Mapping Inequality

Background
The 1929 stock market crash devastated America’s economy and triggered the beginning of a 10 year economic depression. During this time, American families were at risk of losing homes to foreclosure. To tackle the mortgage crises and restart the Great Depression economy, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created federal loan programs to refinance troubled residential homes.

The United States government established the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) to determine potential refinance investments by assessing housing and neighborhood conditions. HOLC created maps and area descriptions to describe the features and threats to a particular area; neighborhoods were graded based on the racial/ethnic presence, high and low-income families, and environmental problems. Referring to map shading, grading, and area descriptions, financial institutions made decisions on loan sizes, refinancing opportunities, etc. Unbeknownst to HOLC and the federal government, the 1939 surveys would have major effects on American cities, especially during Urban Renewal in the 1950’s. In short, HOLC orchestrated the denial of financial services based on race and ethnic background, better known as redlining.

Objectives
Over the past 4 years, teams of archivists have digitized portions of National Archives RG195: General Records of the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation [HOLC]. Now that the records are available digitally, students and faculty members are working to curate the collection and “data-fy” the information contained within. This involves extracting text from digitized 75 year old records, designing queryable databases to house the information, and disseminating the information so it is publically accessible. With partners from the University of Richmond, John Hopkins University, and Virginia Tech, the Digital Curation Innovation Center plans to georeference the historical maps and display them on Google Maps, an innovative digital curation technique to visualize changing American neighborhoods.

Theme
Racial Zoning

Stakeholders
Marginalized Communities

University of Richmond
Virginia Tech
John Hopkins University
NSF

**Data**
Archival Images
Excel Sheets
Txt Files
Program Script Files

**Final Product**
Georeferenced map connected to back end database.

**Skills**
Digitization
Optical Character Recognition
Data Analytics / Data Management
Geographical Information System referencing
Python/SQL Programming

**Software**
AbbyyFine Reader
ARCGis
Tableau
R
SQL Workbench

**Professional Development**
Papers
Conferences
National Project Recognition