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[Record Keeping & Radical Collections: Blog with reflections from the CAM 2018 Conference](#)

By Karen Limón Corrales, February 2018 CAM Fellow

Growing up undocumented in a working class, mixed-status family, questions of injustice were often on my mind, as was the perceived pressure to pursue a career that would make my parents' sacrifices worth it. When I began my undergraduate education, I naturally chose Political Science as my major—I dreamt initially of going on to law school, defending and supporting my parents and somehow, through my success, proving myself worthy of citizenship. In my many classes on constitutional law and political theory, however, I felt isolated from my peers whose relationship to the bureaucracy of the legal system was different from mine and who felt safer talking about their experiences than I could.

In my third year of college, I began interning at the Center for the Study of Political Graphics (CSPG), a political poster archive that approaches materials in the collection as historical documents and works of art. It was a stroke of luck that led me there, a mixture of pending major requirements, astrological guidance, and a quick search for the word "political" on my school's Career Center website. I didn't know what an archive was and didn't understand words in the job description like "cataloguing" or "preservation." The organization's website, however, advertised an upcoming exhibition titled *No Human Being is Illegal* using Yolanda Lopez's well-known artwork, "Who's the Illegal Alien, Pilgrim?" I had never heard my humanity defended in such a beautiful and assertive way, and Lopez's defiant mix of anger and humor transcended immigration narratives I was used to. Despite my confusion around what the work entailed, I was allured by the images and applied.



“Bigger Than Any Border,” Julio Salgado

Once the archival internship began, I quickly fell in love with CSPG’s collection of social movement prints and posters. Through the task of cataloguing the collection, I became exposed to migrant artists documenting their own existence as well as that of dynamic grassroots movements for change. The first time I came across Julio Salgado’s artwork, I felt empowered by his colorful characters who boldly exclaimed, “Undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic!” and “No Sir, I will NOT show you my papers.” Through these vibrant and seductive artworks, I learned about immigrant communities actively resisting xenophobic policies like Arizona’s SB1070 and the Secure Communities program. By showing that others like me were openly fighting to defend our humanity, the artwork allowed me to overcome feelings of shame and isolation.

Learning the practice and theory of archiving was life changing, especially because the posters I worked with provided alternative realities to me for the first time. In addition to teaching me more about my own identities, the collection exposed me to struggles for justice all over the world, from Zapatistas in Chiapas to Palestinians in Gaza and beyond. The artwork documented an intimate side of political history I’d never learned about in my classes, one where organized groups of people challenge their oppressors and win. For someone of undocumented status, documenting these victories was a new and radical possibility that changed my personal, political, and professional trajectory.

About the Author/CAM Fellow:

***Karen Limón Corrales** received her B.A. in Political Science and English Literature at California State University, Long Beach. She was a Getty Multicultural Undergraduate Intern in 2014 at the Center for the Study of Political Graphics and has since worked at various museums in communications, education, and visitor engagement. She currently works at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.*