Mexican-Origin Newsmakers: Utilizing Health in La Opinión Microfilm for Data Collecting and Methodology

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Abstract
The Spanish-language newspaper La Opinión, in microfilm format from the 1960s, shows how the margins of archival repositories are filled with the voices of marginalized communities. Archival data about the Mexican-origin population has proven scarce throughout the twentieth century; not until 1980 was the term “Hispanic” added to the census and the group categorized in governmental repositories. This paper takes the reader on a journey through the depths of the Los Angeles County Library, into the fourth-floor basement where the entirety of La Opinión is stowed away in reels. This paper covers the challenges and rewards of archival research as well as the process of conducting archival research. Equipped with lived experiences in Mexican enclaves in Los Angeles, the researcher recognizes the voice of the community in ads, announcements, political cartoons, and throughout the margins of the newspaper. This article also offers an analysis of the opinions from the community about health care and raises questions of whether health-care services sufficiently met the needs of the community.

Keywords Spanish-language newspaper · Data collection · Microfilm · Mexican origin · Mexican Americans · Primary sources

Personas de Origen Mexicano Haciendo Noticias: El uso del tema de la salud en microfilmes del periódico La Opinión para la recopilación de datos y su metodología

Resumen
El periódico en español La Opinión en formato de microfilm de la década de 1960 muestra cómo los márgenes de los depósitos archivísticos están repletos de las voces de comunidades marginalizadas. Los datos de archivo sobre la población de origen

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mexicano han resultado ser escasos durante el siglo veinte; no es hasta 1980 que se añadió el término “hispano” al censo y que el grupo fue categorizado en los depósitos gubernamentales. Este trabajo lleva al lector en un viaje por las profundidades de la Biblioteca del Condado de Los Ángeles, en específico el sótano de cuarto piso donde se guarda la totalidad del periódico La Opinión en carretes de microfilm. Este trabajo trata los retos y las recompensas de la investigación archivística así como el proceso de llevarla a cabo. Provisto de experiencias vividas en los enclaves mexicanos de Los Ángeles, la investigadora reconoce la voz de la comunidad en anuncios, declaraciones, caricaturas políticas y en los márgenes del periódico. Este artículo presenta un análisis de las opiniones de la comunidad sobre los servicios médicos y plantea dudas sobre si dichos servicios satisfacían las necesidades de la comunidad.

**Palabras clave**  Periódico en español · Recopilación de datos · Microfilm · Origen mexicano · Mexicoamericanos · Fuentes primarias

At the main entrance of the Los Angeles Public Library, visitors walk through a luscious garden, where they are privy to the grandeur of the Art Deco building. Once inside, the long pillars and the detailed crown molding that hug the interior of the building clearly mesh with the contemporary public art hanging from the ceiling like chandeliers. At the foot of the escalators, the magnitude of the building becomes evident in the journey down to the fourth-floor basement. Once in the basement, the trek through historical books and genealogical records ends with the microfilm desk. There, the longest-running Spanish-language newspaper in the United States, La Opinión, which is at the center of this study, is entirely indexed in microfilm. The periodical was first published in 1926 and has continued daily circulation since. Today, La Opinión is archived entirely in microfilm reels, and it is digitized from 1990 onward. In addition to the Los Angeles Public library, other institutions house La Opinión microfilm; often limited reels are available or, in the case of my home institution at the time, the reels had not been indexed and were unavailable for use. Although Spanish-language newspapers have not all centered people of Mexican descent in the United States as newsworthy, La Opinión, geared toward a Spanish readership, centers people of Mexican origin as newsmakers. Upon arrival at an archival repository to search for primary sources about Latinas and Latinos, the inequalities faced by this sector of the population in the United States is made evident physically. ¹

Information about this population hides in the margins of archival repositories, in folders labeled “miscellaneous” or in antiquated technology. Nonetheless, scholars who ask research questions about this community take up the challenge of scavenging through records to form a historical narrative. Newspapers at times are at the center of studies, used as primary sources, and at other times are marginal, because of biased reporting. However, repositories like state and federal archives

¹ Here the terms Latina and Latino are used to draw connections among the community in general; this paper, however, focuses on people of Mexican origin.
house private collections that include newspaper articles curated in folders to support the circulation of certain ideas, or to support the thread of folders and boxes in the archive although those ideas are not always clear or at the center of the indexing guides.

To excavate the documents that answer research questions about the Latina/o/x population, researchers are inventive, finding ways to discover that, in fact, this ethnic group does have a trail of archival information that supports the Latina/o/x experiences. This paper will address the challenges and rewards of archival research as well as the process of data collecting in archives. Additionally, the process of selecting the sources requires researchers to understand how to witness and listen to the knowledge that lies in imaginative spaces, rather than focus on the dearth of documents. For example, exploring the marginal sections of a newspaper, like the classifieds, allows researchers to find sources that might not be included in the news stories. When researchers are able to find the community voice in archives, they can detail specific experiences with a new lens.

Archival data collection is considered a cornerstone of historical research; the procedure for conducting research encompasses extracting data from either a single repository or many. Archives are stored in public institutions, such as libraries and museums, as well as in private entities such as personal possessions or private institutions and organizations (Lewis Gaillet 2012, p. 36). Researchers identify the primary sources necessary for writing a historical narrative as they attempt to answer research questions, using the sources to substantiate claims as well as support theses. Although some sources provide the researcher with direct answers to research questions, other sources inform the research without answering the research questions. That is, some data remains out of the narrative even though it does inform the researcher about patterns, habits, and climate. Being well-versed about the environment in the past makes for more conversant studies, particularly about those who are underrepresented. Although archival sources are often sparse about the Mexican American population, historians have found creative ways of unveiling historical sources from records.

Here I illustrate how research about one topic—health care—is discussed in the Spanish-language newspaper La Opinión, and how the newspaper allows a glimpse of the opinions and efforts by the community of Mexican origin in Los Angeles, as they were affected by the health-care system. Empirical evidence measuring the satisfaction and trust of the community toward the health-care system was nonexistent at the time. Additionally, the archives did not have a measure of the competency and challenges faced by health-care providers and staff to assist this sector of the population in predominantly Spanish-speaking enclaves. Elena Gutiérrez has done extensive research to detail how, during the 1960s and 1970s, women of Mexican origin were purposely sterilized without their consent by health-care providers in Los Angeles County hospital. Additionally, the efforts by Chicana activist Gloria Arellano to bring accessible health care into low-income Mexican-origin enclaves in

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2 Archives are collections of historical documents that provide details about people, places, organizations, and institutions.
Los Angeles also represents an attempt to fill the shortcomings of a health-care system that did not view this community with dignity. Not until the 1980s, with efforts like the Hispanic Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, was the state of health in the community comprehensively reviewed. Before the 1980s, efforts by activists brought to light the lack of resources, lack of accessibility to health-care services, and instances that built mistrust among people of Mexican origin toward health services, a legacy that is well known in the age of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Mexican is a racialized word in the United States, and it has historically been used to negatively characterize people of Mexican origin in a US context (Gómez 2018). Researchers use various terms appropriate in time and place to identify the populations at the center of a study; I have chosen to use Mexican American and people of Mexican origin throughout this paper. Diving into archival methodology, many terminologies have been used to identify this populace throughout the twentieth century. Nonetheless, since this study is about newspapers as primary sources, and archival methodologies cross from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the terms Mexican-origin and Mexican American are relevant across time and space as the international border changed. The word “Mexican” is often used to identify national origin; however, for the purpose of this study, I have associated the word with “origin,” as in “people of Mexican origin,” to identify the population as having a Mexican identity within a US experience. My use of the word is informed by the location from which the community derives, as well as the unifying factor that is attached to this word through ethnic background.

In this paper, I address the macro and micro challenges of conducting newspaper archival research and using the limited available archival information to construct a narrative. I open with a discussion on the foreignness of the process of finding community in institutions that house archives, in this case those of the Spanish-language newspaper *La Opinión*, along with the alienation and isolation involved in delving into this mode of research. I focus on the utility of microfilm and integrate examples of findings from *La Opinión* reels. I then examine how research partnerships can be constructed even when one is not working directly with people. Next, I explore how intersectionality allows the researcher to witness the complexity of an issue and select potential sources to construct a historical narrative. Finally, I conclude with advice about using newspapers as a source, for archivists and researchers alike, as more Latina/o/x researchers excavate the experiences of Latinas/os/x in history.

To gather sources from *La Opinión*, I spent a month conducting research at the Los Angeles Public Library. In the fourth-floor basement of the library, I tediously sifted through microfilm. For my larger study, I conducted research about food assistance programs to unravel how people of Mexican origin created their own solutions for the shortcomings of federal food assistance. My initial approach was to sift through a few papers and search for a specific section in the newspaper, such as a medical and nutrition advice column. Once I identified my target, I thought I would be able to extract it from all the newspapers of the era. However, as prognostic as daily newspapers are in sectioning off their coverage, I found that sprinkled throughout the paper was information about health, including, public health, access to programs, and health-care options for their Spanish-language readership. Therefore, I could not locate health news in one single column, and I would have to explore the
entirety of the microfilm reels to identify coverage about health. At the center and in
the margins of the paper, the community was voicing their needs, and in doing so,
they were making news. The findings throughout the paper included daily advice
columns in the women’s section of the paper, classifieds, advertisements, and regu-
lar news stories. All of these sections included information that helped me build
the narrative about health. The data ranged from multi-article series to headlines to
graphic cartoons and public health announcements. The minuscule articles and ads
about health also contributed to data collection because they, too, revealed a part of
the overall narrative.

**Foreignness of the archive**

Although archives may hold entire collections exclusively about the Latina/o/x com-
community, and there is a growing interest in acquiring papers from key figures of that
ethnic group, challenges to preserve stories that center the community are ongoing.
Going back in time to identify the Latina/o/x community in state and federal archi-
val repositories is like stepping into a foreign space. The researcher needs to engage
their experiences with the community to be able to hear and understand how the
community speaks in the archives.

Archival research refers to the gathering of documents to construct a historical
narrative. Marc Bloch writes about the task of writing history in *The Historian’s
Craft*: “One of the most difficult tasks of the historian is that of assembling those
documents which he considers necessary” (1953, p. 26). The task of data collec-
tion, Bloch goes on to explain, is not necessarily straightforward; there is not a
“unique type of document with a specific sort of use. On the contrary, the deeper the
research, the more the light of the evidence must converge from sources of many dif-
ferent kinds” (Bloch 1953, p. 69). Bloch advises historians to search extensively for
primary sources beyond traditional records and consider artifacts, topography, tools,
and cultural data to construct a narrative about people in the past. How research-
ers answer Bloch’s call varies; nonetheless, at the forefront of historical narratives
should be the lived experiences of people in the past. Within the realm of archi-
val sources, historians of Mexican-origin populations in the United States move
beyond the traditional recordkeeping in archives (Limón 1993, pp. 87–88). Through
their varied sections, which include the voices of regular people, from classifieds to
syndicated content and regional news, newspapers offer a glimpse into the overall
atmosphere of an era.

Once in the library basement and at the microfilm desk, I used a small notebook
in which I etched a long list of call numbers and requested a dozen reels from the
librarian, and I waited. In the room, only a few people sat sporadically on the desks.
After much anticipation, the reels were delivered to a small desk table with a boxy
computer, remnant of a different time. The materials were accompanied by detailed
instructions from the librarian about how to load the reels into the reader and how to
use the zoom button, the focus knob, the navigation lever, and the print button. I sat
with microfilm for six months of daily periodicals from *La Opinión* and began the
process of sifting through microfilm.
The microfilm process is laborious. Documents archived in microfilm are stored as photographic records inside a reel and typically measure 16 mm or 35 mm (Saper 2018). The reels contain film with microphotographs, viewed through a magnifier. On the desk, a monitor is used to view the magnified photographs of the newsprint pages. At the bottom of the monitor sits a mechanism to control the zoom and focus of the newspaper, and a knob to navigate the film. The researcher sits at the computer reading through the photographs of the newspaper. Microfilm reels last for decades and even centuries if they are stored correctly (Saper 2018). However, there has been a concerted effort in recent decades to move from microfilm toward digitizing newspapers.

The move to digitize periodicals has shortened the time and resources necessary to conduct newspaper research. The change is attractive for researchers, first, because digital copies of newspapers are public record and can be widely available through online repositories. Second, once the microfilm is digitized, it can be word-searched. The accuracy of the word-search element of digital periodicals is debatable; anyone who has used it has probably found flaws in the efficiency. Often, using the same words, the digital search will change and provide new findings or omit some of the findings from previous searches. This becomes especially difficult to track when researching a community that has gone by different names, which likely makes the process harder to track errors. Nonetheless, the move forward in the digital sphere is imminent and most legible for many researchers. Still, as a researcher eager to make the most of the tools at hand, I focused on the advantageous aspects of sitting at a microfilm machine.

The process of using microfilm invites us to examine what it means to conduct research about populations who are at the margins of society. In Chicana and Chicano studies, we often refer to the process of “centering the margins,” the process of placing the stories of ordinary people at the center to ask research questions informed by the experiences and lives of those at the margins. In addition to asking questions about marginalized people, we also delve into data that is ostracized. Marginalized data lives in people’s homes, is sold in crates at flea markets, and hides in the margins of newspaper microfilms. Utilizing the newspaper from cover to cover to construct a historical narrative was not a procedure I chose; rather, the microfilm lent itself to this method. Often, the format of the data will drive the methodological approach. The horizontal approach, to look at the entirety of the newspaper, is also informed by the significance of newspapers in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s. Bilingual newspapers were a tool used during the movement to reach people and disseminate information about inequalities in society.

The articles and graphics I found demonstrate how health news is laid out in the entirety of La Opinión newspaper. They also offer a glimpse of the diversity of health news available in the periodical. Moreover, the coverage about health serves as an example of how researchers can make the most of the circumstances in the archives. Rather than perceiving the lack of digitized Spanish-language newspapers as a shortfall, the action of taking the microfilm and using it to find even more information than would be available through indexed words or targeted searches is precisely how researchers can read the silences in the archives. Researchers can and ought to use the digitized format to read entire newspapers, especially when
unearthing histories that are buried at the margins of archival records. Reading through the entire newspaper allows researchers to listen to the voices at the margins, to witness people in the classifieds, and to identify the concerns of the community. Further, the process of conducting research in microfilm and even the idea of using this method for conducting research outside of the headlines and large articles may be useful for undergraduate and graduate researchers.

**Building partnerships through Spanish-language newspapers**

Partnerships are essential for holding researchers accountable to the people they study. Even in historical work about everyday people, who often do not leave a trail of documents to narrate their stories, researchers who ask questions about communities from the past are accountable to those communities. My accountability to the community lies in knowing how high the stakes are for the community and in understanding the real effects that detailing the past can have on communities of Mexican origin, specifically, and Latinas/os/x more broadly. Moreover, accountability is embedded into the research, as research questions are approached from the perspective of inclusivity, and the drive of analysis is composed of the voices of the community as they appear in archival materials.

As a researcher working with primary sources from archival repositories, I have faced many of the same challenges as other researchers who write using this medium to gather information. The difficulty of locating sources, navigating indexes, and constructing a narrative from the materials all form part of the painstaking process that can take a physical and mental toll on a researcher attempting to prove a fact that they might know colloquially about the community. Nonetheless, conducting research that centers people who have been historically left at the margins of archival repositories presents additional challenges: first, holding myself accountable to the people and communities I write about and, second, including the voices of those who have been directly affected by policy, memos, and resources meticulously placed inside folders at the archival repository.

Conducting research about ordinary people and centering how their colloquial experiences reveal their extraordinary circumstances is part of working alongside communities from the past. Particularly challenging are histories left with little evidence from archival records, and monumentally important are the ways researchers have overcome this difficulty. During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, copious numbers of newspapers, zines, and magazines emerged to diffuse information and opinion about the social circumstances of the community. Information and knowledge about politics, inequalities, and socioeconomic conditions were a seminal part of the movement, and these relics of that time inform the archival repositories.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a constant shift in immigration policies, which heavily dictated the lives of people of Mexican origin in the United States. The transient characteristics of migrant workers, the temporality of contracted laborers, and the changing immigration legislation of the twentieth century all contributed to the omission of Mexican-origin people in archival repositories (Gonzales 2019, p. 111). People of Mexican origin who built permanent lives...
in the US were rarely documented. First, census information about Mexican populations is rare and inconsistent prior to the 1980s. The term Hispanic was added to the long form of the US census in 1980 (Mora 2014, pp. 83–118). The addition of an identity marker for the Latina/o/x sector of the population signified the community would be documented through surveys and reviews in a more accessible manner than ever before (Dowling 2014). Second, the living conditions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest were often contingent on labor. Labor camps near smelters in Texas, makeshift camps beside farms and fields in California, and rail box houses along train tracks throughout the Southwest and Midwest all formed part of the living conditions many people of Mexican origin endured (Perales 2010). These temporary living conditions were rarely documented in archives; instead, what we know comes from collective memory, interviews, and sometimes photographs (Ruiz 2008, pp. 22–23). Third, the racist portrayals of Mexicans in the “wild west” as bandits and sexually promiscuous women overrepresent the community in the historical recollection of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the past (Ganster 1997, pp. 301–305). These challenges present an opportunity for researchers to excavate sources in innovative ways, daring to walk in a different direction by questioning the dominant narratives, approaching the past as changeable, and locating sources that have been traditionally displaced from historical common tropes. Researchers are tasked to challenge the stereotypes of Mexicans and Mexican Americans by delving into sources with what Yxta Maya Murray deems “ecstasy and suspicion” (Murray 2008)—maintaining the balance between being in ecstasy about a topic while being suspicious of the information as we formulate narratives.

Newspapers like La Opinión function to fill the crevices of governmental archives because they include colloquial aspects of life. Additionally, the paper, having wide circulation and an accessible price tag, like other papers at the time and throughout history, was within the reach of Latina/o/x communities. The paper also allowed people to communicate about local events, celebrate achievements, and seek an array of opportunities in sections like the classifieds. In terms of health, La Opinión offered anonymity to people seeking information about health-care services, for example a person could find information about clinics offering women’s health services or about free clinics. One article, titled “Certificados a Voluntarios del Dept. de Salud” (“Certificates Given to Volunteers of the Health Department”) (1968), celebrates the impact of community health workers in Los Angeles. The article lists the hours of service conducted, ranging from 143 to 1000 hours, and exclusively highlights people with Spanish surnames who were granted awards by the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors. Looking at the amount of volunteer work some community members contributed provides a glimpse of efforts to, perhaps, fill the shortcomings of a health-care system that often did not have bilingual staff in predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhoods.

Nonetheless, although newspapers are a type of literary source, they are usually informed by opinion and biases. Melita Garza (2018) wrote about three newspapers that documented the plight of Mexican Americans during the Great Depression. Each paper had a biased approach and documented events from a vastly different perspective. Garza (2018) has highlighted the vulnerabilities of newspapers as primary sources. Particularly, newspapers can hardly escape biased reporting, usually
with an underlying agenda by the editors, writers, and reporters (Krippendorff 2004, pp. 55–56). Sources can be dangerous for the community if assumptions are made without context. Under these circumstances, one might ask, how does a researcher move forward using only one paper to draw conclusions? Newspapers are one of the tools used to set the stage about the past, but they should be used in combination with other newspapers, as in the case of Garza’s study, or with other sources. The answers to research questions about Mexican-origin communities specifically, and Latinas/os/x in general, will not all lie in the same repository or in a central location. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to offer insight into one methodological approach, making use of the entirety of newspapers, that can be used as part of a web of methodologies to answer a set of research questions.

The Latina/o/x community in Los Angeles was well aware of the unequal health-care facilities they had to access in the 1960s. In *La Opinión* political cartoons by Armando Campero speak to the community’s fear of health-care facilities. Figure 1 shows a cartoon with two people looking at a skull: the skull has “L.A. Hospital General Emergencia” (“L.A. General Hospital Emergencies”) etched on the forehead and its mouth forms a door, indicating the entrance to the LA county hospital emergency room (see Fig. 1). Under the cartoon is written, “No te espantes mano, así se ve siempre…” (“Don’t be afraid, friend, it always looks this way”) deriving a criticism about the fear people had about entering the county hospital, perhaps because it was underfunded, and death rates were high (“L.A. Hospital General Emergencia” 1968). This cartoon is an example of one way public opinion may appear in the paper, providing researchers a way to integrate the voice of the community. While single articles in the newspaper can have biased reporting, utilizing political cartoons, classifieds, announcements, and ads can add depth to the presence of the general public in the newspaper.

Another example of how newspapers are able to document community voices is Francisco P. Ramírez’ *Clamor Público* newspaper, which ran from 1855 to 1859 in California. According to Nicolás Kanellos and Helvetia Martell, the paper illustrates the complex issues of identity faced by Californios as the territory swiftly moved from Spanish rule to the Republic of Mexico to US statehood during the second half of the nineteenth century (2000). *Clamor Público* tried to unite Mexicans who stayed in the United States. The Spanish-language paper used the word *raza* to refer to the Mexican population who remained in the territory (Griswold del Castillo 1982, p. 134). The term *raza* translates to race; it is particularly meaningful for mestizos who are mixed race. Appealing to the community of Mexican origin was *Clamor Público*’s use of the term *raza* as a unifier for the Mexicans who stayed in California after the territory became part of the United States. According to Urrieta, “Raza connotes a people with a similar social, cultural, and historical experience with oppression. A term like raza, alludes to the solidarity that exists between people who are the products of local and enduring struggles” (2007, p. 139). In

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3 James Diego Vigil writes that Ramirez published a piece on 16 September 1856 in *Clamor Público* about the US refusal to abide by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (2012, p. 164). This illustrates the political impetus of the newspaper to stand by Californios.
Fig. 1 “L.A. Hospital General Emergencia” by Armando Campero. *La Opinión*
this way the term extends to identify people in a shared experience throughout the nation. In the newspaper, Ramírez calls on the raña to use their voting rights to challenge unfair voting practices. For instance, in California during the mid-nineteenth century, it was customary for ranch bosses to buy their workers’ votes (Bryan Gray 2006, pp. 26–28). The paper provides context to the ways US citizenship rights were undermined for Mexican-origin people in California. The way Ramírez used raña to identify the borderlands identity of those who stayed in California following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo speaks to the way his paper lived up to its title, a public outcry. By using the word raña, Ramírez held himself accountable to the people he wrote about.

The voice of the community, as well as temporary efforts to mitigate the lack of health-care services in barrios, appears in La Opinión through advertisements for clinics. An important finding from the newspaper was that the paper captured moments and health-care efforts that include vital information for the community. Free clinics, clinic openings, temporary clinics, and extensive lists of the services available are telling of the need for health-care services in predominantly Latina/o/x communities. On 10 July 1968 a free clinic was advertised as a “nocturnal clinic,” taking place from six to eight in the evening; it offered vaccines for children over six months as well as mammograms for women fifteen years of age or older (“Habra Clinica Especial el Día 18” 1968). The one-day event took place at Central Health Clinic and offered two services for women and infants in downtown Los Angeles (see Fig. 2). Another advertised evening clinic took place in South Los Angeles every third Tuesday of the month, from six to eight in the evening. The ad emphasized the vaccine requirement for schoolchildren, stating, “los padres de familia que trabajan podran encontrar muy conveniente la hora de la tarde y noche para inmunizar a sus hijos” (Parents who work will find the hour in the evening and night to be convenient to immunize their children). Although the community is not speaking directly in these advertisements, the frequency of evening and weekend clinics speaks to the need for working families to have access to clinics during late hours, primarily to cover for the lack of flexibility offered by employers, as well as the demanding hours that did not accommodate important tasks like clinic visits. My archival research as a methodological approach does not involve direct contact with members of the community, so the researcher must pay close attention to their voices in the primary sources. Doing so allows us to understand the needs, obstacles, and everyday experiences of community members.

**Intersectionality in archival research**

Utilizing antiquated technology to find information in the crevices of archival repositories to fill the gaps in canonical narratives is tasked by intersectional methodology. Relying, in part, on our own positionality allows us to witness the voices of the community in archives. If one is not familiar with the community in life then it may not be legible in the archives; in this way our positionality plays a role in building a narrative. The archives also become less foreign to the researcher through identifying the voices of a familiar community when sifting through archival records.
As a Latina historian, I join scholars who write history to feel less alone in the present. For instance, in her book *The Decolonial Imaginary*, Emma Pérez invokes historians to imagine and write a past that includes themselves and people like them in the narrative (1999). Pérez enthuses researchers to use the imaginary as a tool to work against the notion that only concrete documentation can substantiate the past. Identifying a queer Chicana soldadera as a heroine in the battle of the Alamo, Pérez unequivocally stands to question *truth* in historical sources.4 The dearth of primary

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4 Soldadera refers to a woman soldier during the Mexican Revolution.
sources about people who stood at the margins of society does not mean they did not exist in the past. As such, historians delve into primary sources with the aim of constructing narratives pieced together from, often, flimsy records and a vivid interpretation. Through imagination and creativity, coupled with theoretical underpinnings, we are driven to find ourselves inked into the documents of the past.

One of the ways my personal experiences intersected with the research I was conducting was in the details provided by the *La Opinión* articles. Identifying the challenges faced by a community that, fifty years before I went into the archives, was facing many of the same challenges that a similar community continues to face in Los Angeles in the present allowed me to witness a genealogical line in the lack of health-care services and access to said services. I was able to identify patterns of distrust toward the health-care system and facilities because this sentiment continues to plague enclaves of Latinas/os/x around the country. To mediate this problem, advertisements for health-care services were often laced with a number of significant details, such as the price of services, explanations for why certain services are important, and times for walk-ins and evening availability. When Vicente Zapata, a health promoter from North Los Angeles, informed *La Opinión* of a free clinic event in 1968, he included details that the community would need to justify the importance of routine exams. For example, Zapata’s advertisement includes an explanation of lung X-rays and glaucoma eye exams to detect onset signs of illness (“Examenes e Inyecciones Gratitutos” 1968). The details provided in advertisements like Zapata’s are important for understanding the particular needs of the community and for understanding how small community clinics tried to mediate those needs. The barriers to health-care services went deeper than language, even if the community did trust health-care service providers; the circulation of information not only about events but also about the cost, the process of procedures to be offered, and the reasons these procedures were important for preventative care and diagnosis were all steps to creating access. Transparency encouraged more people to participate in clinics and events.

While articles geared to inform the community about available services illuminate the needs in the community, articles about health-care worker training also inform readers about the role of medical professionals in engaging the community. One announcement describes a twelve-week Spanish learning program for medical personnel in a pediatric clinic. The language program came to fruition as a result of the petition from the clinic director, who witnessed the dire need for the staff to have basic Spanish skills in order to communicate with patients and their parents or guardians (“El personal de una clinica aprende español” 1968). This announcement illuminates the needs of the community without directly stating that monolingual English speakers in clinics actually created a number of problems for patients, who often did not receive proper information about procedures, consent, and diagnoses (see Fig. 3). Nonetheless, ads that tell of health-care staff being trained to learn Spanish perhaps attempted to mediate the distrust between the community and one of the clinics that serviced the barrio.

Throughout *La Opinión* one finds examples of the relationships the community had with medical facilities and health-care professionals, in addition to examples of sensitive medical services, which help illustrate the push to destigmatize certain procedures. For example, an announcement for free pap smear exams explains that
Fig. 3 “El Personal de una Clinica Aprende Español.” La Opinión

El personal de una clínica aprende español

El supervisor del Condado Ernest E. Debs anunció la inauguración de un curso de español de 12 semanas para los miembros del personal de la Clínica E. L. A Child and Youth, de 831 North Bonnie Beach Place, East Los Angeles.

“La experiencia ha demostrado la necesidad de tener personal bilingüe que sirva apropiadamente a la comunidad de habla hispana”, dijo Debs, al elogiar al personal de la clínica por haberse embarcado en estos estudios lingüísticos.

El curso, establecido después de una petición del doctor Loren G. MacKenney, director médico de la clínica, está siendo dirigido por el señor Luis Herrera, quien ha enseñado español en numerosos programas de educación de adultos y es intérprete oficial para los tribunales superiores. El proyecto incluye un programa combinado de instrucción en el aula y tutoría en el trabajo.

“Este programa intensificado, hecho a la medida de las necesidades específicas de los médicos y otros miembros del personal, capacitará a la clínica a servir mejor a la comunidad del Este de Los Ángeles”, dijo Mr. Debs.

La East Los Angeles Child and Youth Clinic, sostenida por una aportación del Bureau Infantil del gobierno federal, fue creada para proveer atención médica a niños y jóvenes, hasta la edad de 10 años, que residen en el Distrito Este de Salinas.
the test is effective at identifying life-threatening cancers and other abnormalities that may put a women’s health at risk. Beyond the explanation of the significance of pap smear exams, the announcement also details that, in the past, as many as sixty-four women underwent exams in the one-day event (“Examenes Gratuitos ‘Pap’ Para Mujeres” 1969). The appeal to women to have pap smear examinations is also explained in the title of the article, which highlights the free cost of exams (see Fig. 4). These announcements and ads for health-care services are important in telling the story of how the Latina/o/x community engaged with the health-care system in the 1960s; nonetheless, the researcher must read between the lines to understand why these services were being offered and why there was interest in disseminating information about preventative care and routine medical exams. The community speaks, and voices their opinion, but we need to find those voices. And as researchers, to include these voices in a historical narrative, we need to trust them—that is the work of centering the margins and listening.

Advise on using newspapers as a source, for archivists and researchers

Often unknowingly, people from the past have left a trail of evidence that reveals how they changed the course of history and even influenced how we live our lives in the present. The newspaper can be utilized as a tool to identify the concerns of the community through articles and graphics about the Mexican and Mexican American community. Looking for sources in unlabeled and uncategorized sections of the
archives requires researchers to imagine the community in the narrative. The work of historians is to excavate the past and form a narrative from the sources available. By persistently interrogating the newspaper, historians, like researchers who knock on doors or make phone calls to speak with interviewees, need to be tenacious about finding answers to research questions. It is imperative that researchers who study the Mexican-origin community work to move them out of the margins. Even though we are equipped to make the most of antiquated technology, our data should hold equal value in the digital age and follow suit, to be digitized in the same way as other mainstream newspapers.

Indeed, La Opinión newspaper has evolved with the times, and today, like other mainstream newspapers, it has limited print circulation and a wide presence on the internet. The periodical continues to fill the gap of documentation, as subsets of the Mexican and Mexican American community continue to be written out of governmental records—particularly the undocumented Mexican population, which comprises 4.95 million people in the United States as of 2017 (Passel and Cohn 2019). With contributions to society as significant as their population numbers, the community continues to be largely written into the margins of archival documents, leaving researchers tasked with finding innovative ways of reading the evidence. Spanish-language newspapers also continue to offer a platform on which to center the experiences of ordinary and extraordinary people of Mexican origin in the United States, and with the move to digitized sources, researchers will need to continue interrogating sources thoroughly and diligently.

Moreover, one of the most pressing health issues of today, Covid-19, has brought to light the health disparities experienced by the Latina/o/x community throughout the country and in settings like Los Angeles. The Southern California city has been an ongoing site of health disparities, and some of the same distrust toward medical professionals and health-care facilities, as well as the lack of access to health-care resources continue to be experienced half a century after La Opinión advertised for people to attend events. Additionally, this city represents an exemplar of health disparities experienced by the broader Latina/o/x population across the nation and across time. The urgency of health tends to draw some researchers to uncover the efforts from the past to understand how health crises developed and what could have been different, yet for Latina/o/x historians of health the urgency is amplified because the ongoing conditions continue to ravage the community in real time.

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5 The Pew Research Center estimates that 10.5 million people in the United States are undocumented. Mexicans are 47% of the entire undocumented population. People from all Latin American countries combined form 77% of the entire undocumented population in the United States. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/us-unauthorized-immigrant-population-2017/.
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