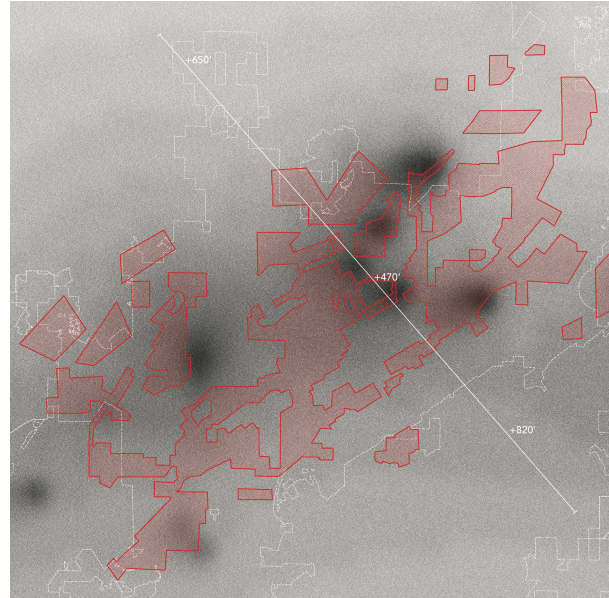Barnard and Columbia Colleges Architecture Department
Summer Term A ARCH UN3312.01 Special Topics in Architecture
Meeting Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00pm – 4:10pm EST
Instructor: Daisy Ames, daisy.ames@columbia.edu
Office Hours: by appointment

Housing: Mapping Metrics and Narratives

Google base map of Morningside and South Harlem area, to be researched and re-presented in this course.

Map of Birmingham, Alabama formerly Redlined area overlaid with the US EPA Air Quality Index ©StudioAmes

Maps are abstractions. Through the process of mapmaking, an environment's visible and invisible elements are translated into a coded two-dimensional representation. At each step of this transformation, the mapmaker decides which information is to be edited in or edited out. Maps are thus subjective representations that bolster or conceal certain narratives. Like any artistic, architectural, or urban representation, a map is influenced by its maker's socio-political moment and, in turn, the map influences its viewer's perception of a space's future. Students in this studio will study maps of the past, specifically the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) maps, which were part of a federally-funded project to assess neighborhoods' credit-worthiness, a program that effectively determined individuals' access to housing along racial lines. In 1936, Morningside Heights and South Harlem, the neighborhoods in which Barnard and Columbia University are located, were mapped by the HOLC. Students will be asked to interrogate the subjectivity of these maps, and to compare the maps' assumptions with contemporary metrics and local narratives. This hybrid theory and practice course will consist of one one-part lectures, reading discussions, and presentations, and one-part student-led research and map-making initiatives.