paths to use our rage and rebuild our resilience" (201). The power of her histerimonia is found in its curative properties, for her and for others. For more, see Beverly and Levins Morales.

[2] For more information on the various versions of the Lone Ranger, see Andreychuk.

[3] John Dean points out that "Webb's *The Texas Rangers* establishes credible authority as an official account of Texas-Mexico border history by following the linear narrative structure of Anglo European and U.S. American progress . . . The dominant Anglo American ideology of conquest, the inevitable triumph of Anglo American civilization over its wild and savage frontier, had become U.S. American cultural memory" (22–23). For further details, see Dean.

[4] Quotation is found in Don Graham's article, "Fallen Heroes," for *Texas Monthly*. See Graham for more information.

[5] Indeed, as John Morán González notes, the role of myths as they concern the Texas Rangers has less to do with actual history and more to do with projecting into history the racial claims of white supremacy in which Texas history is depicted "as the tripartite racial struggle between Anglo-Texans, Indians, and Mexicans for control of the region's vast natural resources" (22). See González.

[6] Corridos are narrative folk ballads. From the middle of the nineteenth century onward in the U.S./Mexico borderlands, corridos have functioned as counter-hegemonic vehicles for challenging "official" histories. In the context of this article, corridos are integral components of the social imaginary of the borderland communities, allowing peoples on the border to represent historical events from their perspectives. For more information on the history of the corrido and its role in counter-storytelling, see Paredes.

[7] Along with *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, Muñoz Martínez has been instrumental in public scholarship projects that more accurately depict the past. Please see, for example, the *Refusing to Forget* project, refusingtoforget.org.

[8] Reasons for the Mexican Revolution are complex, though like many of the revolutions in the early part of the twentieth century it had a decidedly social revolutionary zeal to it. In many ways, the Mexican Revolution pitted the interests of organized labor and farm workers against the landed gentry, who ruled their fiefdoms in the mold of aristocrats of yore. For more information on the Mexican Revolution, see Knight. Recent work by Raúl Ramos has added an important transnational approach to understanding the Mexican Revolution and its impact on border states. See Ramos for further information.

[9] Further information on the long legacy (dating from the mid-eighteenth century) of Tejanos and Mexicanos in Texas, see Alonzo. As to the intra-Tejano problems that arose directly because of the Mexican Revolution spilling into Texas, see Johnson.

[10] For more information on soldaderas, see Herrera-Sobek and Salas.

[11] While also an advocate for women's rights and a radical promoter of worker autonomy, for the purpose of this article, Jovita Idár was an ardent crusader against state-sanctioned violence, writing and speaking out against the lynchings of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Her strident critique of the lynching of fourteen-year-old Antonio Goméz in 1911, for example, set her on a path that would culminate with the Texas Rangers trying to shut down her work in 1914. For more information, see Hernández.

[12] A. V. Negra is a playful take on ave negra, which in Spanish means black bird.

[13] Originally coined by the journalist Roberto Lovato in 2008 as a way of understanding the matrix of oppressions at play in anti-immigrant sentiment in Georgia, the term *Juan Crow* is useful as a method for comparing the oppressive laws and customs that Mexican Americans face with those faced by African Americans in the Jim Crow era. In this, the systemic forms of racism that underpinned segregation, both legal and de facto, and lynchings in Texas have much in common with Jim Crow statutes and practices.

[14] For an overview of corridos, see Gurza. For sustained study on corridos, see Paredes. A feminist account of corridos can be found in Herrera-Sobek.

[15] The line is from "El Corrido del Rinche fantasma" by Juan Ochoa and Oscar Garza III. The corrido can be found in *El Rinche* (207–12).

[16] See Quiros and Araujo Dawson for more information on colorism and Latinx communities.

[17] See Peaslee and Weiner.

[18] For more information on multiethnic and multiracial identity in Latinx young adult literature, see Rhodes.

[19] Seferina Calanche Molina's oral confirmation of the Brite's Ranch Raid is found in Means, 190–91. Seferina was my grandfather's sister. Means provides several oral accounts of Villa's role in the raid (13–18).

[20] In "Visualizing Everyday Racism" Pérez Huber and Solorzano argue that the historical image of the Mexican bandit continues to inform everyday and microaggression in contemporary American society. For more information, see Huber and Solorzano, "Visualizing Everyday Racism."

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