Introduction for Students: The Personal Archive Assignment

Assignment created by Dr. Krista Grensavitch, Ph.D. and Abbi Nye, MLIS.

“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:

[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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category/Metadata Prompt</th>
<th>Description of Prompt</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>A name given to the item</td>
<td>Protesters occupy the Chancellor's office / Manifestantes ocupan la oficina del rector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>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)</td>
<td>August 27, 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creator</td>
<td>An entity primary responsible for the creation of the item</td>
<td>UW-Milwaukee Photographic Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>An account of the item (several sentences that address who, what, where, when, and why)</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| Subject | University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Hispanic Americans  
Demonstrations  
Students  
Student movements  
Universities & colleges  
Children |
|---|---|
| Type* | The topic of the item  
(essentially, create subjects like you would create and use hashtags) |
| Format* | The original format of the item  
Still image |
| 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!) |
| Why Did You Include This Item? | Explain what significance this item holds for you; what motivated you to choose it?  
TBD |

**Suggested Readings for Students**