

Resisting the Institutional Archive through Digital Humanities

“Traditional archival methods often nourish a “feedback loop” in which one’s access to power determines one’s presence in the archive, and one’s presence in the archive shapes historical knowledge, which, in turn, informs the system of values that shapes the collecting priorities of institutions. So those farther away from the mechanisms of power . . . are rarely represented in institutional archives. And when they are in the archive, their legacies are strictly controlled by the very institutional structures . . . that have tended to marginalize them. As an institutionally-recognized scholar I can access these legacies in the archive and write about them, but the communities that they really matter to can’t.” -María Cotera

Access to the legacy of Latina/os in the United States is ever present in my mind as a scholar of US Latino literature. How can one specialize in this field without a well-rounded, informed knowledge of the Latino community in the United States? And how can one accomplish this when many of their legacies are not present in archives, or are not prioritized when they are present? While it is true, as María Cotera states, that a lack of power contributes to a lack of presence, working on the Delis Negrón Digital Archive has given me hope that we can change this.

The digital approach given to this archive allows for open access to part of Negrón’s legacy as a journalist, editor, writer, activist, and while some of his work is lost or scattered across other archives, on this page he is not lost amongst the literal and figurative stacks of paper. For me, this project symbolizes a resistance to the archival power that “shapes historical knowledge,” a resistance of the marginalized control of “institutional structures” by making this archive available not only to scholars, but also to the community.

Through this digital archive we not only give access to his participation in the literary, political and historical aspects of life in the United States, but we also hope that it will encourage other Latinos and excluded communities to share their stories in ways that resist the power structures that invisibilize them from the archives.

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