



The Daughters of Juárez: A True Story of Serial Murder South of the Border

By Teresa Rodriguez, Diana Montané, Lisa Pulitzer

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For more than twelve years, the city of Juárez, Mexico -- just across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas -- has been the center of a horrific crime wave against women and girls. Consisting of kidnappings, rape, mutilation, and murder, most of the atrocities have involved young, slender, and poor victims -- fueling the premise that the murders are not random. As for who is behind the crimes themselves, the answer remains unknown -- though many have speculated that the killers are American citizens, and others have argued that the killings have become a sort of blood sport due to the lawlessness of the city itself. And despite numerous arrests over the last ten years, the murders continue to occur, with the killers growing bolder, dumping bodies in the city itself rather than on the outskirts of town, as was initially the case, indicating a possible growing and most alarming alliance of silence and cover-up by Mexican politicians.

Now, in *The Daughters of Juárez*, the authors provide the first eye-opening and authoritative nonfiction work of its kind, examining the brutal killings and drawing attention to these startling atrocities on the border. The end result will shock readers and become required reading on the subject for years to come.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*The Daughters of Juárez* not only investigates, with facts and information, but illuminates how innocence and purity are sacrificed almost daily on this desert altar. Teresa Rodriguez's book can make a difference only if you and I get involved to assure that this will never happen again to anyone."

-- Carlos Santana

"This story is more horrifying than a Stephen King novel, has more twists and turns than an Agatha Christie plot, and has a higher body count than any James Bond flick -- and it is all true. You will never forget *The Daughters of Juárez*, which is exactly what the authors intend and accomplish brilliantly. This book must be a beacon, a catalyst for justice, that rare commodity so nonexistent in Juárez. The authors bring to life the human faces, shattered families, and lost dreams of those who must not be forgotten."

-- Edna Buchanan, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of *Love Kills*

"*The Daughters of Juárez* is a book you cannot put down and will never forget -- it will shock you and it should. The authors have done a remarkable job piecing this horrific puzzle into one lucid account of the atrocities that have befallen Juárez, Mexico. This is truly an extraordinary book."

-- Isabel Allende

"Here's the deal: you are murdered and your death is not counted, you are murdered and your death is not investigated, you are murdered and someone is framed for your death. This is Juárez, the jewel of our free trade theories. This is a book everyone should read. And then wonder about the United States and Mexico and this hell of dead women they paper over with lies."

-- Charles Bowden, award-winning author of *Down by the River*

"*The Daughters of Juárez* is a crucial, chilling, and detailed account of the mutilations and murders of hundreds of women and girls in Juárez, Mexico. It is a cry for an end to these atrocities and it is a righteous call, after all these years of horror, for justice now."

-- Eve Ensler, Obie Award-winning playwright and founder of V-Day, a global movement to stop violence against women

About the Author

Teresa Rodríguez es una periodista ganadora de once premios Emmy que trabaja para *Univision*, donde es co-presentadora y corresponsal de la galardonada revista noticiosa *Aquí y Ahora*. Ha investigado los asesinatos de Juárez durante más de diez años.

Diana Montané es editora asociada de la revista *Nueva* así como escritora, periodista y dramaturga. Está radicada en Ormond Beach, Florida.

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Chapter One: A Corpse in the Sand

I don't feel safe because once I step out on the street, I don't know if the second step I take will be my last.

-- Guillermina González, victim's sister

Ramona Morales hurried from her small concrete house in Juárez, Mexico, just after 8:30 P.M. on July 11, 1995. She was determined to be at the bus stop when her daughter, Silvia, arrived after a long day of school and work.

In the last thirty-six months, there had been a series of brutal sexual attacks against young women in and around the Mexican border city, all of them fatal. Ramona wanted to make sure her teenage daughter didn't become the next victim.

She had noticed short stories about the killings in the newspaper. Many of the victims had disappeared on their way to or from work, often in broad daylight; their lifeless remains were found weeks, sometimes months later, in the vast scrublands that rim the industrialized border city. What the newspapers hadn't reported would have frightened her even more. The victims' bodies exhibited signs of rape, mutilation, and torture. Some had been bound with their own shoelaces. Others were savagely disfigured. One young girl endured such cruelty that an autopsy revealed she had suffered multiple strokes before her assailant finally choked the life from her.

The victims were young, pretty, and petite, with flowing dark hair and full lips. All had been snatched from the downtown area, while waiting for a bus or shopping in stores. An alarming number were abducted en route to their jobs at the assembly plants, known locally as *maquiladoras*, that made parts and appliances for export.

The once unremarkable border town was fast becoming the fourth-largest city in Mexico with the opening of hundreds of these export factories. Locked behind towering gates and manned security booths, these contemporary assembly plants, many with neatly tended greenery and lush lawns, seemed a stark contrast to the prickly cacti and blowing tumbleweed indigenous to the arid region. Eighty percent of the factories were American-owned and produced goods for major U.S. corporations including Lear, Amway, TDK, Honeywell, General Electric, 3M, DuPont, and Kenwood. They had been built in response to NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement, signed by the United States and Mexico in 1993.

The plants, which looked just like the ones constructed by those same companies north of the border, were drawing tens of thousands of laborers from across Mexico each year with the promise of work. The constant influx of people was rapidly creating a booming metropolis. Indeed, the city of Juárez was growing so fast that it was nearly impossible to map.

The city's roadways were a hodgepodge of paved and unpaved streets, some marked, others anonymous sandy paths that led to the shantytowns and squatters' villages continually springing up on the outskirts of town. When viewed from north of the border, Juárez appeared a vibrant and major metropolis, but on closer inspection the city seemed to be El Paso's poor, depressed relative, more reminiscent of a third world country.

The one- and two-story buildings crowding the narrow streets just off the Santa Fe Street Bridge from El Paso were dilapidated, their pastel colors dulled by a layer of brown dust from the sandstorms and car fumes. There were no emissions laws in Mexico, and pollution continued to be a problem.

In addition to car exhaust, road debris was a major concern in the city. Ramshackle tire shops -- little more than wooden huts -- dotted almost every corner, offering motorists a quick fix for the innumerable blowouts caused by such debris. American-built cars and trucks from the seventies and eighties dominated the landscape, many of them looking like they'd been resurrected from junkyards.

After dark, loud music blared from the nightclubs and cantinas that lined the streets of the red-light district, frequented by local street gangs, drug traffickers, and those who wanted to dance and party. Bars stayed open all night on Mariscal and Ugarte Streets, magnets for those eager to cross the border and indulge under the veil of anonymity.

Driven by a desire to maximize profits, the city's factories also operated on a twenty-four-hour schedule. Even some of the schools held two sessions each day to accommodate the ever-growing student population.

Getting a job on one of the hundreds of assembly lines meant a chance at a better life for the impoverished and often untrained laborers flooding into the Juárez area from throughout the region. Construction and forestry jobs had all but dried up in other parts of the country. Juárez was one of the few places in Mexico that was experiencing a growth in the job market.

The truth, in fact, was that there were plenty of employment opportunities in the factories of Juárez -- so many that entire families could expect to find work there in a fairly short period of time. Girls in their early to mid teens were especially sought after because they didn't expect much money for their labor and could rapidly perform detailed assembly work. Many were under the legal age of sixteen and had lied about their ages on their job applications to secure a paycheck, most with the dream of earning enough to buy a pretty dress or a fashionable pair of shoes.

Silvia Elena Rivera Morales was just seven years old when her family relocated to Juárez in the mid-1980s from La Laguna, a region in Coahuila, the third-largest state in Mexico. The construction industry was on the decline, and Silvia's father could no longer find steady work. The family's eldest son, Domingo, was employed as a teacher in one of the local elementary schools. But his salary was not enough to provide for the family of seven, so the Moraleses decided to try their luck in Juárez.

As in other Latin American cities, there are extremes of wealth and poverty in Ciudad Juárez. While the Mexican city is literally within walking distance of El Paso, Texas, the two cities couldn't be more different.

Ciudad Juárez is located in the northern state of Chihuahua, one of thirty-one states that make up Mexico. By 1990, its population of 1.5 million was nearly triple that of the state capital of Chihuahua City.

Crossing into Mexico costs little more than twenty-five cents for pedestrians. Vehicles pay a nominal fee in each direction, except at the Bridge of the Americas, which is free. U.S. and Canadian citizens need only show a valid identification, such as a driver's license, to enter

Juárez. In contrast, citizens of Mexico and other countries need a passport and a multiple entry visa to come to the United States.

Prior to the Mexican-American War of 1846, El Paso and Juárez constituted one large metropolis, its people divided only by the Rio Grande. But when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, the two nations agreed to split the city, with the area south of the river falling to Mexico. Four bridges with pedestrian and motor vehicle access connect the twin cities, as they are often called. The United States and Mexico now share the waters of the Rio Grande through a series of agreements overseen by the joint U.S.-Mexico Boundary and Water Commission.

But the river has all but dried up in many parts, due to drought and overuse. For much of the year, it is little more than a sandy ditch filled with household refuse and other trash. From its riverbanks, Mexican locals watch the steady stream of vehicular and pedestrian traffic crossing into their city. Many have set up camp in small cardboard boxes there. They use the area as a way station until they can execute their escape from the poverty of their native land for what they hope will be a better life in the United States of America.

Ironically, most of the job opportunities in the El Paso/Juárez area are on the southern side of the border, in Mexico. The U.S.-owned factories provide the majority of income for residents of El Paso, who cross daily to work as managers and other middle-level employees at the maquiladoras.

The lower-paying assembly-line jobs are what the young Mexican girls and their families travel hundreds of miles to fill. These jobs pay little more than three to five dollars a day, enough to put food on the table but not always enough to put a roof over the worker's head.

An increase in the number of factories in Juárez and along the northern border came in 1982 with the devaluation of the Mexican currency, the peso. By 1986, 94 percent of maquiladora employment was in the border states of northern Mexico. The shift in jobs to the industrial sector came after the cancellation of the Bracero Program, a U.S. government program started in the early 1940s to bring a few hundred experienced Mexican agricultural laborers to harvest sugar beets in the Stockton, California, area. The program soon expanded to cover most of the United States to provide much-needed farm workers for the booming U.S. agricultural sector. But the program was halted in 1964 in response to harsh criticisms of human rights abuses of the Mexican laborers. The following year, the Mexican government implemented the Border Industrialization Program (BIP), better known as the Maquiladora Program, to relieve the resulting high unemployment rates in northern Mexico. The new program used low-wage Mexican labor to entice U.S. manufacturing to the region, allowing companies to move production machinery and unassembled parts into Mexico without tariff consequences, as long as the assembled product was returned to the United States for final sale. In exchange, Mexican laborers would receive salaries that they wouldn't otherwise be able to obtain.

By 1991, there were almost seven hundred maquiladoras located in the Mexican border cities, with more than three hundred in Ciudad Juárez, as compared to ninety-four in Matamoros and eighty-two in Reynosa, just across the border from Brownsville and McAllen, Texas.

Juárez underwent a second transformation in the mid-1990s under the North American Free Trade Agreement (...)

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