

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

AbbyFine Reader

ARCGis

Tableau

R

SQL Workbench

Professional Development

Papers

Conferences

National Project Recognition