

In Search of the Delta Hot Tamales: Locating Latinx Collections in Mississippi Archival Repositories

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Abstract

This project summarizes the location of Latinx histories located at archival repositories across the Mississippi Delta by way of a regional archival collection analysis. The central goal of this project is not only to identify where these histories exist so that they are more discoverable, but also demonstrate how large-scale analyses may be conducted to uncover the histories of marginalized communities. The researchers hope other archivists learn from their methodology and apply it to their own collections.

Background

- The Latinx population has boomed in the Southeastern United States; it is estimated that more than 90,000 people identify as Hispanic or Latino in Mississippi (USCB, 2019).
- However, this is not a new phenomenon; the Latinx community has been a part of Mississippi society and culture since the early 1900s as evidenced in photographs taken by M. P. Wolcott in the 1930s and in the local cuisine.
- According to Martin (2016), this community may even be responsible for bringing the hot tamale to the Mississippi Delta.
- The Latinx community is and has been a part of Mississippi society and culture, but where are its histories?
- It is imperative to find these stories, such as the origins of the tamales, so they are preserved for the ages.

Figure 1.
Mexican Cotton Pickers Inside Plantation Store.



Note. These workers, employed at Knowlton Plantation, Perthshire, Mississippi Delta, were transient laborers who hailed from Texas each farming season. From Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection, by M. P. Wolcott, October 1939a.

Research Questions

- R1: What is the number of Latinx collections in the Delta region of Mississippi, and what are their locations?
- R2: What is the subject matter and medium of extant collections?
- R3: What terminology is used to describe the Latinx community?

Figure 2.

Two Mexican Children on Steps of Railway Station where They Live During the Cotton Picking Season on Knowlton Plantation, Perthshire.



Note. From Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection, by M. P. Wolcott, October 1939b.

Methodology

- Identified 43 repositories located in the Delta region of Mississippi.
- Assessed each repository's Web site to see if a list of archival or special collections holdings were listed.
- Performed keyword searches using a list of predefined terms: Agricultor (Farmer); Agricultura (Agriculture); Braceros; Central Americans; Chicano/Chicana; Cuban; Dominican; Gastronomía Latina (Latin Gastronomy); Hispanic; Latinx/Latino/Latina; Mexican; Mexican Americans; Mexicans-Southern States; Migrante/Imigrante (Migrant/Immigrant); Puerto Rican; Salvadorian; South American; Southern Migration; El Sur (The South); and Trabajadores (Workers).
- Collected data from the finding aid or collection description, if available. Specific data sets measured included: number of collections; subject coverage; types of materials; collection creators; language used to describe the community (archival description); language of the collection (e.g., Spanish, English, etc.); time period; and any notes that were deemed of relevance.
- Checked to see if the repositories had any digital Latinx materials.
- Contacted each repository directly for more information regarding their Latinx holdings if not available online.
- Tracked data using a Microsoft spreadsheet.

Limitations

- Study focus is limited to the Mississippi Delta since the Latinx influence in this area inspired the current project.
 - Results are not generalizable to all archival repositories.
- Data collection relied on manual keyword searching, the personal judgment of each researcher, and the assumption that all data obtained from Web sites and email communication were accurate and up-to-date.
 - It is possible that some relevant collections were overlooked or that some repositories' holdings were misrepresented due to the nature of human error.

Results

- Out of the 43 repositories identified, no repositories had evidence of Latinx collections listed on their Web sites.
- No repositories had evidence of Latinx collections in their digital holdings.
- Thirteen repositories were contacted directly for follow-up information. From this number, only 2 responded confirming they did not hold Latinx materials.
- Due to the lack of collected data, it was impossible for the researchers to answer R2 and R3.

Discussion & Conclusions

- Implications:
 - Number of identified collections may be low due to the nature of conducting research in a pandemic (i.e., understaffing leads to backlog of reference inquiries).
 - Data could be misrepresented due to insufficient or inaccurate collection description.
- The results of the current study raised further questions:
 - What efforts have been made to build a relationship between archival repositories and the Latinx community in Mississippi?
 - If Latinx collections are not at archival repositories, where are they (e.g., church and/or legal records)?
- Next steps for researchers of current study:
 - Expand the parameters of the current project to include other regions of Mississippi.
 - Eventually widen the scope to include data collected from repositories situated in the Southeastern United States.
- Hopefully, archivists and researchers will conduct similar analyses to:
 - Better understand collection deficiencies and collecting priorities in relation to marginalized communities.
 - Confront and correct systemic racism in collecting practices.
 - Contribute to the field's general knowledge of collecting practices regarding marginalized histories.

References

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