



October 20, 2020

Mr. Byron Johnson
Director, Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum
P.O. Box 2570
Waco, Texas 76702-2570

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Thank you for your separate invitations to the three of us to submit our comments about a “candid, thorough and equitable presentation of the history and evolution of the Texas Rangers.” Although you asked each of us for feedback as individual scholars, since we have since 2013 collaborated on the Refusing to Forget project in an effort to bring attention to the enduring consequences of the 1910s border violence – so much of it perpetrated by Texas Rangers – we are taking the liberty of writing with this joint response.

We welcome the decision of the Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum to revisit its presentation of the history of the Rangers. To be an accredited institution, a museum must embrace best practices for exhibitions. The Hall of Fame and Museum’s mission to disseminate knowledge of the Texas Rangers while also inspiring appreciation and “honoring the service of Texas Rangers past and present” has resulted in physical and online exhibitions that do not truthfully account for the past and erase histories of violence, racism, and discrimination that were in many ways central to Texas Ranger history.

Your institution’s continued celebration of individual Rangers who captured fugitive slaves, murdered innocent civilians, and used terror to keep ethnic Mexican communities disfranchised makes this museum out of step with professional

historical standards. Given that the citizens of Waco and the State of Texas currently support the operations of the Hall of Fame and Museum financially and through its designation as the “official historical center” of the Texas Ranger force, the current exhibits and museum bibliography with suggested readings for public audiences do not comply with standards endorsed by the American Historical Association (AHA). In particular, the museum does not meet the first recommended standard that exhibits should be “grounded in scholarship, marked by intellectual integrity, and subjected to rigorous peer review.” The third standard outlined by the AHA is that museums “funded with public monies should be keenly aware of the diversity within communities and constituencies that they serve.” These and other basic other standards are available on the AHA website in their written statement: [“Standards for Museum Exhibits Dealing with Historical Subjects.”](#)

Based on our own research expertise, we urge that future exhibits, website content, bibliographies, and programming address the following points:

- The Texas Rangers actively worked to maintain and support white supremacist institutions in Texas like slavery and Jim Crow. The museum must truthfully acknowledge this history and stop celebrating Rangers that enforced fugitive slave laws by hunting people seeking freedom. The museum should also stop celebrating Rangers that broke neutrality laws by crossing international boundaries to pursue enslaved people seeking freedom; one example is William A.A. Wallace’s raids to capture enslaved people who reached Mexico.
- Since the establishment of the Rangers, agents worked to secure Anglo colonization in Texas. In addition to armed conflict with Indigenous peoples, Rangers also participated in the massacre of unarmed Indigenous men, women, and children. The museum must accurately address atrocities by Texas Rangers rather than creating exhibitions that cast all Indigenous people as anonymous, monolithic, inherently violent enemies of Anglo settlers who deserved of brutal treatment.
- The current museum and its accompanying website include outdated and inaccurate histories of the Texas Rangers. Exhibit labels and website text present the tragic racial violence of the 1910s in highly skewed terms. In the early twentieth century, Texas Rangers blurred the lines between enforcing state laws, practicing

vigilantism, and inciting racial terror. As Martinez observes in her award-winning book, the language and tone of this museum labels and website narratives “leave the reader assuming that Americans in this period were exclusively Anglo and that Mexicans were exclusively foreign.”¹ While the museum’s narration correctly suggests that Rangers were involved in the extralegal killing of Mexican Americans, it erroneously states that these actions were “unacceptable to ‘regular’ Rangers,” ignoring the large body of primary sources that demonstrates that longtime commanders such as James Monroe Fox and Henry Ransom have blood on their hands.²

- The role of individual Rangers and the Ranger force in supporting the politics of white supremacy – including in early warfare against Indigenous people, protecting slavery, dispossessing Mexican Americans, and suppressing Mexican American and African American civil rights movements – should be honestly presented. For example, the entry for Francis “Frank” Augustus Hamer in the Hall of Fame neglects to mention his threat to kill State Representative José Tomás Canales for investigating murder and other crimes committed by the Rangers in the 1910s, despite extensive evidence on this point.³ Throughout the twentieth century, Texas Rangers actively enforced Jim Crow laws meant to maintain racial segregation in Texas and to disenfranchise African American voters. They also actively suppressed civil rights organizing to end lynching cultures in Texas and to end labor exploitation. There is no mention in the current exhibition of the use of Rangers to prevent the desegregation of Texas schools by Black citizens, such as in Mansfield in 1956, when Captain Jay Banks threatened to arrest Black students and refused to take down an effigy of a Black man hanging from the school entrance. The Rangers were also deployed to suppress predominantly Mexican-descent farmworkers from striking to protest labor exploitation in the 1960s.⁴ In 1968, the Texas Rangers also

¹ Monica Muñoz Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 253.

² Benjamin H. Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 115-117; Richard Ribb, “*La Rinchada*,” 84; Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 78

³ Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*, 174; Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*, 187.

⁴ (See [Allee Et Al. v. Medrano Et Al., 1973](#); Hearing Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, San Antonio, Texas, December 9-14, 1968; <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015002680141&view=1up&seq=9>)

came under investigation for continued civil rights violations and for failing to hire women and racial and ethnic minorities. These are just a few examples that the current museum exhibitions ignore.

- The “recommended reading” posted to the website neglects to include numerous prominent scholarly works critical of the Rangers, dating back to Américo Paredes’ 1958 classic, *“With His Pistol in His Hand,”* still in print and widely assigned in college courses.⁵ Indeed, this list is so skewed toward celebratory accounts of the Rangers that it puts your institution in violation of standards one and four of [Standards for Museum Exhibits Dealing with Historical Subjects](#), which hold that exhibits should be grounded in scholarship and that when exhibits address a controversial subject, the public should see “that history is a changing process of interpretation and reinterpretation formed through gathering and reviewing evidence, drawing conclusions, and presenting the conclusions in text or exhibit format.”
- Instead of including the most recent scholarly publications, the museum’s “recommended reading” includes works that have been widely criticized by contemporary scholars for their use of derogatory racist language, like Walter Prescott Webb’s *The Texas Rangers*. The list also includes books that have been criticized for treating racial violence and racist terrorism with a flippant tone, as when Charles H. Harris III and Louis R. Sadler joke about a human skull (they caption a photo of Ranger D.C. “Jack” Webb holding a skull of a man whom he may have executed while in custody with the observation that Webb “could have obviously used sensitivity training”).⁶ In another passage they mock State Representative José T. Canales’ masculinity for the support he received from his wife while his life was being threatened by rangers.⁷ The website also recommends

⁵ also see Samora et. Al, *Gunpowder Justice*; De León, *They Called Them Greasers*; Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands*; Johnson, *Revolution in Texas*; Graybill, *Policing the Great Plains*; Ribb, “*La Rinchada*,” T. Gonzales, “The Mexican Revolution, *Revolución de Texas*, and *Matanza de 1915*,” Martinez, *The Injustice Never Leaves You*; Swanson, *Cult of Glory*.

⁶ Charles H. Harris III and Louis R. Sadler, *The Texas Rangers and the Mexican Revolution* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 244; Ribb, “*La Rinchada*” provides accurate context for the photograph

⁷ Charles H. Harris III and Louis R. Sadler, *The Plan of San Diego* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 249.

books like Mike Cox's *The Texas Rangers*, which gives a skewed view of racial violence by Texas Rangers, celebrating agents that regularly denied ethnic Mexicans due process. Despite more than sixty years of publications by professional historians on the Rangers, including by Latinx scholars, the recommended reading list does not include these publications and fails to take into account their historical findings. For your convenience, we have provided a list of publications that we believe should be recommended for public audiences and utilized in the development of new exhibitions.

- While it is fitting that museums have a particular focus, in this case on Texas Rangers, many exhibits at the museum name specific Rangers while displaying photographs and images of Mexicans or Mexican Americans that are not dated and do not list their subjects by name. The result is a depiction in which Rangers have identities and personalities, but people of color, especially ethnic Mexicans, are dehumanized generic, stock figures. Moreover, the museum should stop using terms that criminalize racial and ethnic minorities. For example, the museum's current use of the terms "border bandit," "bandits," and "Mexican revolutionaries" mischaracterizes all ethnic Mexicans, Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals alike as inherently violent, dangerous, or criminal.

- The museum should stop celebrating Texas Rangers, in the Hall of Fame and in exhibitions, that built their reputations by abusing their authority, killing prisoners in custody, massacring Indigenous peoples, hunting enslaved peoples seeking freedom, intimidating residents, suppressing the vote, abusing prisoners, or who regularly denying Texans' rights to due process. The museum currently has displays honoring Rangers with bloody records. For example, the current biography of William A. A. "Bigfoot" Wallace describes Wallace as moving to Texas to "take pay out of the Mexicans" and later describes his duties "fighting border bandits as well as Indians." This biography cast Wallace as a hero while depicting Mexicans and Indigenous peoples as enemies and criminals. The biography goes on to celebrate Wallace for helping to maintain the institution of slavery by preventing enslaved people from seeking freedom: "Wallace's tracking skills were often put to use trailing runaway slaves trying to get to Mexico." Wallace's biography is just one

example. In another display honoring the history of Hispanic Texas Rangers, the display includes a photograph of Daniel Hinojosa and his enlistment record. Historians have noted that Hinojosa committed violent acts as a deputy sheriff in Cameron County and again as a Texas Ranger. His record was so egregious that witnesses testified to his abuses and civil rights violations in the 1919 Texas congressional investigation into Texas Ranger abuses. For Texans who know these histories of violence by particular Rangers, these public celebrations can be interpreted as endorsements of violent policing practices.

- The museum must reflect on the history of racial violence at the hands of state police. Currently, only one exhibit case accounts for the decade between 1910 and 1920, when Rangers performed countless acts of anti-Mexican violence. By presenting this period as an expansion of the force in response to turbulence stimulated by the Mexican Revolution, this display decontextualizes the violence from the racial politics of the time. Instead, it interprets the role of Texas Rangers in this turmoil as merely protecting the lives and property of Anglo settlements under threat. The display does not address the extent to which Texas Rangers in this period participated in extralegal violence. It only marginally presents the 1919 investigation of the Rangers led by State Representative José T. Canales. The investigation into the Texas Rangers provided evidence of abuse, torture, murders, and civil rights violations committed by Texas Rangers. Providing a vague and general account of the investigation, without acknowledging the injustices that were revealed is wholly inadequate for accurately displaying the history of the Rangers in the early twentieth century. The museum should also acknowledge the effort by Representative Canales, for attempting to end abuse and violence by Texas Rangers, despite intimidation by Rangers like Frank Hamer. The panel does not make note of the atrocities committed by key captains of the force, such as James Monroe Fox and Henry Ransom. Nor does it describe the role of investigating officer William Hanson in maintaining a culture of impunity for the police. To the contrary, Hanson's pearl-handled .45-caliber Colt revolver is prominently on display in the museum. Current exhibits suggest to visitors that, in the 1910s or elsewhere, the vigilante aspects of policing were peripheral, but dozens of published books have documented the

history of anti-Mexican violence and the role of Texas Rangers in the ethnic cleansing of Indigenous peoples.

- Consistent with standard four of [Standards for Museum Exhibits Dealing with Historical Subjects](#), we urge the museum to offer engaged, substantive profiles of some of the individuals and communities affected negatively by Ranger violence, including their struggles for recognition and justice. The long history of racial violence by the Rangers gives a public history institution devoted to their study the opportunity – and indeed, obligation – to contribute to this reckoning with careful, judicious, and human stories that do not seek exclusively to validate the Rangers, or even center on their experiences. We would respectfully draw attention to our own scholarship as examples of such accounts, as well as documentaries such as *Border Bandits* (2004) and *Porvenir, Texas* (2019) and the feature film *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, based on Américo Paredes’s work .
- Finally, before the museum spends funds redesigning exhibits and or improving the museum facilities, it should address reports that the museum failed to properly reinter remains that were exhumed from the First Street Cemetery during the construction of the museum and the education center. If these reports are true, the museum has a responsibility to consult with experts and local community members to ensure that any human remains are identified and reintered in an appropriate location and with due respect. The museum cannot act in good faith as an accredited historical institution if it is in fact desecrating human remains.

Thank you again for your request for feedback.

Sincerely,

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Benjamin H. Johnson
Professor, Loyola University Chicago

Monica Muñoz Martinez
Associate Professor, University of Texas at Austin

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