

Anne Bonds

Geography 441: The Geography of Cities and Metro Areas

Assignment: "Milwaukee Digital Justice Project: Mapping urban (in)justice along North Avenue"

Digital Humanities tool/method: Storymap JS, field observation and landscape analysis, and interviews

Description:

This digital project involves the development of a story map exploring urban processes and (in)justice along North Avenue in Milwaukee. The aim was to produce a **counter map** (a map that reveals and contests dominant power structures) of North Avenue illuminating urban histories and geographies that might otherwise not be visible. The project focused on North Avenue as a major urban thoroughfare, once the northern boundary of industrial Milwaukee, that is illustrative of an array of urban processes. North Avenue bi-sects the city, linking the prosperous and predominately white Lakefront and Eastside to neighborhoods of color that have experienced decades of disinvestment. Many large urban renewal projects in the city crosscut North Avenue and, more recently, redevelopment and gentrification are transforming some North Avenue neighborhoods. Students selected a primary theme to orient their projects (housing justice, racial justice, transit justice, and environmental justice) based upon their interests and major focus. Drawing from tools of urban geographic analysis (field observation, landscape analysis, interviews, data collection) established in scaffolded assignments, students submitted a 2-page analysis of a site or location along North Avenue that is instructive of broader urban processes and patterns of injustice.

Students developed their contribution to the story map drawing from research conducted in three urban field assignments:

- **Field Assignment #1: Urban Encounter** – This assignment required observation and analysis of the social and physical urban environment along North Avenue and at one specific intersection.
- **Field Assignment #2: Urban Knowledges and Experiences**– This assignment involved interviews with individuals active in urban governance in student research sites.
- **Field Assignment #3: Urban Structures and Contexts** – This field assignment required students to situate their field sites on North Avenue within broader scales and processes that produce urban space (planning and policy across scales, historical trends, larger social, economic, and political dynamics).

Learning Outcomes:

There are two primary learning goals for this digital project. First, the project supports the development of urban geographic research skills and basic competency with a story map platform. Second, the project fosters experiential learning outside of the classroom. Students studying urban geography often learn about urban dynamics in theoretical terms that can seem disconnected from

the city and its inhabitants. This assignment encourages students to connect theories of urban development, change, and inequality with research grounded in the Milwaukee urban landscape.

Students completing this course and the digital project were expected to be able to:

- Identify differing conceptual approaches to understanding the city;
- Explain the relationship between social processes and urban forms;
- Develop introductory competencies in field methods and digital tools for urban geographic research; and
- Cite examples of existing theory and research in the field of urban geography