

1983

The KKK Marches in Austin

It Happened Then, It's Happening Now . . . **POLICE BRUTALIZE PROTESTORS**

by María Limón

EDITOR'S NOTE: *As this issue of La Voz goes to print, protests continue denouncing George Floyd's brutal killing by police in Minneapolis. Protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement continue despite state sanctioned violence...*

A body—as strong as it can be—is supremely delicate. The skin covering the skull splits easily; a police baton swung at the right angle, with the right force, parts the flesh precisely.

In February of 1983 the kkk decided to take back Texas. They held one event per month including a cross burning on land adjacent to a Black family. They rallied against Black History month at the state capitol; the historical society displays photos of its construction by Black “prisoners” that docents consider a must-see for thousands of children on field trips. The capitol crowns Congress avenue which also happened to be the gentry’s preferred location for holding a lynching back in the day.

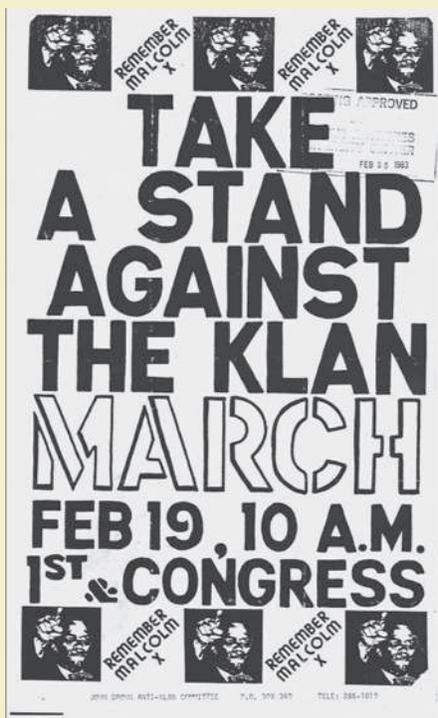
There was no way I could stay home as the k marched in my hometown. Texas’ long history of cloaking white supremacy under the banner of ‘law and order’ includes the Texas Rangers, or *pinches rinches*, who expanded the King family’s control of south Texas through extrajudicial murders and displacement of Mexican and First Nations landowners. The spirit of twelve-year-old Santos Rodríguez—murdered by Dallas police as they tried to scare him into confessing for a burglary he didn’t commit—would have haunted my friends and I had we not protested.

I met Jesse Johnson, Ramón Hernández, Mary Sue Galindo, and Julie Garza at UT where we plotted our revolution while smoking *mota* outside the Texas Union. The day of the rally we met at Julie’s place on the East Side for a smoke and breakfast tacos. Ramón, the RN, packed his medic bag, and I loaded the pockets of my khaki pants with 35 mm film.

I remember standing by Dorothy Turner

and Velma Roberts who were with the Black Citizens Task Force and feeling righteous in our cause. I remember the police pointing at those of us who’d protested against police brutality. I remember how a provocateur looking to pick a fight shoved me as Adela and I stood between them and Paul, the hot-headed leader of the Brown Berets. I remember panicking when I got separated from Jesse, Ramón, Mary Sue and Julie. I remember someone passing me a gun telling me to hold onto it. I remember the yelling. I remember the crush of bodies running to chase the klan out of town. I remember the hate. I remember the wave of protestors pushing me into the line of cops in riot gear. I remember their rage as they yelled at us to get back. I remember screaming at them we couldn’t because people behind us were running downhill. I remember Paul yelling that it was a free country and that we could cross the street if we wanted. I remember the shock. I remember throwing my arms up to protect my head. I remember the gray sweatshirt that had to get cut off of me because my arm swelled to the size of a football. I remember the terror seizing my diaphragm, squeezing the air out of my lungs.

I remember feeling like I couldn’t breathe. I remember a cop yelling at me to ‘just drop to the ground.’ I remember thinking he wanted the beating to stop. I remember the pavement. I remember the dizziness. I remember screaming for Adela who went down with one hit. I remember my indignation. I remember yelling “You’re going to kill him!” as 8 officers beat Paul who weighed 125 pounds. I remember an officer yanking me out of the way. I remember people helping me to the curb. I remember the blood pooling at my feet. I remember Ramón dropping to his knees beside me. I remember being grateful that we’d helped him graduate from nursing school by writing his papers for him. I remember wanting to laugh. I remember his tenderness as he wrapped my wound. I remember going limp with relief when Jesse, Mary Sue, and Julie found me. I remember screaming at the governor who’d come into the ER to check on wounded officers. I remember laughing when the x-ray technician asked if I had a gun in my pocket



Flyer against the 1983 Austin, TX KKK March... - Bazillion Points Books.

and was able to show him it was just film. I remember laying on Julie's waterbed that night as the fundraiser for the *Venceremos Brigade* went on as planned in the living room. I remember people coming into the dark room to check on me. I remember Yvonne had to leave because she was crying so hard. I remember the Berets giving me props. I remember being furious because it wasn't until I'd been bloodied in a beating that they recognized my work. I remember Ramón, Jesse, Mary Sue, and Julie running into the bedroom squealing because Ntozake Shange had arrived. I remember them making me get up to go see. I remember how everything hurt. I remember the fog. I remember Ntozake's beauty. I remember taking deep breaths as I lay back down in that little house on the East Side with Jesse, Ramón, Mary Sue, and Julie sitting on the bed.

I was safe.

I could breathe.

A news videographer captured the beatings. The footage was damning. The police panicked and launched an 'investigation' to craft a justification for their actions. I refused to speak to them. They staked out my apartment for several days. I parked my car a few blocks away and walked home the back way. They terrorized my mother who'd flown in from El Paso when she wouldn't tell them where I was. Amá and I had the worst fight.

"*Me estás matando!*" she hollered when I said I wouldn't go back to live in El Paso. "*Lleva años diciendo que la estoy matando y no se ha muerto!*" I yelled back. I'm not proud of the hell I put her through. She went to every protest and stood by me wanting to rip the throat out of the cops that had hurt her baby.

The mayor called us hoodlums so often that years later I met people who were surprised I wasn't the deranged, violent person the mayor and cops made me out to be. Adela, Paul, and I were charged and arrested three weeks later. The jail workers were sympathetic and didn't cage us. Tom Kolker and Malcolm Greenstein with the *National Lawyers Guild* stepped in to represent us. They were fired by the Beret's leadership in what I now know to be an act of bald-faced anti-semitism.

Mr. and Mrs. Aguallo insisted I stop by their flower shop once a week to give me a giant bunch of flowers; this went on for months. *Las Manitas* fed me for free for a long time. I wouldn't feel calm until I crossed the bridge into my East Side neighborhood—02 p/v. Jesse and I moved in with Ramón just down the street from Julie's



An archival photo from a 1983 anti-Ku Klux Klan march in Austin, Texas, taken from the ATX Barrio Archive Instagram account on March 13, 2017.

place. His apartment was tiny; the three of us slept on his king size waterbed together.

I could breathe.

The city hired an expensive legal team to prosecute the case against us. Adela and I were acquitted. We tried to sue, but the city had way more money than we did. The police who beat us got paid time off 'to deal with the trauma they'd experienced'. I grew quieter in spite of my efforts to be the revolutionary *hocicona*, *malhablada*, *lesbianota* I knew I was meant to be.

Ten years after that beating, I was preparing to address a group protesting yet another klan march at the capitol. Dottie Curry offered to help me think; I didn't know what to say. I tried to articulate the lesson I was supposed to take from that experience. Dottie told me to stop. "You didn't learn anything you didn't already know. You already knew police violence exists. You already knew it was wrong. Period."

As awful as that experience was, I know it would have been worse if I were Black. I only felt like I couldn't breathe. I wasn't in a chokehold.

A formerly incarcerated Chicano now working on prison abolition once said, "Chicanos are becoming the new white pipo; it's Chicano cops shooting at Blacks." I know he's right.

I trace the scar along my scalp absentmindedly a few times a day. I've turned it into a reminder of a few good things. If Dottie were still around, I'd argue that I had indeed learned something that day—about love, solidarity, and gratitude.

Ramón died of AIDS. Heart disease took Julie before her time. Cancer got Dottie. Racism cut Velma and Dorothy's lives short. My mom made my siblings promise to take care of me on her deathbed. They all come along with me to the vigils and protests. When I feel like I can't breathe, I remind myself that it's only a feeling, and I take a big ass deep breath.

I'll see you on the streets.

Ni Una/o Más

Mi Lucha es tu Lucha

Black Lives Matter

BIO: María Limón, a native of El Paso, has worked with the LGBTQ, Family Violence and Latinx communities in Austin, TX. She currently works at the University of Colorado in Denver for the Center on Domestic Violence.



The Women's March on Washington in January, 2017 prompted more than 300 sister marches across the country, including one in Austin, Tx attended by the author, María Limón.