Preserving Memory
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When I began to plan the SALALM LVI annual meeting, I knew immediately that memory would be central to the theme. Memory and memory studies have emerged as fields critical to our understanding of social history. Nowhere is that more true than in Latin America where cultural and historical memory often lies in sharp contrast to the official history. As librarians, we are trained to be impartial recorders or collectors of history. Yet, the selections we make leave an indelible mark on recorded history. Undoubtedly, the sources we choose to preserve, or not preserve, today will influence future perception of current events.

In shaping the SALALM LVI program, I selected papers that addressed a variety of issues related both to memory and human rights. In keeping with SALALM tradition, the program also featured papers and presentations focused more generally on trends in library services and collection development. Film, a medium vital to the preservation of memory and human rights, was prominent throughout the program. Along with a panel of documentary filmmakers, the program included screenings of documentaries with accompanying question and answer sessions. To set the tone, the conference began with a stirring keynote address by Peter Kornbluh who recounted his work to declassify documents related to human rights abuses in Latin America.

This volume features a selection of theme-related papers centered on the role of libraries and archives, both physical and digital, in shaping and preserving memory; cultural initiatives implemented to preserve memory; and examples of museums and archives in Latin America and the Caribbean who are working to preserve memory.

Amongst the papers compiled here, you will find two presented by our 2011 Presidential Fellows, Corina Norro and Kumaree Ramtahal, who describe work at the Archivo Nacional de la Memoria de Argentina and the Indian Caribbean Museum of Trinidad and Tobago, respectively. Also featured are papers by ENLACE invitees Graciela G. Barcala de Moyano and Mercedes Tinoco Espinoza, who address documentation and description of collections and government and social initiatives to preserve and promote cultural memory.

Amongst the remaining papers are a moving account of Professor William Sill’s heroic efforts in Argentina; memory communicated through visual arts in Oaxaca; two papers documenting the preservation of memory in Chile and amongst Chilean exiles; a review of publications produced by human rights organizations in Mexico; documenting the Haitian American community in Miami; illegal immigration into Trinidad and Tobago; and a look at political memory in Nicaragua through visual images.
As many of the papers presented here illustrate, we are just beginning to address the need of documenting human rights abuses. There are still many questions related to the acquisition, description, and preservation of sources. It is my sincerest hope that this volume adds to that conversation. The task of preserving memory is great and full of challenges and pitfalls. Only through sheer tenacity and continued effort can we assure the preservation of human rights abuses in Latin America.

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