

OPINION

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EDITORIAL

120 years late,
anti-lynching
law still needed

It took more than 120 years of failed legislative attempts, and more than 4,700 murders, before anti-lynching legislation finally became law in the United States.

The entire 20th century and one-fifth of the 21st century passed before the United States Congress could pass a bill declaring it a federal hate crime for mobs of American citizens to take it upon themselves to apprehend other American citizens, torture them for hours, hang them from a tree, riddle their bodies with bullets or burn them alive before sending out postcards in celebration.

Generations of inaction ended on March 29 when President Joe Biden signed the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act, the first legislation making lynching a federal hate crime. It's named for the 14-year-old from Chicago who, in August 1955, was kidnapped, brutalized and murdered in Money, Miss., for whistling at a white woman.

The bill succeeded where more than 200 pieces of similar legislation, since 1900, had failed.

U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush, D-Ill., introduced the Till Act in the House, where it passed with a 422-3 vote.

U.S. Rep. Chip Roy, who represents parts of San Antonio, was one of the three no votes.

Sens. Cory Booker, D-N.J., and Tim Scott, R-S.C., introduced the legislation in the Senate, where it passed unanimously. Under this new law, a person found guilty of conspiracy to commit a hate crime that has led to death or serious bodily injury could be prosecuted for lynching. The perpetrator, if convicted, would face up to 30 years in prison.

If it hadn't taken more than 120 years to pass, the new law could have been applied to the 2020 murder of Ahmaud Arbery, a modern-day lynching. This law also recognizes an important distinction about lynchings, historic or modern day. They are not only murders, but also threatening messages to entire communities.

The Equal Justice Initiative has documented more than 4,400 lynchings of Black people in the United States between 1877 and 1950. The NAACP estimates that 4,700 lynchings happened between 1892 to 1968 with more than 70 percent of the victims Black.

Lynching was a post-Reconstruction weapon to terrorize Black people and enforce white supremacy.

Through the mid-20th century, the main obstacle to getting an anti-lynching bill to a president's desk was Southern Democrats, who opposed legislation that would benefit Black people.

Lynchings were a grotesque form of public theater for some white communities. Newspapers announced them in advance, special trains took spectators to the scene and parents sent notes to school excusing their chil-

dren from classes.

Many times — before or after the victim was killed — his fingers or other parts of his body would be cut off and spectators would keep them for souvenirs, even fighting over them. It didn't matter that the victims weren't tried or convicted, and that

many, if not most, were innocent of the crimes for which they were accused.

Look, if you dare, at the countless pictures of lynchings and see the smiling, joyful faces of men, women and children; of fathers proudly holding their children and pointing at a corpse as if it were the first deer shot by that child.

Lynching and its use to subjugate and terrorize Black people is an ugly part of American history some would prefer to minimize and ignore.

The historic crime of lynching must be remembered because it's part of our history and it reminds us how barbaric and unconscionably cruel human beings can be to other human beings, especially when carried away by the passions of mobs.

After 122 years, the negligence in not having a federal anti-lynching hate crimes law is in our past. But the passions and ignorance that fueled them still exist. May this new law be another step in our long march for progress.

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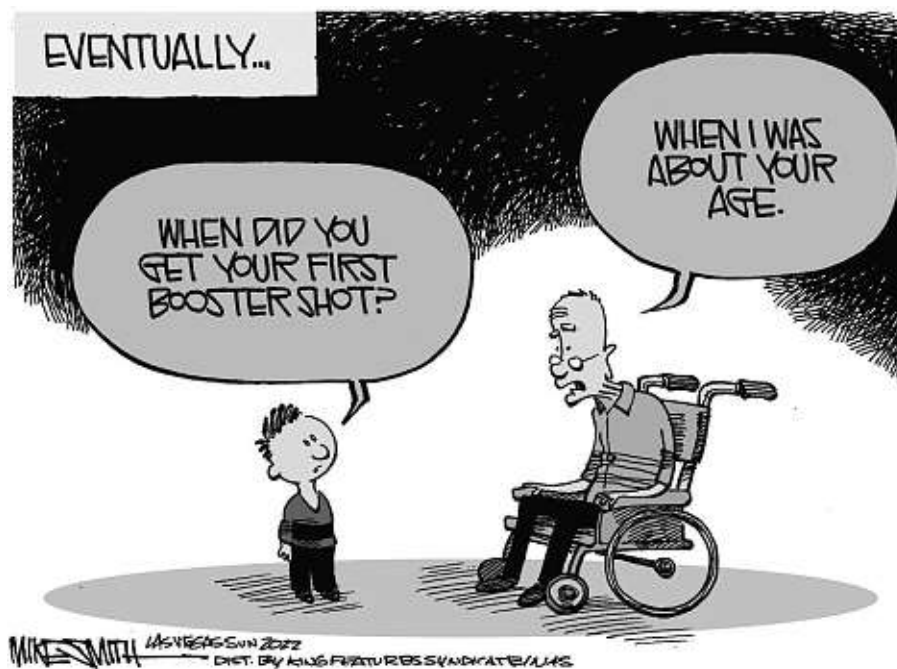


Susan Walsh / Associated Press
President Joe Biden signed the Emmett Till Anti-Lynching Act on March 29.



Associated Press file photo

Mamie Till Mobley and her son, Emmett Till, whose lynching in 1955 became a catalyst for the civil rights movement.



YOUR TURN

Grant clemency

Re: "As questions mount, stop execution of Latina mother," Editorial, Sunday:

I appreciated your editorial about Melissa Lucio.

I was especially struck by how the jury wasn't made aware of how Lucio suffered a lifetime of sexual abuse and domestic violence. When jurors are asked to make these life-and-death decisions, they must have as much information as possible to do so. That clearly did not happen in this case.

It's also upsetting that Lucio went through an interrogation that led to a possible false confession during her most vulnerable state.

Lucio's case is clearly tainted. If her execution goes forward, it would cause further suffering for her children, and her mother and sisters, who are also the victim's family. Gov. Greg Abbott should grant Lucio clemency.

Mary Jo Villalobos

Right actions

Re: "Biden right president for these times," Another View, Saturday:

Self-proclaimed deal makers who do not understand what is meant by the peaceful transition of power are simply ill-equipped for navigating the ongoing horror in Ukraine.

Two things seem clear: President Joe Biden's carefully considered "steady as she goes" strategy should not be confused with weakness; and Russian President Vladimir Putin's increasing sense of isolation, despair, and paranoia is weighing heavily on him and, consequently, he is becoming more dangerous, deadly and unpredictable.

Biden continues to synthesize the growing worldwide revulsion to Putin and has executed a set of coordinated responses — from sanctions to dramatic increases in humanitarian and military aid — designed to ensure the survival of Ukraine without drifting into World War III. Complementing Biden's strategy is the investigation underway in the International Criminal Court at The Hague into Putin's "crimes against humanity" and "war crimes."

Taken together, it would be quite reasonable to agree that Biden is, indeed, the right president for these times.

Lou Horwitz

Protect children

A Jan 12 Express-News article about Texas foster care said Department of Family and Protective Services Commissioner Jaime Masters claims to be "unsure whether the state has resources available" to make the required corrections.

Meanwhile, Republican leaders have plenty of resources to pursue issues supporting their re-election. They have millions to re-audit the 2020 election, sue the Biden administration, investigate rare voter fraud cases, deploy 10,000 guardsmen to the border, and appeal court orders to fix foster care.

They also have more than \$1 billion to build a wall (fence).

Now, instead of fixing foster care, Gov. Greg Abbott has conscripted the entire DFPS to attack transgender families, take transgender children away from families that love and support them, and put them into a foster care program where the chances of abuse, exploitation and suicide are

unacceptably high.

DFPS is supposed to protect children, not use a non-binding opinion from Attorney General Ken Paxton to put them in mortal danger.

Charles R. Allen

Remember Kavanaugh

Democrats are upset about how Ketanji Brown Jackson was treated in the congressional hearings. I say get over it — this is payback for how Brett Kavanaugh was treated during his hearings.

Enocencio Garcia

Ending my dream

Re: "Fiesta rooted in 'heroes,' elitism, segregation," Metro, Thursday:

Thank you, Elaine Ayala for your insightful, educational column. It brought back some childhood memories. When I started going to parades and seeing the beautiful gowns with ornately decorated trains, I was fascinated. I would look at the pictures in the newspaper and read about what the bejeweled trains depicted. One day I told my mother that when I grew up I wanted to be one of those queenies (my facetious word for this faux royalty.) With the wisdom of a mother, she said, "Mija (my daughter), that's for the rich folks." And thus ended my dream of some day being a queenie. Such is life.

Rachel V. Diaz-Kennon

True roots of Fiesta

Re: "Fiesta rooted in 'heroes,' elitism, segregation," Metro, Thursday:

Interesting commentary on the San Antonio Fiesta Queens and the Order of the Alamo and King Antonio. Columnist Elaine Ayala cites Michael Thurgood Haynes' book, "Dressing Up Debutantes: Pageantry and Glitz in Texas," published in 1998, as the basis of her column.

But another book, "Inherit the Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine," written three years earlier by Holly Beachley Brear (University of Texas Press 1995), blows cover on the behind-the-scenes activities and selection of King Antonio by the elitist Texas Cavaliers and the symbolism leading up to Easter.

Brear's book is a superb anthropological analysis of the historical connection of the Texas celebration with its Manifest Destiny bravado and the convoluted, artificially created symbolism (Battle of Flowers) of good versus evil leading up to Easter. One of the research questions that Brear attempts to answer is how to make an event palatable to Latinos and change an "entire mythology of the struggle between good Anglos and the evil Hispanics portrayed in most Alamo films?"

Even more troublesome: how do they counter the genealogical image of the current Alamo custodians, the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT) and other groups associated with the Alamo? Or, as Brear rhetorically asks: How can the Tejano be a Texan when the proclaimed importance of the annual Fiesta celebration in San Antonio involves the transformation of Tejas to Texas? A good start, perhaps, is fessing up to the truth: instead of calling it Fiesta San Antonio, return to its original title, "Fiesta San Jacinto," so folks know that the celebration is not about some springtime ritual.

Rafael Castillo

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