Community and Memory: Exploring the Cal State LA Department of Special Collections & Archives

The Cal State LA Department of Special Collections and Archives houses over 3,000 linear feet of materials, 1,500 of which capture the demographic transformation and diversity of twentieth century Los Angeles. These collections include the public records from prominent California public figures, memorabilia of the 1960s Chicano Movement, documents from an exhibition on mid-twentieth century Mexican American baseball, letters from high-profile Hollywood figures, and demographic records of one of Los Angeles' oldest neighborhoods, Boyle Heights. Located on the site of one of California's original 36 adobes, the Cal State LA archives department has attracted nearly two thousand visitors in the past year, including students, researchers, and community members.

Since archives speak to the relationships between identity, memory, and power, the department's strength lies in actively pursuing community-based collections that can inspire research and the development of alternative histories. Thus, the mission of the Cal State LA Archives is, above all, to promote access. This article highlights our most prominent Los Angeles centered collections and encourages student researchers to utilize this invaluable campus resource to expand their intellectual horizon and further their studies. Most importantly, it urges Cal State LA students to engage primary source materials, both through research and archival volunteering and internship opportunities.

Public Officials Papers

The collection of Public Official Papers was initiated by University Librarian, Morris Polan who established a repository for the records of distinguished California public officials. The collections include papers from statesmen Mervyn Dymally, John C. Holland, Julian C. Nixon and Julian Nava. The most recent addition to the archives is the Mervyn Dymally Collection, comprised of over one hundred boxes of materials that trace his decades-long involvement in public service and civil rights activism. Of mixed Indian-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian heritage, Mervyn Dymally (May 12, 1926 – October 7, 2012) was one of the first people of African and Indian heritage to serve in the U.S. Congress.

Figure 1. Senator Anthony C. Beilenson (left), Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mervyn M. Dymally (right). Dymally invited Dr. King to Anaheim during the CDC convention for a luncheon speech to delegates. Mervyn M. Dymally Collection, Special Collections and Archives, John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, California State University, Los Angeles.



The collection includes photographs, political posters, records of his tenure as a statesman, correspondence and ephemera, including clippings and images from the 1965 Watts Riots. Dymally, who represented the Watts area since 1962, was heavily involved in civil rights advocacy throughout his career.

John C. Holland was a Los Angeles City Councilman during the clearing of Chavez Ravine to make way for the construction of Dodger Stadium in the 1950s. Holland was one of the longest serving City Council members from 1943-1967. His collection contains one of the very few remaining original eviction notices mailed out by the City of Los Angeles Housing Authority to Chavez Ravine residents.

As of the 1940s, Chavez Ravine was made up primarily poor Mexican American residents. Originally, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, with federal funding from the Housing Act of 1949, was set to construct public housing in the Ravine. The project was abandoned in 1957 when the city decided to trade the land to Brooklyn Dodgers Owner Walter O'Malley to construct a new state-of-the-art baseball stadium.

The East LA Archives

In 2008, Cal State LA became home to The East LA Archives, a unique collection that traces the history of the eastside, from the Chicano/a Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s to the twenty-first century activism of community-based organizations.



Figure 3. Buttons from the Carlos Montes Collection. The East LA Archives, Special Collections and Archives, John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, California State University, Los Angeles. Photograph by Allina Nunley.

The most sought out collections to date are those of Carlos Montes and Gloria Arrellanes. Montes was a Chicano Civil Rights leader in Los Angeles and co-founder of the Brown Berets and Arrellanes was a Chicana activist and founder of "Las Adelitas," a Chicana feminist organization formed in response to sexism in male-centered organizations.The collections include copies of *La Raza* and *La Causa* bi-lingual publications, which highlighted racial issues such as the murder of Mexican American journalist Ruben Salazar. Others contain pro-Chicano political posters, flags, and buttons. Maria Flores, a Cal State LA graduate and a leader of the Chicano student movement, donated a series of political posters that were displayed on campus between 1968 and 1969.

Cal State LA Professor Emeritus Francisco Balderrama worked with the LA community and researchers on a local history project that concluded with the "Mexican American Baseball in Los Angeles-From the Barrios to the Big Leagues" exhibition and the publication of *Mexican- American Baseball in Los Angeles*. [1]





Figure 4. Signed Baseball and Chorizeros Baseball Cap. Mexican American Baseball Collection, The East LA Archives, Special Collections and Archives, John F. Kennedy Memorial Library, California State University, Los Angeles. Photograph by Allina Nunley.

The project highlighted the significance of baseball leagues in Mexican American neighborhoods during the mid-twentieth century. The collection consists of photographs, newspaper clippings, art, ephemera, administrative materials, audio and video recordings, flyers, and oral histories. It also includes programs from the opening of the exhibition that took place April 2006 at Cal State LA. The event brought together community members, scholars, and students and drew *LA Times* coverage. Clippings of the published article are included in the collection.

The most recent addition to the East LA archives is the Inner City Struggle (ICS) Collection. ICS works with youth and community residents to promote safe and non-violent communities in East LA, with a focus on alleviating high unemployment, poverty, and gang violence. ICS began as a part of Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission and became an independent community organization in 1994. It organizes youth and families in Boyle Heights and has a specific youth component at local high schools. The ICS collection, donated in 2015, is in many ways an extension of the work started in the wake of the Chicano/a Movement. The organization engages eastside voters during elections and fosters youth programs that focus on civic engagement and higher education.

Los Angeles History Collections

During Hollywood's Golden Age (1927-1959) Mexican American, Academy Award winning actor Antonio Rodolfo Quinn Oaxaca, better known as Anthony Quinn, supported Mexican American activists. The Anthony Quinn Collection extends beyond his work in Hollywood and documents his role as an unofficial ambassador of the Chicano Movement. Quinn worked with UCLA's Chicano Association for Student Assistance (CASA) in their efforts to promote access to higher education. Among the items in

[1] The book was coauthored by Francisco Balderrama and Richard Santillan. Student research and oral histories from a series of upper division Cal State LA history courses contributed to the content of the publication.

the collection are original newspapers, personal notes about his concerns for this overlooked community, and supportive messages to fund programs for Chicano students.

As one of the oldest communities of Los Angeles, Boyle Heights has experienced radical changes in its demography and infrastructure. In the early twentieth century, Boyle Heights was home to Eastern Europeans, Japanese, and Latinos. With the rise of suburbs and other economic and political developments, the area transformed into a predominantly working class Mexican American community. Despite the many changes, groups have sought to maintain Boyle Heights' architectural identity. The Boyle Heights Collection contains reports on: the population shifts, research on the oldest cemetery in Los Angeles, Evergreen Cemetery, topically indexed reports on the infrastructure, and registration forms of the Breed Street Shul into the National Register of Historic Places (#359).

The rare book collections date back several centuries. Containing memorabilia, exhibitions, newspaper articles, photos, and audio records, some of the most prized collections include: Leonardo di Vinci's *Codex Atlanticis*, a 1783 edition of Royal Ordinances of the Spanish regime, and one of only 425 original copies of *The Kelmscott Chaucer*. *The Kelmscott Chaucer* is complimented by the Washington Hardpress, a contribution from the largest collection of fine printing on the West Coast. [2]

Student Learning Opportunities

In the advent of the digital age, the extent to which student researchers utilize primary resources has dramatically increased. As a result of this transformation, librarians and archivists, in conjunction with academic departments and digital humanities advocates nation-wide, are working to encourage student engagement with archives. [3] Humanities, Liberal Arts, and History students can especially benefit by connecting their classroom learning to public history projects. The current university library archivist, Azalea Camacho, is developing a student-centered instructional program. Offering in-house professional training to students will give them the edge necessary to compete for museum, archival, and public history internships nation-wide.

Opportunities at the Cal State LA archives include digitizing nearly seven decades of the campus student newspaper and yearbooks, preserving rare books, processing analog collections, exhibition curatorial opportunities, advertising, graphics, and more. The Inner City Struggle (ICS) staff is currently looking for students with interests in Chicano/a Studies and archival studies to help work on a photo digitization project.

With a wide array of possibilities, the department welcomes volunteers of all majors. A tailored internship program that will provide students with a semester or year-long training program is expected to start in the future. The archivist is especially interested in training students invested in the field who may not otherwise have archival or curatorial exposure. In an archive like ours, students can potentially recognize themselves and/or their communities within collections. With an array of memorabilia, the department has something to offer anyone seeking resources that can contribute to their research or personal intellectual interests. Holding unique library materials, the department enhances the academic tools necessary to educate our students and the broader LA community.

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[2] Perry Long Collection, Cal State LA Special Collections and Archives webpage.

[3] Kelly Miller and Michelle Morton, "Hidden Learning: Undergraduates at Work in the Archives," *Archive Journal*, 2012.

Visit: **http://calstatela.libguides.com/SCA**

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