

The past is never dead. It's not even past

# NOT EVEN PAST



## Refusing to Forget



Last week, the Organization of American Historians awarded the prestigious **Friend of History Award** to **Refusing to Forget**. The award recognizes an institution or organization, or an individual working primarily outside college or university settings, for outstanding support of historical research, the public presentation of American history, or the work of the OAH. The citation reads as follows:

*Refusing to Forget, an award-winning educational nonprofit, works to increase public awareness of an often-forgotten period in the history of the United States, and to raise the profile of a struggle for justice and civil rights that continues to influence social relationships today.*

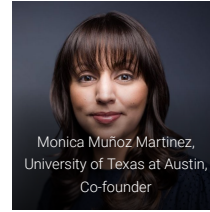
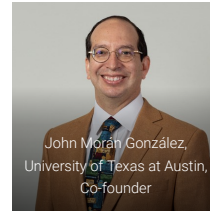
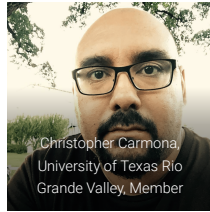
*Between 1910 and 1920, ethnic Mexicans living on the Texas-Mexico border were targets of state-sanctioned violence. The dead included women and men, the aged and the young, longtime residents and recent arrivals. They were killed by strangers, by neighbors, by vigilantes, and at the hands of local law enforcement officers and the Texas Rangers. Some were summarily executed after being taken captive, or shot under the flimsy pretext of trying to escape. Some were left in the open to rot, others desecrated by being burnt, decapitated, or tortured. Extralegal executions became so common that a San Antonio reporter observed that "finding of dead bodies of Mexicans, suspected for various reasons of being connected with the troubles, has reached a point where it creates little or no interest. It is only when a raid is reported or an American is killed that the ire of the people is aroused."*



*Far from being surreptitious, the violence was welcomed, celebrated, and even instigated at the highest levels of society and government. Although historians estimate that several thousand Mexican nationals and American citizens were killed, this period of violence has received little public attention.*

*The advocacy and awareness-raising work of Refusing to Forget has included the launching of a major museum exhibit at the Bullock Texas State History Museum and working to erect historical markers across seven Texas counties. It has meant convening conversations and creating lesson plans for K–12 educators. For all these efforts and in recognition of its continuing ambitions for the future, Refusing to Forget receives the 2021 OAH Friend of History Award.*

Refusing to Forget's members are:



The Refusing to Forget team dedicated the OAH award to Melba Coody, a collaborator and friend who recently passed away. Coody was a descendant of Jesus Bazán and Antonio Longoria who were murdered in 1915 in Hidalgo County. She helped preserve that history, she loaned photographs for the Bullock Museum exhibit, presented her family history at public history events and at conferences, and volunteered her time to speak with journalists like Rosa Flores at CNN. We are grateful that her [interview with Rosa Flores](#) is available for people to watch online:

Refusing to Forget has previously won the [American History Association's Herbert Feis Award](#) for distinguished contributions to public history and the [Autry Public History Prize](#).

The projects undertaken by Refusing to Forget are remarkable—both for their scholarship and their public reach. In this profile, we highlight just a few of their many efforts to bring awareness to a period of state-sanctioned violence.

## *Life and Death on the Border, 1910-1920: An exhibit at the Bullock Texas State History Museum*

[Life and Death on the Border](#) re-examines historic events in Texas during which some of the worst state-sanctioned racial violence in the U.S. occurred. On display from January – April 2016 at the Bullock Museum, Texas' flagship history museum in Austin, the exhibit examined the climate for ethnic Mexicans living on the Texas-Mexico border who were targets of state-sanctioned racial violence during the early 20th century.



This video is unavailable.



Complete with photographs, relics from family archives, Texas Ranger artifacts and more, the exhibition made connections between the past and the continuing struggle for justice today. The American Association for State and Local History (AALSH) awarded the exhibit the Leadership in History Award of Merit. The award acknowledges standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful to all Americans.



**In the Bullock exhibit, the truth is  
beginning to be told.**

-San Antonio Express-News

You can listen as well to a [15 Minute History episode](#) with John Morán González here.

## Historical Markers Project

Beginning in 2014, the Refusing to Forget team started supporting applications for [Undertold Historical Markers](#). The Texas State Historical Commission approved two historical markers in 2014, a third in 2015, and a fourth in 2016. In October 2017, the team unveiled the first historical marker in **Cameron County** to recognize the unknown victims of [La Matanza](#) (The Massacre) in 1915.

This project reflects wider efforts in Texas to recognize previously ignored or overlooked people, events, communities, and structures in Texas history. County historical commissions recently unveiled related state historical markers in **Anderson County** to memorialize the 1910 Slocum Massacre and in **Karnes County** to honor Gregorio Cortez. To date, the Undertold historical marker program has unveiled over 100 state historical markers.

### Markers:

[La Matanza, Cameron County](#)

[Jovita Idar, Webb County](#)

[Jesus Bazán & Antonio Longoria, Hidalgo County](#)

[Porvenir Massacre, Presidio County](#)

[Antonio Rodríguez, Edwards County](#)

## Lesson Plans

To meet the requests from Texas teachers, Refusing to Forget is developing curriculum specifically designed for K-12 classrooms. These forthcoming lesson plans will provide historical context and activities for educators interested in incorporating the historical markers, which were recently passed by the Texas Historical Commission, into their local history units.

*Jovita Idar,  
second  
from right,  
in El  
Progreso  
print shop.  
Source:  
University  
of Texas  
San  
Antonio  
Special  
Collections*



The first lesson plan available on Refusing to Forget's website explores the life of Jovita Idar, who was a prominent civil rights activist and journalist in South Texas. The team at Refusing to Forget secured a historical marker for Idar in Laredo, Texas, and the lesson plan is designed to help educators contextualize the Jovita Idar historical marker. Designed for seventh grade classrooms, the sample lesson plans include a teacher guide, handouts, primary sources, and suggested activities.

*Posted April 23, 2021*

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The Department of History

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

We are supported by the College of Liberal Arts  
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