Of Locker Rooms and Silos: What if We Had Digital Archives in Places No One Expects Them?

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Goals of Talk

- Overview of one research project involving archival resources
- Limitations of existing archival resources for this project
- Speculations on how digital resources would change this project and how I would change it
But first...

- My Debts to Librarians and Archivists
Overview of Project

- Building the Federal Schoolhouse: Localism and the Political Development of Public Education
- How do local politics change as federal officials increasingly make more authoritative decisions about public education?
Archival Resources for One Dimension of Book

- “Massive Resistance” to School Desegregation, 1955-65
  - Alexandria City Public School records
  - Virginia State Archives
  - Federal Archives
  - U.S. Court Decisions and Proceedings
  - Special Collections and Local Collections
Desegregation and Massive Resistance

- School Vouchers: State of Virginia paid families to send children to private schools
- My question: Who used the vouchers?
- Were they influenced primarily by racial dimensions of the conflict or class dimensions of private schooling?
Archival Materials from ACPS Record Center

- Written descriptions of school boundaries, from 1959-1965
- Name and address of each black child seeking to attend a non-black school.
- Name and address of each voucher recipient
- An opportunity to spatially locate children within the school system, using GIS software, and track entries and exits
From this...
The Process is Painful

- First, convert archival map to GIS-usable scan
- Electronically draw attendance zone boundaries on GIS map, following both current and archival maps.
- Enter name and address lists of desegregation and voucher students by hand
Combining with Non-Electronic Data from Federal Sources

- 1960 Census of Housing
  - Able to explore racial and class dimensions of neighborhoods at the block level.
  - But....
The Pain, Part Two

- Convert Census Bureau archival map to GIS-usable scan
- Align Census Bureau map with Alexandria map
- Key enter housing and race data for each block by hand,
- Link up blocks with geo-coded address lists of voucher recipients and desegregated students.
Housing Cost Index is a weighted average rank of rental/homeownership costs.

Figure 8: Alexandria, Virginia
Housing Cost Index by Census Block
The Upside

- Alexandria archives represent a rich repository of archival information and data virtually untapped.
- New perspectives – both historic and contemporary -- on an important story
- Applications of new data tools to archival-based information
The Downside: Where Did the Time Go?

- Began this GIS investigation in 2004
- Time spent gathering complete data from archives
- Map preparation, data preparation and data entry
- Problems with historical maps and GIS-related issues
- Technical issues (geo-coding, orphaned addresses, etc)
Locker rooms and silos

- Location of Alexandria City Public Schools Records Center
  - Storage room converted from a locker room adjacent to a gymnasium in a middle school.
  - Knock on Door 7 of the gym and ask for Val

- The record center contains the administrative working life of an on-going enterprise, but has valuable historical importance

- A need to link these non-university based archival sources to scholarly communities
The Silo Problem

- “Off the grid” means the archives are siloed.
- How can I view these archives, both topically and substantively, relative to other archival sources that contain relevant information from the same time period, held by a different entity?
- Eg, What do the Federal or state archives have to say about problems or issues confronting locals?
Conclusion

- Rich archival resources outside of library settings
- Digitization of archives needs to both uncover these resources and link them up in content and topic with other archival sources from the same time window.