

Culture, Art and History: Its Collection, Presentation, and Archiving

By Miguel Juárez, MLS, MA, Doctoral Candidate

Twenty-years ago I published the article [“The Invisible Careers for Latinos: Public History and Museum Studies,”](#) in *CultureWork*. Although some would argue that there has been some progress for Latinos and persons of color, I think very little has transpired. Given the 2016 election, it has become imperative for us to preserve and celebrate how culture, art, and history are collected and presented. Today, I would now add, how they are archived and digitized.

Since my essay was written, I finished my Masters in Library Science from the SUNY Buffalo and I worked for 12 years as an academic librarian and archivist. In 2008, I left libraries and enrolled in a doctoral program in [Borderlands History at the University of Texas at El Paso](#). The program, that recently received an Equity Award from the American Historical Association, addresses all borders, geographical, gendered, or constructed. Now, I possess a [whole new set of skills](#) to engage in the preservation and celebration of culture, art, and history.

In the original essay, I asked why aren't more Latinos involved in public history and museums studies? Since then, I have combined my interests in scholarly research, theoretical perspectives, and practical hands-on projects via curating, exhibits, teaching, and documentation. My conclusion is that there needs to be a sense of trust, respect, and accountability to communities that have been excluded, marginalized, and underrepresented.

As a librarian/archivist/historian, I have witnessed the importance of primary materials that future generations will produce knowledge based on tools they will use, but only if these diverse archives exist. Tools can be both digital and practical skills that include cultural competencies that recognize the values of historical and cultural production of communities of color. One great program that creates librarians with cultural heritage competencies is the [Knowledge River Program](#).

There may be programs trying remedy ethnic underrepresentation, but many of them are still falling short, as the [Mellon Study in 2015](#) has shown. **My essay** also called for the need to examine the role of independent scholars and curators in culture, art, and history. I believe this remains as important as ever: even though institutions have diverse collections, [they lack expertise to provide access](#).

Twenty years ago, the use of the Internet was not as portable as it is now. The use of social media has spurred the ownership and rethinking of how culture, art, and history can be shared. A superb example is the creation of [Museo Urbano](#) that grew out of the efforts of Dr. Yolanda Chavez-Leyva and Dr. David D. Romo, who created a living community museum in a tenement building in [Segundo Barrio in El Paso, Texas](#).

Digital technologies, the Internet and social media has the promise of leveling the playing field by providing exposure and access to collections, materials, **ideas and historical sites of and for Latinos**. Two examples include [Mujerestalk.org](#) and efforts like [Latinos in Heritage Conservation](#). As to where Latinos will go from here, the answer is anywhere they want.

[496 words with hyperlinks]

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