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Black author riles some Texas historians with new book about Yellow Rose of Texas Legend

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Texas journalist and activist Denise McVea says her white male detractors are “why people do not read history anymore. The genre has been hijacked.”

SAN ANTONIO, TX—A book about the true identity of the woman who inspired the Yellow Rose of Texas legend is causing a cantankerous stir inside Texas history communities—even before the book has been released to the general public.

According to legend, a fair-skinned black woman, Emily West, helped Texas win its independence from Mexico when she distracted Mexican general Antonio Lopez Santa on the San Jacinto battlefield during the Texas Revolution in April of 1836.

For decades, history buffs have described Emily West as a servant or slave and her method of distraction as a seduction. In some cases, she has been described as a prostitute.

Making Myth of Emily: Emily West de Zavala and the Yellow Rose of Texas Legend, presents research that shows Emily West de Zavala, the biracial wife of the vice president of Texas in 1836, was the inspiration for the Yellow Rose of Texas legend, but refutes that the woman sexually distracted Santa Anna. The first such book of its kind regarding the legend, the book states that the legend arose because of efforts to hide Emily West de Zavala’s racial identity.

Many Texas historians and history buffs, once described by former Texas Historical Commission Executive Director as “snickering white men”, responded to McVea’s research with outrage. For several weeks some men have posted increasingly hysterical messages to a popular Alamo history site, trying to convince people not to read the book.

But, the strategy may be backfiring. According to McVea, sales of the book have exploded since the men began posting to the website.

McVea, who is the executive director of the Auris Project, Inc., which is publishing the book, says that even she was surprised at the hostile response to her research, which she conducted for more than 10 years.

“When I started this project several years ago,” she said, “I quickly learned that there were white male historians in Texas who simply were not open to hearing from a black woman about their precious legend. But I never expected them to expose their bias so publicly and with so much hatred. This is not everybody, mind you, but just a few people used to having their own way.”

She also speculated that many of the attacks against her on the forum probably have something to do with the fact that the book exposes some questionable behavior by a few prominent historians regarding the authenticity of documents presented to the public, and other potential scandals.

“Suffice it to say that there are a few history communities or institutions that might stand to be embarrassed by some of the research in the book,” McVea said. “I guess if I were them, I’d be hysterical, too.”

To visit the Yellow Rose of Texas thread at the Alamo Site forum, go to
<http://www.thealamofilm.com/forum/viewforum.php?f=2>

To learn more about Making Myth of Emily, go to:
<http://www.aurisproject.org/Books/Myth/makingmyth.htm>

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