

October 2017

Benjamin H. Johnson, author of *Revolution in Texas*

What do we accomplish by petitioning for this marker and coming here today to present it to the wider public?

We cannot loosen the rope that was placed around the neck of Rudolfo Muñiz not far from here, un-fire the bullets that riddled his body in July of 1915, convince his murderers that his life had value, or strip them of their badges for taking it from him. We cannot undo the orders and the fear mongering that that led to his murder, or those of Jesús Bazan, Antonio Longoria, and countless others. We cannot return the land stolen from their heirs. We cannot return husbands to their wives, or fathers to their orphaned children, like Juan Flores and nameless others.

We are here to tell the truth about the past: that people suffered and died, often at the hands of their own government, for no justifiable reason. That their land and independence were taken from them, that their families were denied the right to give them a dignified burial, that this was all sanctioned and encouraged at the highest levels of power. That many of the murderers are still celebrated – in our history books and classes, on historical markers and in museums lionizing the Texas Rangers.

But the past is unchangeable. It is the future that is ours to shape.

By telling the truth about the past – in this case, the hard truth – we work for a world where this kind of violence is not repeated. When we remember Rudolfo Muñiz, we insist that he was *somebody*, a child of God, like us, like our neighbors, like the people we encounter working in the fields, in offices, sitting in theatres, in school, going about their own lives. When we remember that he was killed by men authorized to use deadly force to uphold the law, we remind our fellow citizens that putting on a badge and uniform is no inoculation against venality and sadism, in 1915 or 2017. When we say that legislators and governors and reporters looked the other way and even endorsed these actions, we remind our fellow citizens of the dangers of demagogues in high places today. When we celebrate those who tried to stop the violence – Cameron County Sheriff W.T. Vann rescuing prisoners from execution, attorney Thomas Hook translating telegrams for help into English, journalist Jovita Idar and State Representative J.T. Canales risking their lives to expose the violence in public – we offer examples to be emulated today.

The demons of our past are still with us. The Ku Klux Klan parades in our streets, angry men arm themselves in fear and hate against their neighbors, our government again targets Mexicans as criminals and invaders. We need an honest history, for the living, now more than ever.

Today we take one step toward that history. We refuse to forget.