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Colonial and Nineteenth-Century Latin American Studies and Digital Public Humanities

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Scholarship in colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies often does not reach beyond specialized academic audiences. The majority of work continues to be largely traditional in nature, with monographs, journal articles, and book chapters remaining the most common types of publications. Only a small portion of that production is distributed in an open-access format online, and even when that is the case, such scholarly output is generally not conceived with broader publics in mind, and engagement with stakeholder communities seldom plays a role in its creation.

Digital methodologies and tools present opportunities to explore new modes of scholarly production and publication in these fields. Researchers working in a digital realm are designing and carrying out projects that speak to contemporary communities and involve diverse constituencies in new ways. Without seeking to supplant the more conventional scholarship that grounds their fields, these scholars are asking questions about how we conduct academic work in the twenty-first century and how we can make the products of our work relevant to larger audiences.

This article examines five digital projects through which scholars of colonial and nineteenth-century Latin America are conducting work that looks outward from the academy towards inclusive scholarship: Ticha, the Biblioteca Digital Soledad Acosta de Samper, the Mexico team of the multinational project Oceanic Exchanges, Rendering Revolution, and coloniaLab. Through a commitment to producing scholarship for, and in collaboration with, diverse communities, these projects suggest models for conducting the work of colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies in the public sphere.

Les études sur l'Amérique latine coloniale et du XIXème siècle ne s'adressent souvent qu'à un public universitaire spécialisé. Seule une petite partie de cette production est distribuée en ligne dans un format à accès libre, et même lorsque c'est le cas, cette production scientifique n'est généralement pas conçue pour un public plus large, et l'engagement avec les communautés concernées joue rarement un rôle dans sa création.

Les méthodologies et les outils numériques offrent la possibilité d'explorer de nouveaux modes de production et de publication scientifiques dans ces domaines. Sans chercher à supplanter la recherche plus conventionnelle qui fonde leurs domaines, ces chercheurs posent des questions sur la manière dont nous menons le travail universitaire au XXIe siècle et sur la manière dont nous pouvons rendre les produits de notre travail pertinents pour des publics plus larges.

Cet article examine cinq projets numériques dans le cadre desquels des chercheurs de l'Amérique latine coloniale et du XIXème siècle mènent des travaux qui s'éloignent de l'académie pour s'ouvrir à un public plus large : Ticha, la Biblioteca Digital Soledad Acosta de Samper, l'équipe mexicaine du projet multinational Oceanic Exchanges, Rendering Revolution et coloniaLab. En s'engageant à produire des études pour diverses communautés et en collaboration avec elles, ces projets proposent des modèles pour mener à bien le travail des études latino-américaines coloniales et du dix-neuvième siècle dans la sphère publique.

Introduction

Scholarship in colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies often does not reach beyond specialized academic audiences. The majority of work in these fields continues to be largely traditional in nature, with monographs, journal articles, and book chapters remaining the most common types of publications. Only a small portion of that production is distributed in an open-access format online and therefore widely available. Even when that is the case, such output is generally not conceived with broader publics in mind. Engagement with stakeholder communities seldom plays a role in its creation or dissemination, a reality made apparent, for instance, by the fact that most scholarship in these areas is written in English.

Digital methodologies and tools present opportunities to explore new modes of scholarly production and publication in colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies. Researchers working in the digital realm are designing and carrying out projects that speak to contemporary communities and involve diverse constituencies in new ways. Without seeking to supplant the more conventional scholarship that grounds their fields, these scholars are asking questions about how we conduct academic work in the twenty-first century and how we can make the products of our efforts meaningful to larger audiences.

At the 2021 congress of the Latin American Studies Association, the Alliance for Digital Research on Early Latin America (ADRELA) sponsored a panel showcasing projects that bear relevance for specific stakeholder groups today (Cobo Betancourt et al. 2021; Lillehaugen et al. 2021; McCarl, Thom, and Wilson Aranguren 2021). ADRELA subsequently hosted at DH Unbound 2022 a round table considering models for engaging in digital public humanities practice (Alzate Cadavid et al. 2022). These sessions brought together scholars based in Latin America and the United States, working on projects focused on different historical moments and diverse geographical areas, to consider ways that the scholarship they were carrying out largely in isolation reflected common themes and methodological tendencies.

This article continues portions of those conversations by examining five projects through which scholars are conducting work that looks outward from the academy toward greater inclusivity. It considers how each project creates innovative products and connects with new audiences through the use of digital tools and methodologies. In doing so, this study argues that digital approaches create opportunities to expand the reach and increase the contemporary relevance of scholarship on colonial and nineteenth-century Latin America.

Context

The term "public humanities" refers to a range of scholarly practices that seek to engage non-academic constituencies with the materials and methods of the humanities. Overlapping with the narrower category of "public history," public humanities encompass a diverse set of activities that reflect various goals. These can include the recovery of marginalized histories, reflection on shared experiences, strengthening of communities, vindication of injustices, and construction of common identities. In some cases, the public humanities involve not only targeting the output of scholarly efforts toward non-academic audiences but also involving the public itself in the creation of that work.

The "digital public humanities" direct such scholarship into a digital realm, opening up different possibilities in terms of developing new understandings, delivering content, reaching new audiences, and engaging communities in collaborative processes. The digital public humanities pursue similar objectives as more traditional public humanities but allow researchers to potentially formulate new kinds of questions and different approaches to finding answers. Conducting public humanities work in a digital context can also open new opportunities in terms of how we define and understand the publics toward whom such efforts are targeted, and how we can engage those populations in our work.

The expression "digital community engagement" has emerged to refer to the formation of partnerships through which academic institutions and off-campus organizations collaborate on digital projects. Central to this paradigm is the notion of both parties as equal partners. Such work differs from the extractive and exploitative relationships that scholars frequently maintain with the communities they study or with which they otherwise interact (Wingo, Heppler, and Schadewald 2020, 12). Many projects that fall under the category of digital community engagement allow for an immediacy of the connection between these parties, allowing for faster and more accessible partnerships. In this sense, digital community engagement is not primarily a type of scholarly or institutional activity, but rather a set of ideas about the ways that universities can or should exist within the communities they serve, and which sustain them.

Theoretical work on these topics tends to focus primarily on the relationship between the humanities and public life in the United States and other Anglophone contexts. A few examples of important scholarship from the last ten years for which this is the case are *Learning in the Plural* by David D. Cooper (Cooper 2014); *The Humanities and Public Life*, edited by Peter Brooks (Brooks 2014); and a recent issue of *Profession*, edited by Paula Krebs (Krebs 2019). Scholarly forums dedicated to public humanities and digital public humanities exist outside the United States, including *magazén: International Journal for Digital and Public Humanities* (Venice University Press 2023), but they are rare. This is

particularly true in a Latin American context, in spite of the role that universities and their students have historically played in advocating for social change.

Within public history, at least, concerns about internationalization have recently been at the forefront. Understanding the field in a global context is a focus of the *Oxford Handbook of Public History* (Gardner and Hamilton 2017, 8–9). As Serge Noiret and Thomas Cauvin point out in that volume, we stand to benefit from imagining public history in a global context: "It is critical to understand that local and international approaches are not mutually exclusive. In fact, international public history helps to reconcile the two approaches by adapting public history to an interconnected world of migrations, trade, media, and the Internet" (Gardner and Hamilton 2017, 37).

A more recent volume edited by Noiret, along with Mark Tebeau and Gerben Zaagsma, goes a step further by surveying current trends within digital public history on an international scale (Noiret, Tebeau, and Zaagsma 2022, 1), emphasizing the collaborative, participatory nature of such work. As the editors argue, "[digital public history] is about more than producing digital work for one's scholarly peers; it is about finding ways to collaborate directly with audiences and engage in a process of co-creation through digital means, a form of citizen's digital history for the public and with the public" (Noiret, Tebeau, and Zaagsma 2022, 15).

The three notions considered here—public humanities, digital public humanities, and digital community engagement—are particularly relevant to the fields of colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies. Within the interdisciplinary area of Latin American studies, scholars have long been conscious of the social environment in which they operate, and in which scholarship and activism are closely intertwined. Although within this broader context, those who study the colonial period and nineteenth century do not focus on contemporary realities, the repercussions of the past are apparent in many aspects of Latin American societies today. Communities throughout the region continue to live in situations that have been shaped directly by the social, political, and economic dynamics of the colonial era and nineteenth century.

The difficulty of accessing narratives and cultural artifacts is a central challenge for Latin American communities that seek to grapple with the past. Much cultural heritage material was long ago removed from the region, primarily to Europe, or resides in libraries and archives that are, in practice, accessible only to privileged segments of the population. The ability of many groups today to explore their own stories and challenge stereotypes about the past is limited by barriers imposed by geography, race, ethnicity, and social class.

Work carried out in a digital realm can contribute in meaningful ways to overcoming those boundaries. Communities' access to cultural artifacts can be established or

restored by making material available online, a process often referred to as *digital repatriation.* Communities can likewise participate in the creation and analysis of those digital products, offering opportunities to alter both the ways we conduct scholarship and the impact that it can have beyond rarified academic spheres.

The five projects examined in this article demonstrate the potential for digital scholarship within colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies to appeal to, engage with, and involve audiences outside those traditionally targeted in those fields. In all cases, these endeavours connect contemporary constituencies with narratives and cultural artifacts that would otherwise be difficult to access and interpret. These projects point to ways that those who study the Latin American past can make the results of their scholarship more widely known and position their work to be of use to diverse publics today.

Making cultural artifacts and scholarship about them available online does not guarantee that they will reach wider, and particularly non-academic, audiences. Involving those publics in processes of the creation and analysis, however, suggests one way to promote ongoing engagement with digital scholarship. Collective efforts to trace connections between these projects—as reflected in the work of ADRELA, for instance—likewise create avenues for increasing the visibility of this work and for establishing digital public scholarship and digital community engagement as key tendencies within colonial and nineteenth-century Latin America studies moving forward.

Ticha: Engaging stakeholders in Zapotec history

With a close and dynamic relationship with its user community, Ticha (Lillehaugen et al. 2016; Broadwell et al. 2020) exemplifies the possibilities of collaborative digital scholarship within colonial Latin American studies today. As a digital text explorer for Colonial Zapotec, Ticha curates high-quality images of documents with diplomatic transcriptions, Spanish and English translations, historical context, and additional analysis. The project integrates crowdsourced document transcription and digital textual editing with pedagogy and community-building to create robust resources and supportive learning spaces that increase access to Colonial Zapotec documents for all stakeholders, with an emphasis on Zapotec people who want to learn about their language and history.

Zapotec people have been living in what is now the state of Oaxaca, located in southern Mexico, for millennia. Today there are over 450,000 speakers of Zapotec languages in Mexico, as well as large diasporic communities in the United States. The diverse Zapotec language family, one of over a dozen language families indigenous to the state of Oaxaca, comprises over forty different languages. Zapotec people have a rich writing tradition, with the first documented logographs dating back over 2,500

years (Romero Frizzi 2003). Zapotec people regularly used alphabetic writing for their political and religious records from the mid-1500s and throughout the colonial era (Oudijk 2008). Due to the ongoing erasure of Indigenous history in the United States and Mexican schools, access to the Zapotec written record is of great importance to Zapotec individuals, scholars, educators, and activists.

There are economic and social obstacles to accessing the physical archives where these documents reside, however. These barriers can be even greater for texts written in minoritized languages. Monolingual Colonial Zapotec documents generally have incomplete metadata and may not be clearly marked in finding aids. The lack of curatorial guides for these materials makes it more challenging to find documents that would be of most use to a modern audience. Even potential readers who speak or read a different Zapotec language may still have difficulty reading the 500-year-old Colonial Zapotec due to language change and idiosyncratic spelling. These impediments are heightened for Zapotec knowledge-seekers due to the anti-Indigenous racism embedded in educational and research institutions, in addition to the financial and logistical difficulties that can be involved in travelling to archives.

Ticha contributes to ameliorating this problem of access by creating a Colonial Zapotec corpus that is freely available online, and that contains linguistic, cultural, and historical information of interest to various audiences with different levels of expertise. Digital methods and tools allow this material to be combined in a single resource, presenting multiple levels of analysis that allow users to choose the information streams that are most applicable to them. Users may elect to engage with the documents through document images, but they are also able to search the corpus for specific Zapotec words, read transcriptions of documents from a particular *pueblo*, or browse a list of people mentioned in the texts.

As an example, see **Figure 1**, which shows how users can access multiple layers of resources associated with the 1733 Zapotec-language last will and testament of Francisco Jimenes (Anderson et al. 2022). Above the image, arrows allow users to navigate between multiple pages or download a PDF of all associated files. High-resolution images appear on the left (on which the user can zoom) and tabs on the right allow selection between a plain text transcription and a detailed morphological analysis with translation.

The digital format further allows the Ticha team to make materials public as soon as they are available and update them iteratively. This flexibility of publication time is crucial in the context of knowledge repatriation and language reclamation. The workflow includes regular virtual and face-to-face outreach events in Zapotec communities to improve the project design to better fit the preferences and needs of Zapotec users. For
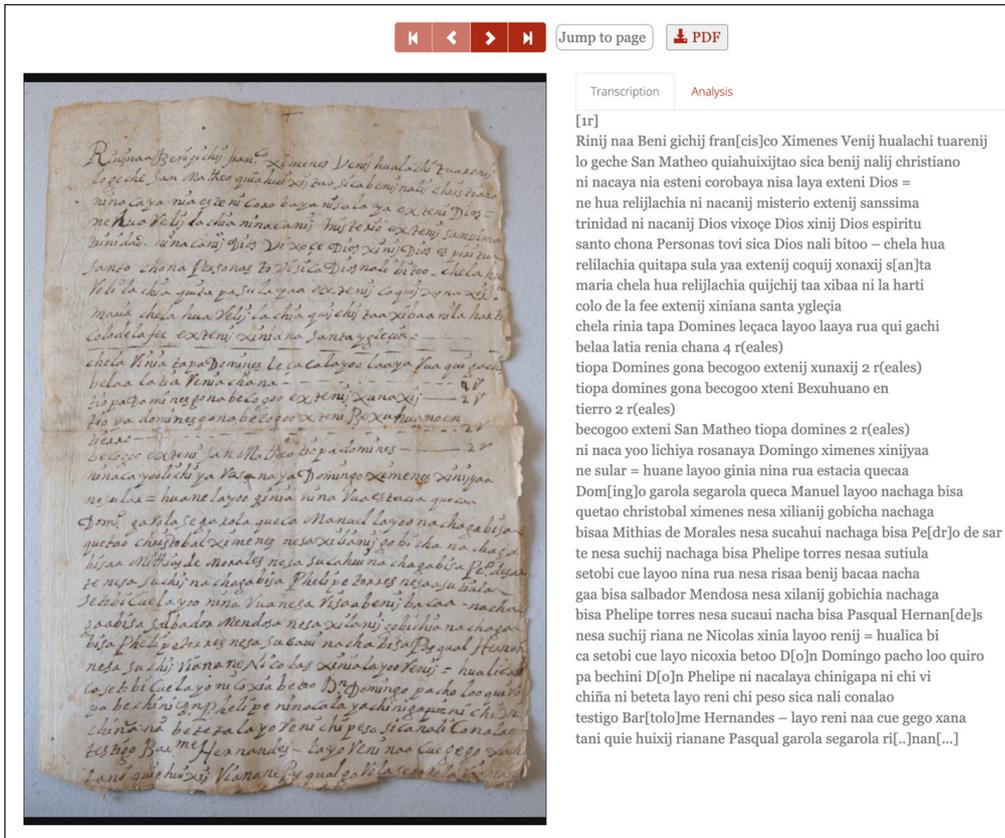
Figure 1: "The Zapotec-language last will and testament of Fransisco Jimenez, 1733 San Matheo Macuilxocitl, Oaxaca: An interlinear analysis and translation" (Anderson et al. 2022).

example, during workshops held in Oaxacan *pueblos*, project leaders realized that a PDF version of each text would increase access in communities with unreliable internet access. Ticha subsequently added these files, which allow users to download and print resources for use in their homes or other locations where an internet connection may not be available.

The team behind Ticha realizes that the simple availability of materials does not solve the problem of accessibility, and that providing access to colonial-era documents in and about Zapotec languages does not guarantee those materials will be used. Potential knowledge-seekers must also have the tools or guides to interpret and learn from these historical texts. In 2020 and 2021, with funding from an ACLS Digital Extension Grant, the Ticha team developed a set of lesson plans for students at the high school and college levels that use the corpus available on the project's website as a foundation for learning about Colonial Zapotec language and history, while connecting this rich history to the deep Zapotec present and future.

The resulting e-book, *Caseidyneën Saën—Learning Together* (Flores-Marcial et al. 2021a; Flores-Marcial et al. 2021b), is published via PressBooks and is available in both English and Spanish to best serve the transnational audience of stakeholders. Although the learning modules are geared toward classroom use, they are also suitable for individual study. The collaborators wrote with a Zapotec audience in mind, and in particular created exercises that engage speakers and learners of Zapotec languages. However, the lessons do not require any previous knowledge of Zapotec and are appropriate for a broad audience.

During workshops using *Caseidyneën Saën*, Zapotec community members developed an inspiring breadth of projects. These community-initiated endeavours were not limited by the lessons available in the e-book. Instead, speakers used the introductory material as a stepping-stone to further exploration of Colonial Zapotec, engaging directly with the documents available on the Ticha website. Thus, these pedagogical materials are enhanced by interconnectivity with a digital text corpus.

Through the process of creating and using these materials and engaging with the Ticha archive, the Zapotec scholars and activists working on Ticha have identified a need for a pan-Zapotec network that connects the transnational community. The Ticha team has used social media and their own classrooms to build community and to explore anti-colonial ways of teaching and learning (Lillehaugen 2019; Lillehaugen and Flores-Marcial 2022). These projects disrupted the unidirectional model of university instruction and focused instead on creating supportive networks of teaching and learning, with Zapotec community members and non-Native students alike finding ownership of their expertise. The Ticha team furthered this work in 2020 and 2021 through the Conversatorios, a series of workshops led by and for Zapotec community members, using *Casiedyneën Saën* as framework for exploring Colonial Zapotec (Broadwell et al. 2021; Lillehaugen et al. 2021).

The project uses Google Analytics to understand who is accessing the project and from where. For example, in 2022, there were 9,870 users to the Ticha webpage in over 12,349 sessions. Of those who stayed on the site longer than thirty seconds per visit, the majority came from Mexico (approximately 36%), followed closely by users from the United States (approximately 35%). The country with the longest average session duration (and pages per session average) in 2022 was France. While the project leaders can only infer user motivation from these numbers, they do suggest that Ticha is being accessed by both members of Zapotec communities in Oaxaca and in the diaspora, as well as by individuals outside of the Zapotec diaspora, likely scholars or academics (e.g., the European users).

The 2022 Google Analytic numbers also show a growth in usership over time. The number of users in 2022 was up 166% from the year 2020, and the number of sessions was up 68%. In particular, the users from Mexico increased from 22% of the users in 2020 to 36% of the users in 2022, which the Ticha team views as a positive sign that the use of the site is growing within Mexico.

Such analytics, however, do not speak to some central questions that interest the team. For instance, they want to know more about how Zapotec community members are employing the online resources, what else those users would like to be able to accomplish with the resources, and how Ticha can make its website more accessible and easier to use. To understand these critical questions, they rely on feedback provided during the workshops the team holds in Zapotec communities in Mexico and the US, as well as by Ticha's Zapotec Advisory Board, who share feedback from Zapotec communities with the larger team. Through these channels they have learned, for example, that speakers of Zapotec languages are using Ticha resources to reclaim words, a process illustrated by the experience of Ticha Zapotec Advisory Board member Lopez, who writes about his own engagement with language recovery through Ticha in one chapter of *Caseidyneën Saën* (Lopez 2021). Ticha's leaders also gain feedback from a group of teachers who are using *Caseidyneën Saën* with their students in Oaxaca at the middle-school, high-school, and college levels.

This collaboration with user communities is not fundamentally digital in nature, and indeed, Ticha's leaders do not regard the project as a wholly digital endeavour. Many of their workshops, in fact, are held in person using photocopies, not devices, often in outdoor settings. The project's leaders do not view such analog interactions as a failure or limit of the digital methods, but rather as evidence that their project is about language and community, not technology. They seek to make a corpus of colonial era Zapotec manuscripts accessible to a global public while centring a Zapotec audience, and their use of digital methods is merely one facet of their approach.

The Ticha team is planning two major projects in the future. First, they would like to reconsider the technical architecture of the data sets and their relation to one another, an undertaking that will require writing proposals for major grants. Secondly, following the positive response to the pedagogical materials in *Caseidyneën Saën*, they seek to find ways to expand the use of those resources by connecting with and training teachers, as well as continuing to improve the materials based on feedback from those instructors.

While the work of reclaiming knowledge, language, and history can be traumatic and lonely (see Lopez in Broadwell et al. 2021, 8:11–8:24), the collaborative model created by Ticha has proven to be inspiring and empowering. Within the community spaces, both physical and virtual, that the project provides, Zapotec people are reclaiming

the history of their *pueblos*, creating art, recovering Zapotec words used by elders, sharing skills to further their activism, and supporting one another through learning experiences (see e.g., Cruz Cruz 2021; García Guzmán 2020; Felipe Lopez 2020; Jasmine López 2020; Velasco Vasquez 2021).

Biblioteca Digital Soledad Acosta de Samper: Connecting with young audiences

Like Ticha, the Biblioteca Digital Soledad Acosta de Samper (Soledad Acosta de Samper Digital Library, or BDSAS in its Spanish initials; Alzate and Corpas de Posada 2019) is a project that involves pedagogical goals and engagement with broad communities. The BDSAS gathers the diverse writings of Acosta de Samper, a nineteenth-century Colombian woman writer. Built using Omeka, the project currently contains 691 documents and continues to grow as new materials are catalogued and digitized, as is the case with a series of letters currently being added to the site. As Georgina Wilson Aranguren observed in a recent review of the project (Wilson Aranguren 2021), the user can browse by format (manuscripts, albums, periodical press, and books) and by genre, according to a system of classification established by the main curators. Each genre has a brief introduction, presenting each sub-collection and describing its contents. There is also information about the project itself in English and Spanish, a biography of the author, and a collection of written and audiovisual materials that have been created since 2013. The site also presents a series of virtual exhibitions authored by guest curators who aid in the dissemination and interpretation of the collection. These virtual exhibitions also serve as a mechanism for continually revitalizing the project through renewed readings and appropriations and by enabling the insertion of the collection in new debates and scholarly contexts.

When project leaders Carolina Alzate and Isabel Corpas first conceived of building this resource, they were thinking mainly about preservation and offering a resource for international research. In this sense, their work is part of a movement that has taken place in recent decades to recover the work of Latin American women writers who have been left out of traditional canons. The broader outlines of that work can be seen in projects such as Nineteenth-Century Latin American Women Writers (ELADD in its Spanish initials; Martin and Goswitz 2015), in which Acosta is featured. Alzate and Corpas soon discovered that the scope of the project was greater than they anticipated. Their work, they found, inevitably reached beyond a scholarly sphere. It likewise did not only move in one direction, nor did it lead to finished, fixed products. Instead, the project involved identifying new publics and learning how to engage them in the building of the collection. In this way, the project was, from the start, about the collaborative production of meaning.

This realization led the project leaders to discover new opportunities to incorporate the project into their teaching. Once the library was launched, for instance, Alzate designed a graduate course at the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá entitled Unexpected Hypertexts: Soledad Acosta de Samper, from the Nineteenth to Twenty-first Century. The course worked from the premise that the concept of hypertext, which is commonly associated with the digital era, reflects an approach to creating and interacting with texts that was, in fact, common in the nineteenth century. As Gérard Genette explained in his book *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, engaging with literature as hypertext involves a type of reading and writing that is linked with spontaneity and a process of assemblage: "[T]he pleasure of the hypertext is ... a *game. ...* One could even go so far as to say that every form of hypertextuality entails some kind of game ... [A]t bottom, whatever its urgency, tinkering is always a game, at least to the extent that it processes and uses an object in an unforeseen, unprogrammed, and thus 'unlawful' manner" (Genette [1982] 1997, 399). Embracing this idea, Alzate's students explored the complex history of the notion of *hypertext* and the many ways to think about this concept in the humanities and the study of the nineteenth century more specifically. Likewise, students considered what the circulation of cultural products in Acosta's era can teach us about hypertexts, as well as how digital hypertexts can bring those objects to us in new ways today. These reflections led to hands-on work through which students applied these ideas to the production of interactive scholarly products.

One of those was *Una mirada a la infancia en el siglo XIX a través de Soledad Acosta de Samper* (A Look at Childhood in the Nineteenth Century through the Work of Soledad Acosta de Samper; Cifuentes, Gómez, and Ortiz 2021), a student-developed collection and exhibit about Acosta's writing for children. The editors and curators were three students with interests in history and literature, women's studies, children's literature, and elementary education. In Acosta's nineteenth-century texts, these student collaborators found new ways to think about the history of childhood, Colombian history, racialization, social groups, and the natural world. Through these texts, readers were able to go beyond the traditional corpus of Colombian children's literature, which consists primarily of rhymed fables of the type found in manuals of urbanity and good manners, most of which were written by Rafael Pombo. In contrast to these works, Acosta's stories are not infantilizing: she regards children as beings capable of reflection who are in the process of gaining their own autonomy. She does not tame reality for them, and her writings for children therefore allow us to investigate how the nation was formed, what was expected in the education of boys and girls, how the discourse changed depending on whether children belonged to the elites or not, how they were encouraged to relate to other social classes, etc. They are materials that allow children, parents, and teachers to address key historical issues.

The items included in this collection had not been republished since their original appearance in nineteenth-century magazines. Prior to their inclusion in the BDSAS, they could only be read in a few specialized libraries in Colombia. The open-access format of the BDSAS promised to increase the availability of these works, but an obstacle still remained: without curatorial intervention, the texts would be largely inaccessible to children today due to the format of the original publications, which were magazines for general publics, with no illustrations and a graphic design, in terms of font, font size, and spacing, that assumed adults would read the texts aloud to children.

The dynamic interface of the BDSAS suggests ways to overcome such barriers. Employing the visual and interactive possibilities of the site, the curators created e-books designed for young readers offering engaging illustrated texts accompanied by related games. These require players to complete such tasks as matching images to text and answering questions related to the author's life and writings. Through these games, young users are expected to learn and account for literal, inferential, and critical information in accordance with the curricular guidelines for language studies published by the Colombian Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional 1998). Such literal information includes facts related to the author and her works, historical events in the nineteenth century, and authors from the same period, including Pombo and Jorge Isaacs. The inferential learning involves drawing conclusions based on certain fragments of the texts, as well as work with vocabulary, such as identifying synonyms and antonyms and determining meaning through context. The critical learning involves identifying relationships between texts and reflecting on the reader's own experience of the texts. See, for example, **Figure 2**, which shows the interactive contents of "Pequeños naturalistas" (Little Naturalists), a subsection of *Una mirada a la infancia* that presents new versions of three texts: "El mono" ("The Monkey," Acosta de Samper 1878), "El gato" ("The Cat," Acosta de Samper 1879), y "Algo sobre astronomía" ("Something about Astronomy," Acosta de Samper 1893).

In recognition of the importance of the work of this project, the Ministry of Education is promoting the use of *Una mirada a la infancia en el siglo XIX a través de Soledad Acosta de Samper* in primary and middle-school classrooms throughout the nation. The project has contributed to addressing the general lack of up-to-date pedagogical resources for teaching nineteenth-century literature and history. Many Colombians still face barriers in utilizing resources like the BDSAS due to limited internet access, but the Ministry of Education is committed to addressing such obstacles. Having access to this type of corpus is of particular importance in a country like Colombia, where the often-stark divides within society and culture are so strongly informed by the dynamics of the colonial and nineteenth-century past. By extending the reach of and targeting

Figure 2: "Pequeños naturalistas" (Little naturalists), part of Una mirada a la infancia en el siglo XIX a través de Soledad Acosta de Samper.

engagement with the BDSAS to young publics, the exhibit raises the profile of one of Colombia's most important nineteenth-century writers who until relatively recently, like so many other women, had been largely omitted from the nation's literary history.

Oceanic Exchanges: Discovering new tools to connect publics with a historical newspaper collection

Like Ticha and BDSAS, Oceanic Exchanges: Tracing Global Information Networks in Historical Newspaper Repositories 1840−1914 (OcEx; Oceanic Exchanges Project Team 2017) seeks to connect contemporary communities with the written culture of the past. Oceanic Exchanges is a transnational project with teams in Finland, Germany, Mexico, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The project seeks to analyze the international flow of information between newspapers during the second half of the nineteenth century (Cordell et al. 2017). While focusing initially on enabling and carrying out such analysis, the collaborators inadvertently discovered a method for exploiting the project's data and its visual representation to engage the public. Their work in this area addresses problems that are common when trying to make digital collections useful to broad audiences: providing effective tools for accessing the massive amounts of data contained within a repository and visualizing it in meaningful ways that have broader relevance for and beyond scholarly practice.

Having obtained its data from the National Digital Newspaper Library of Mexico (Hemeroteca Nacional Digital de México, HNDM), the Mexico team built on Ryan Cordell's ideas (Cordell 2017) to develop tools to represent the information visually. Part of the research was aimed at studying the flow of news in specific cases, such as the explosion of the United States Navy battleship *Maine* in Havana in 1898 and the execution of Emperor Maximilian in Mexico in 1867. Building on an approach used by other scholars (Wevers, Kenter, and Huijnen 2015), the team proposed to identify the terms that appear over time in relation to a given concept. They sought to use the data extracted from the HNDM to identify concepts relevant to their research, like *Maximilian, Juárez, USS Maine*, and *Spain*, and monitor the words with which they were associated in the newspapers at a specific time. Examples of two such chronological moments are the period prior to 1864 before Maximilian was Emperor of Mexico, and 1866, when he was at war with Juárez. The team believed that an instrument for such a comparison would allow them to see at a glance the shift in the relationship between words and concepts in journalistic writing.

To accomplish this, the team adapted ShiCo, a web application that facilitates the visualization of concepts over time, to operate with Spanish texts (Martínez and Kenter 2018). The ShiCo system works from a seed term to illustrate a constellation of related concepts in a specific chronological context. For example, for the year 1861, the word *juárez* is related to *relaciones, habiendo, miramón, fue, sigue, mando, degollado, comunicación, benito, conocimiento, español, justicia, mexicano, político, nombrado, presidente* and *actual.* For the year 1868, however, it is related to other words such as *cumplimiento* and *maximiliano.*

The system is based on a methodology known as *embedding*, which consists of the vectorial representation of a word as a point in space. An advantage of this approach is that it is possible to identify words that we might understand to be "similar," meaning that their proximity to each other—measured as numerical distance—is within a specified range. Through this mechanism, the relation of the seed word with the words that are similar to it can be graphically represented by projecting them in space. As it also allows the display of a set of related words at a given moment, that representation can be shown as dynamic in time. The visual representation, in a sense, facilitates making a "time trip" through words.

The team's work in deploying ShiCo as a tool for analysis was directed toward achieving research goals, seeking to visualize the relationships that underpinned the data and contrast them with their close reading of the news. To their surprise, however, this method of representing the data had further implications for the project. Useful not only to an expert eye, this approach to visualization held promise for engaging the

general public in the use of the project's data. Recognizing this potential, the Mexico team made its tools available on its website (Intercambios Oceánicos 2019).

Of the various methods the team developed for displaying Shico's results, two are especially attractive to a wide audience. The first represents the concepts in networks, as in **Figure 3**. The other displays the concepts streams, as in **Figure 4**. Both methods allow the user to "peer" through the material in the newspaper library, interacting with historical newspapers in an active and entertaining way. Unlike the usual search tool for accessing the catalogue, that provided by the project does not require any expertise to gain meaningful output. As the results are graphic and dynamic, the user can play with the input moving back and forth to see the changes over time. In a presentation at the National Library of Mexico, where the HNDM is located, the team shared their view that this system could serve not only as a research tool but as a vehicle for engaging a broader audience with the contents of the HNDM. Since that time, it has been used with students in classes as a way to explore the library with no specific goal, to find curios or significant relations between terms used in the press.

Figure 3: Words associated with *juárez* and *maximiliano* in three different years.

One important limitation of the tool is that it does not permit navigation into specific newspapers contained in the database. This circumstance means that results cannot be interrogated as concrete evidence of a relationship between concepts at a specific moment, but rather must be regarded as a suggestion of such a connection. The project has ended, and for the moment, there are no plans for further development.

coloniaLab: Editing the local colonial and nineteenth-century past

coloniaLab is another project that involves engaging communities today with the textual culture of the Latin American past. Based at the University of North Florida, coloniaLab (McCarl 2016) is a digital editing workshop that focuses on the online publication
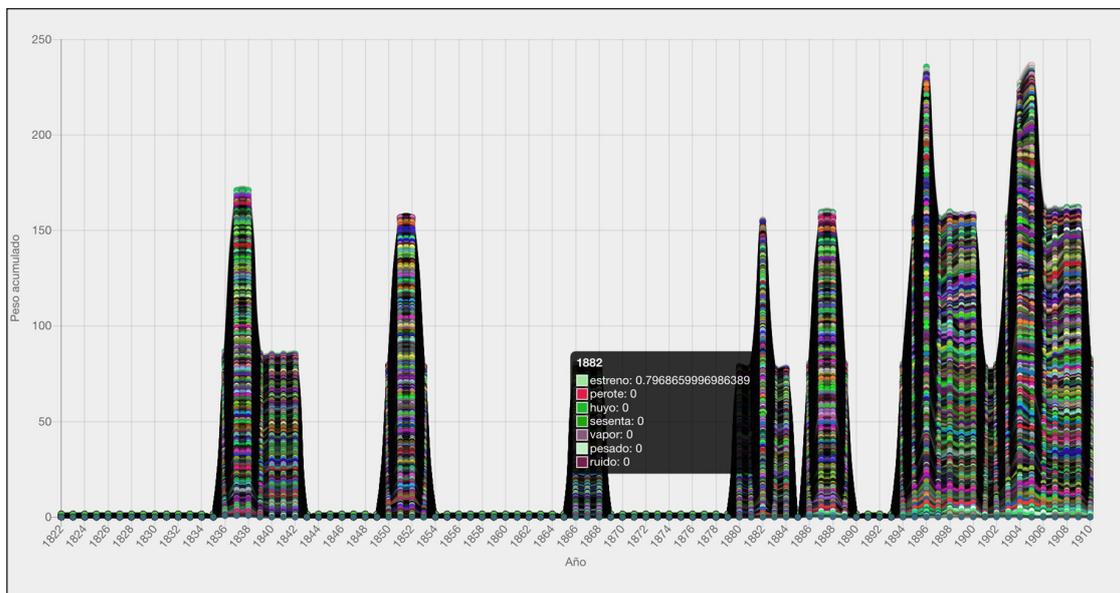
Figure 4: Streams of words associated with *temblor* between 1822 and 1910.

of manuscripts and rare print texts from the colonial period, as well as nineteenth-century materials that reflect continuities of colonial life. Led by Clayton McCarl, coloniaLab has also functioned as a space to experiment with methods for involving undergraduate students in the transcription and TEI-XML markup of such texts. Since its founding, coloniaLab has engaged over forty students as digital editors. Projects carried out by coloniaLab follow a multi-layer approach to documentary editing that is designed to maximize the transparency of editorial decisions and processes as well as provide student editors with formative experiences in engaging critically with the Spanish language (McCarl 2018).

In recent years, coloniaLab has focused much of its work on texts that make visible the colonial and nineteenth-century past of two places: North Florida and the Antioquia department of Colombia. The former possesses a rich history that revolves around St. Augustine, founded in 1565, and involves complicated relationships between Spanish, Indigenous populations, and enslaved and free people of African descent. Like Florida, Antioquia was a remote region with a complex history involving Spanish settlers, Indigenous and mestizo residents, and enslaved Africans and their descendants.

In both locations, processes of erasure have obscured that history. In North Florida, the Spanish colonial past is remembered primarily through Eurocentric narratives that minimize the agency of Indigenous peoples before and after the arrival of the Spanish (Bossy and Frank 2021). The Spanish history of the area is perhaps most often evoked by the sometimes-garish attractions of St. Augustine, which Henry Flagler converted into

a tourist destination for northerners in the late nineteenth century, as well as through the fanciful architecture and names that characterize suburban streets, shopping centres, and subdivisions throughout the area. Such idealization and commercialization of the colonial past stand at times in sharp contrast to the discrimination faced by some Hispanic residents of North Florida today.

Evocation of the colonial and early Republican world in rural Antioquia is perhaps less self-conscious. This is, in part, because the region maintains a wealth of well-preserved colonial and nineteenth-century towns; the tourism they attract involves a largely local audience from the capital of Medellín; and the economic and social change experienced by those areas over the centuries has arguably been less. As in North Florida, however, the local history of the region has been simplified or transformed, with the roles that Africans and Indigenous people played in the settlement and development of the region obscured by a longstanding myth of Antioquia as white, an idea so powerful that it continues to make marginalized communities invisible today.

Contributors to coloniaLab have edited a variety of documents from North Florida that challenge current understandings of the past by pointing to the complexities, contradictions, and poverty of life on the colonial frontier. Emilia Thom worked with three letters to Madrid from colonial officials that address matters related to interactions with Indigenous groups, suggesting the interdependence that often characterized relations between the Spanish and native peoples in the area (Thom and McCarl 2020a; Thom and McCarl 2020b; Thom and McCarl 2020c). Georgina Wilson Aranguren edited a dispatch related to Fort St. Nicholas, a Spanish outpost on the south bank of the St. Johns River in what is now Jacksonville, concerning the complaint of a local woman who believed soldiers had stolen her livestock, and another reporting on efforts by two Indigenous men to recover an African slave whom they claimed as their property (Wilson Aranguren and McCarl 2020a; Wilson Aranguren and McCarl 2020b; Wilson Aranguren and McCarl 2020c). Karen Rhodes and Angelic Fleites worked on a legal case in which a proposed marriage in St. Augustine is challenged by the father of the would-be groom, who objects to his allegedly penniless son marrying an equally destitute widow (Rhodes, Fleites, and McCarl 2019). In the fall of 2022, Stacey Lowey-Ball edited a document related to the presence in Northeast Florida of English pirate Andrew Ranson in the seventeenth century (Lowey-Ball and McCarl 2022). These materials are drawn from the East Florida Papers (Library of Congress 2023) as well as the holdings of the Archivo General de Indias (General Archive of the Indies) in Seville.

Participants have also edited a variety of documents related to overlooked aspects of the history of Antioquia. Students in a summer 2019 course on digital editing in Spanish, part of a study abroad trip to Colombia, worked on a criminal case from 1713

in which an enslaved woman was accused of using witchcraft on her master (McCarl et al. 2019), a document held at the Archivo Histórico de Antioquia (Historical Archive of Antioquia) in Medellín. In a Latin American culture course the following year, students edited segments of a census of enslaved and freed persons of African descent prepared in Antioquia in the 1840s (McCarl et al. 2020), a collection of documents located in the Archivo Histórico Bernardo Martínez Villa (Bernardo Martínez Villa Historical Archive) in Santa Fe de Antioquia (see **Figure 5**).

Lista de los hijos de mujeres esclavas nacidos libres a virtud de la ley formada en cumplimiento del artículo segundo del decreto ejecutivo del 21 de junio de 1842, clasificándola de la manera allí prevenida

Primera clase, de menores de 7 años, varones

Pedro Vargas, 7
Clemente Vargas, 6
Guillermo Moreno, 7
Leoncio Sorera, 1
Pedro Londoño, 7
Juan Estéban Londoño, 2
Dámaso Botero, 2
Martín Montoya, 5
Boro Montoya, 3
Fausto Montoya, 4
Jesús María Montoya, 5 meses
Juan Francisco Corral, 4
Faustino Corral, 1
Pastor Bonis, 6
Tomaso Martínez, 3
Pablos Martínez, 7
Jorge Martínez, 4
Blas Hoyos, 7
Juan de Jesús Hoyos, 7
Pedro Zapata, 7
Tomás María Losada, 6

Figure 5: A selection from "Listas de los esclavos de uno y otro censo, y el de los libertos y esclavos prófugos, año de 1845" ("Lists of the slaves of various censuses, and of the census of freedmen and fugitive slaves"; McCarl et al. 2020).

McCarl is currently collaborating with local historian Daniel Acevedo to design a series of annual summer workshops to take place in El Retiro, a town that makes public acknowledgment of the role of Afro-Colombians in its founding. In the 1760s, local mine owner Javiera Londoño granted freedom to those she and her deceased husband had enslaved, an event that is considered to be a precursor to the abolitionist movement in the following century (Duque Betancur 1967, 462). In partnership with

the Centro Cultural Javiera Londoño in El Retiro, McCarl and Acevedo will use these workshops to engage community members in the transcription and digital encoding of documents from various repositories related to Afro-Colombian and Indigenous history in El Retiro and nearby parts of eastern Antioquia.

Going forward, McCarl would like to develop coloniaLab into a transnational, cross-institutional platform for digital edition. He would like for coloniaLab to become a space in which scholars and students at different institutions in geographically disparate locations could collaborate in the digital transmission of archival material. He also seeks to develop further the pedagogical model behind the project and articulate it in ways that can be utilized by others. As a first step in this direction, he has recently co-authored with several students a study on digital editing as a pedagogical tool within academic programs focused on the Spanish language and Hispanic letters and culture (McCarl et al. 2023).

The primary obstacle faced by coloniaLab are limitations on the project leader's time. Ideally, work produced by participants would, in all cases, be proofread and approved by the faculty leader in his role as general editor. In practice, this final layer of editorial work can prove to be a bottleneck. A balance must often be struck between the desirability of making the work available in a timely fashion and ensuring that it is accurate and conforms consistently to the project's editorial criteria. coloniaLab's practice of publishing document images and diplomatic transcriptions, alongside regularized reading versions, alleviates this concern somewhat, as most editorial decisions are visible to users, who can usually consult the originals in case of doubt.

The ultimate goal of coloniaLab is to make broadly available rare, difficult-to-access textual material that can expand understanding of the colonial period in Latin America. Since its inception, however, the project has also been about developing models to involve students and the broader public in digital editing. Engaging these groups in efforts related to local history can potentially add a deeper level of connection, as the work becomes not only about the processes of textual transmission but also the discovery and reevaluation of the narratives that define the places where we live today.

Rendering Revolution: Tracing legacies of slavery through fashion on Instagram

Like the other projects in this essay, Rendering Revolution: Sartorial Approaches to Haitian History (Meï and Square 2020) is concerned, in part, with textual material. Likewise, as the tools developed by Oceanic Exchanges, Rendering Revolution has a visual focus. It is unique among the five projects discussed, however, for its use of social media as its primary platform, as well as for the particular theoretical tools that it employs.

As a queer, bilingual, feminist experiment in digital interdisciplinary scholarship, Rendering Revolution uses Instagram to trace the aesthetic, social, and political reverberations of the Haitian Revolution through the lens of fashion and material culture. By focusing on stories of self-fashioning that rarely receive attention in colonial archives, Rendering Revolution explores the many ways in which modern identities (and concepts such as human rights) were formed in relation to the legacy of slavery in the Americas. The materials produced, curated, and translated for this project focus on the activities of occluded figures in history, including women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Drawing on black feminist thought and transnational queer methodologies, Rendering Revolution generates a transhistorical, undisciplined archive that illustrates the importance of material culture in constructing diverse (and often competing) visions of freedom in the Atlantic world.

Rendering Revolution is especially attentive to how colonial archives, particularly slavery's textual and visual records, produce a way of knowing that privileges the perspective of those who held economic and social power—principally white, propertied men and women. These archival records include trade logs, travel diaries, newsletters, pamphlets, ephemera, manuscripts, topographic studies, political treatises, engravings, legal documents, paintings, and court proceedings. A common characteristic of these records is silence—a lack of information about the embodied experiences and daily lives of bond people. The question of archival silence has been explored at length by literary historian Saidiya Hartman, whose scholarship considers the relationship between slavery's archive and the production of historical knowledge through the prism of power. As Hartman writes in her most recent book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*: "Every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor" (Hartman 2019, 1). One of the ways in which Hartman addresses/redresses the power imbalance that shapes what is known about black women's lives from the early twentieth century is to identify and tell stories of everyday self-fashioning and beauty-making that have received little to no attention within dominant narratives about US history.

Building upon and expanding Hartman's methodologies, members of the team at Rendering Revolution examine colonial archival sources—textual and visual— to understand how histories of fashion and material culture illuminate stories of accommodation, resistance, joy, and survival that may be otherwise marginalized in dominant narratives about the Haitian Revolution and its wider impacts on the Atlantic world. This work has resulted in several series of posts that draw from Saint

Domingue's colonial archives as well as existing scholarship in the field of Haitian studies to examine how histories of indigo production (Rendering Revolution 2020b), headwraps (Rendering Revolution 2021a), blueing (Rendering Revolution 2020d), tribal scarification (Rendering Revolution 2021b), textile trades (Rendering Revolution 2020e), and wig-making (Rendering Revolution 2020a), among other material economies, were connected to revolutionary imaginings and activities (for an example, see **Figure 6**). These activities include marronage and the practice of Vodou in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Saint Domingue. Existing work examining these material economies involves practices of critical fabulation and reading "along the bias grain of the archive" (Fuentes 2016, 11) to centre the everyday—specifically the sphere of black women's coerced or uncoerced labour—as a critical space of dissent, creativity, and political reimagining.
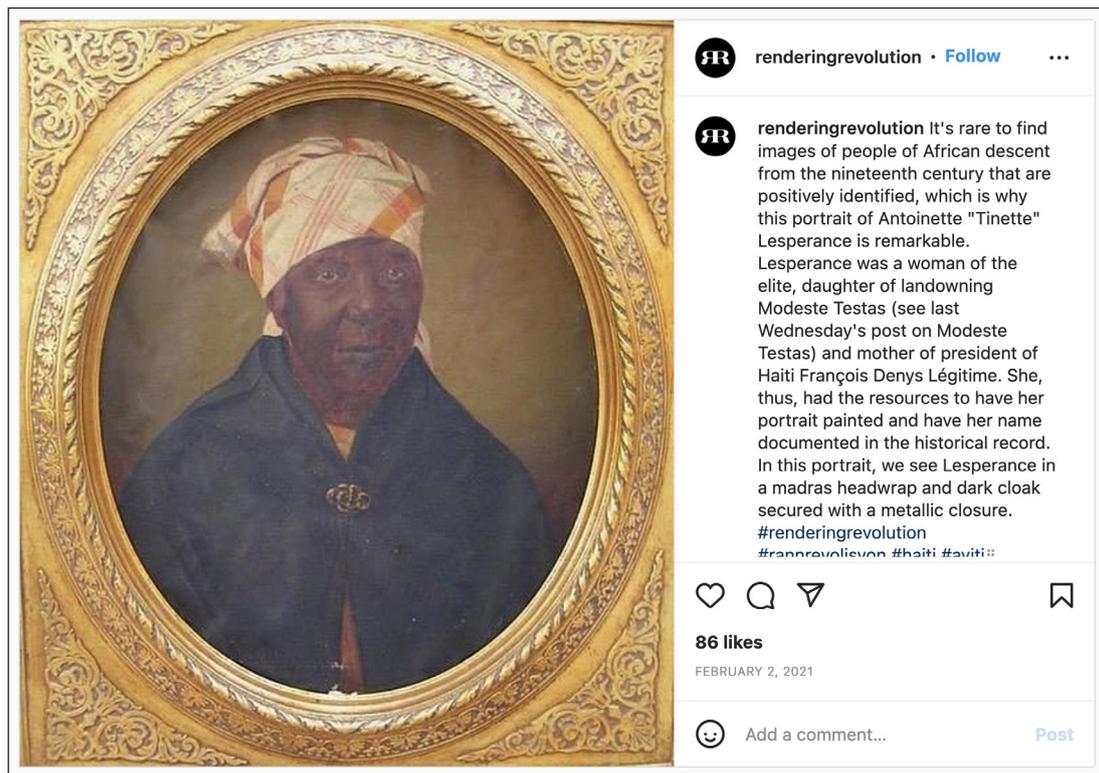
Figure 6: A sample Instagram post (Rendering Revolution 2021a).

Woven between and among posts that explore textual and visual content from the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries are analyses of contemporary art, films, and fashion lines designed by artists in Haiti and its diaspora who are invested in translating the Haitian Revolution and its legacies for new audiences. Rendering Revolution

has brought together work by fashion designer and activist Stella Jean (Rendering Revolution 2020f), artist and designer Daveed Baptiste (whose 2019 "Haiti to Hood" series explores issues of migration and material accumulation; Rendering Revolution 2021c), and the queer activism and style of Haitian drag king Mildred "Dred" Gerestant (Rendering Revolution 2020c), among others. The work of these artists challenges heteropatriarchal framings of the Haitian Revolution as a project of liberation and opens new avenues for understanding that historical process in a diasporic context.

Rendering Revolution's use of Instagram as a platform for engaging in public-facing scholarship on colonial Haiti (Saint Domingue) is a double-edged sword, as is largely the experience for most users of social media these days. As a social media platform, Instagram was a forerunner in cultivating a popular sense of digital aesthetics and visual curation among users. Instagram's emphasis on visual content as its central form of data currency is reflected in the tiled presentation that serves as the "feed" of a given account. The "tiled" or "pieced" visual design of Instagram allows for a vibrant collage experience for visitors to the Rendering Revolution account. Users could see, for example, a new materialist analysis of a runaway slave advertisement from Haiti's colonial newsletter *Les Affiches Américaines*, directly next to (with no transition) an interview with contemporary fashion designer and visual artist Marielle Plaisir. The account on Instagram permits the stitching of content and an emphasis on the plurality and imperfection of seams— those nearly invisible sites of connection among pieces of information.

Content visibility on Instagram is, however, closely linked to "user engagement" in which posts and their promotion are contingent upon a "like and subscribe" information economy. These conditions (which determine the reach and volume of information diffusion) reflect how markets, trade, and distribution frameworks continue to play a significant role in shaping the various forms that public-facing scholarship can take. One of the impacts of the "like and subscribe" economy on the aesthetics of Rendering Revolution as a bilingual digital resource in English and Kreyòl is the length of posts. Instagram is not an application that is made for intensive reading. This is a result, in part, of how applications such as Instagram are designed—the purpose of an information feed is to facilitate the sustained consumption of content—in other words, the experience of scrolling. We know that users are not going to spend much time on a given post (sometimes no more than a second) and thus we use a short-form style of information presentation—typically no more than two hundred words per visual. The short-form nature of textual production via Instagram offers both affordances and limitations in terms of producing and circulating counter-histories. While Rendering Revolution's posts often cut straight to the "thesis," so to speak, there is less space for contextual framing, and thus the project relies on the knowledge and experiences

that the various audience members bring to their engagement with the content. In this way, while the project seeks to offer narratives about the Haitian Revolution that are typically marginalized and not broadly circulated, the use of Instagram also means accommodating its constraints in terms of how content can be shared with users.

The project is able to gauge engagement through the analytics on the back end. The collaborators can see which posts are popular and attracted the widest audiences, though that does not always shape the content that they post. The benefit of using social media is that they can engage with their audience, which includes many Haitian and Haitianist scholars (e.g., Marlene Daut, Julia Gaffield, Grégory Pierrot, Jasmine Claude Narcisse, etc.) and artists (e.g., Steve Baboun, Fabiola Jean-Louis, Tasha Dougé, Joanne Petit-Frère, Natacha Thys, etc.). This audience faithfully likes, comments, and shares the project content.

The biggest challenge with using social media is that the platforms are proprietary and operate according to algorithms that are inscrutable to users. Moreover, once content is posted on Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter), it no longer belongs to the project. These companies are for-profit entities and education is not their main priority, which sometimes puts scholars at odds with the very tools they are using to disseminate their content. The team at Rendering Revolution does not support many of the policies advanced by Meta and X, but nonetheless benefit from the use of these platforms.

A long-term goal is to create an exhibition inspired by the project. By sharing their artwork online, the project leaders won the trust of a number of Haitian artists, as well as artists like Leah Gordon and Firelei Báez, for whom Haiti figures prominently in their artwork. The exhibition will be a brick-and-mortar version of the curation that Rendering Revolution carries out on social media. The team at Rendering Revolution would also like to publish an edited volume of scholarly articles on Haitian visual culture. Rendering Revolution is a collective of intellectuals from whose scholarship the project can draw from for the volume. Moreover, the same way that the project has gained an audience among artists, it has gained a similar following among Haitian and Haitianist scholars who can contribute to the volume. The introduction will include a reflection co-written by co-founders Siobhan Meï and Jonathan Square on the use of social media as a tool of radical pedagogy.

Conclusion

Together, these examples represent various approaches to making the work of scholars in colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies available and accessible to the non-academic public. The authors study the types of textual and visual materials

with which scholars in these fields have traditionally engaged, but do so in new ways that expand the reach and possibilities for analysis of their research. Furthermore, they present the results of their work using interactive tools that can engage new audiences in a fashion that books and journal articles cannot.

The authors recognize that these are but a few examples of digital humanities applications and projects that have helped to build community understanding of the past. The future will surely bring additional projects, perhaps taking inspiration from those outlined here, that will address new methods of working with communities. Such future work could include using the methods discussed above as a framework to teaching basic data literacies to those eager to work with the written past.

Several of these projects suggest ways that students can play vital roles in digital scholarship related to early Latin America. Ticha, BDSAS, and coloniaLab have all positioned students as primary collaborators, engaging them in the practice of humanities scholarship in ways that go beyond the "subordinate roles" that students have often occupied in faculty-led research (Smith 2022, 61). In this sense, the practice of digital public scholarship within colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies provides means not only to project academic work beyond traditional institutional boundaries, but also to alter the fashion in which teaching and mentorship are conducted in these fields. In addition, these practices with students can be extended to include broader and more diverse communities outside of academia, which can offer perspectives that can enhance traditional archival research.

These projects also point to opportunities to consider the ethical dimensions of academic work. Framing scholarship as an activity that extends beyond the immediate environment of higher education raises questions about the social responsibilities involved in humanities research, as well as its potential to impact and benefit societies. Indeed, making primary sources available and accessible through contextualization and curation allows for increased ownership of and engagement with multiple histories. Through a commitment to producing scholarship for, and in collaboration with, diverse communities, the projects described in this article suggest models for conducting the work of colonial and nineteenth-century Latin American studies in the public sphere.

Competing interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

Acknowledgments

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