

Introduction for Students: The Personal Archive Assignment

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“What does it mean to be omitted from history textbooks?”

What are the implications of not being able to find any (or very few) traces of the past left by people who look like you, share your cultural background, or speak the same native tongue?

What impact do these archival absences have on how you might understand your place in society?”

(Caswell, “Seeing Yourself in History,” p. 26)

Personal Archive (PA) Assignment Description

This semester, you will create an archive. As we will explore in greater depth, an archive is a physical or digital collection of historical records that possess continuing value.

As a body and titled the “[Insert Your Name Here] Papers,” the items in your archive will communicate how you - an individual person occupying a complex matrix of identities - experience the world around you. This includes, and will highlight, how you experience major historical moments: life through the COVID-19 pandemic, observing or participating in the most recent iteration of Black Lives Matter uprisings and protests, voting in the 2020 election. The items in your archive will also help you to explore and record more mundane things: what you look like, where you live, what you eat.

Creating your archive will take place over the course of the semester. In total, you will receive 10 prompts and each prompt will direct you to choose an item (or set of items). Often, these prompts will ask you to choose an item that communicates a specific topic, idea, or event. Then, using a cataloging method, you will create metadata (simply: information about other data) to provide more information about your chosen item. You will find details about how to do this below.

The Midterm and Final for this course ask you to do further work on your archive. In the Midterm, you will begin work to explore your items and item descriptions through the lens of course readings, media, and associated student-generated key terms. For the Final, you will submit all items and item descriptions (your Papers) along with a brief narrative that contextualizes them. In addition, you will complete a peer review and explore a classmate’s Papers and they will explore yours. You will receive more information and specific prompts for the Midterm and Final later in the semester.


Along with helping you record and critically engage with your lived reality this assignment has several purposes:



- To help you explore what an archive is, understand how archives are political, and that archives are often the product of heteronormative, patriarchal, white supremacist institutions
- To introduce the concept of symbolic annihilation -- and then imagine how creating a personal archive can counter systemic forces that silence, erase, deny, and minimize
- To help you develop an understanding of intersectional analysis, utilizing it as a lens to interrogate mass movement, other, and self
- To build radical empathy - both in and out of the classroom

How to Complete Personal Archive Assignment Prompts


Each of the 10 PA prompts will instruct you to identify an item that communicates relevant information or insight about a particular event, idea, or topic. To describe and organize information that you provide about that item, we will use categories from the [Dublin Core Metadata Initiative](#) and create metadata. The Latino Activism Collection held in the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's digital collection uses the Dublin Core system to create and categorize item metadata. In short, metadata is information that describes or gives more information about other data. Here's an example:



UWM Latino Activism
UWM Libraries

Home > [UWM Student Activism](#) > Protesters occupy the Chancellor's office / Manifestantes ocupan la oficina del rector

Protesters occupy the Chancellor's office / Manifestantes ocupan la oficina del rector



Item Description

Title	Protesters occupy the Chancellor's office / Manifestantes ocupan la oficina del rector
Date	1970-08-27
Photographer	UW-Milwaukee Photographic Services
Description	Demonstrators of all ages occupy the Chancellor's office the August 1970 demonstrations leading to the establishment of the Spanish Speaking Outreach Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Gregorio Rivera (center, holding bottle), one of the five participants arrested during the demonstrations, talks with other participants.
Description in Spanish	Manifestantes de todas edades ocupan la oficina del rector durante las manifestaciones de 1970 que resultaron en el establecimiento del Instituto para la educación de hispanohablantes de la Universidad de Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Gregorio Riveras (centro, con la botella), uno de los cinco manifestantes que fueron arrestados durante las manifestaciones, habla con otros participantes.
Subject-LOC	University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee Hispanic Americans
Subject-TGM	Demonstrations Students Student movements Universities & colleges Children
People	Riverera, Gregorio J.
Building	Chapman Hall
Type (DCMI)	Still Image
Original Item Location	UWM Archives Collection 214 Box 76
Folder Title	12100-12155
Original Item Size	35 mm
Original Item Medium	Safety film negatives
Original Item Format	Safety film negatives
Sub-Collection	Latino Activism
Color/B&W	Grayscale
Finding Aid	http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/wiarchives.uw-mil-uwmac0214
Repository	Archives. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries
Rights	http://rightsstatements.org/vocab/InC/1.0/
Digital Publisher	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries
Digital Id	uwmac214_000353
Date Digitized	2013-01-15
Digital Collection	Student Activism

[If you'd like to navigate this more closely, find the item [here](#).]



Under the item (in this case, an image), there is a header titled [Item Description], under which you can see a list of categories. Each category (like “Title,” “Date,” “Photographer”) essentially serves as a prompt that directs you to create a particular piece of information. For example, after “Title,” you’ll find the title of the item. In this case, it is listed in both English and Spanish: “Protesters occupy the Chancellor's office / Manifestantes ocupan la oficina del rector.” In your own PA, you’re also welcome to provide translations.

In your PA, item descriptions will look much like the one above and you will generate metadata - information - for a series of categories.

Use this master list to create your item metadata:

Category/Metadata Prompt	Description of Prompt	Example
Title	A name given to the item	Protesters occupy the Chancellor's office / Manifestantes ocupan la oficina del rector
Date	The date the item was created (if you don't know the exact date, you can use the month and year or just the year)	August 27, 1970
Creator	An entity primary responsible for the creation of the item	UW-Milwaukee Photographic Services
Description	An account of the item (several sentences that address who, what, where, when, and why)	Demonstrators of all ages occupy the Chancellor's office [during] the August 1970 demonstrations leading to the establishment of the Spanish Speaking Outreach Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Gregorio Rivera (center, holding bottle), one of the five participants arrested during the demonstrations, talks with other participants. Manifestantes de todas edades ocupan la oficina del rector durante las manifestaciones de 1970 que resultaron en el establecimiento del Instituto para la educación de hispanohablantes de la Universidad de Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Gregorio Riveras (centro, con la botella), uno de los cinco manifestantes que fueron arrestados durante las manifestaciones, habla con otros participantes.



Subject	The topic of the item (essentially, create subjects like you would create and use hashtags)	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Hispanic Americans Demonstrations Students Student movements Universities & colleges Children
Type*	The original format of the item	Still image
Format*	The format of the surrogate item	N/A
Language	The language/s of the item	English, Spanish
Rights	Information about rights held of the item (in our case, unpublished archival material is under copyright by the creator)	
Create a Prompt	Any other relevant information you wish to share about this object: location, people included, etc. (be creative!)	TBD
Why Did You Include This Item?	Explain what significance this item holds for you; what motivated you to choose it?	N/A (not a Dublin Core prompt - just used for our purposes)

Suggested Readings for Students

Caswell, Michelle. "Seeing yourself in history: community archives and the fight against symbolic annihilation." *The Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (2014): 26-37.

