# REDLINING IN LITERATURE:
MAPPING BLACK-AUTHORED MANHATTAN
BY TORI HOOVER

PROJECT SUMMARY

For this project, I wanted to interrogate how red-lining impacts characters in fiction.. To do this, I examined a selection of New York City-based novels spanning roughly across the last century: *Plum Bun* (1928) by Jessie Redmon Fauset, *The Blacker the Berry* (1929) by Wallace Thurman, *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) by James Baldwin, *Open City* (2011) by Teju Cole, and *Behold the Dreamers* (2017) by Imbolo Mbue. I mapped the walks taken by characters in these novels, hoping to consider these routes not only as representations of the city over time but also as a reflection of the characters' internal states. By mapping these routes, I aimed to consider a larger question I have, a question about the relationship between race and walking: when the characteristic *flâneur* makes his personal map by being invisible within the space of the city, a silent and leisurely observer, is it possible for more visible non-white, non-male characters to occupy this same role?
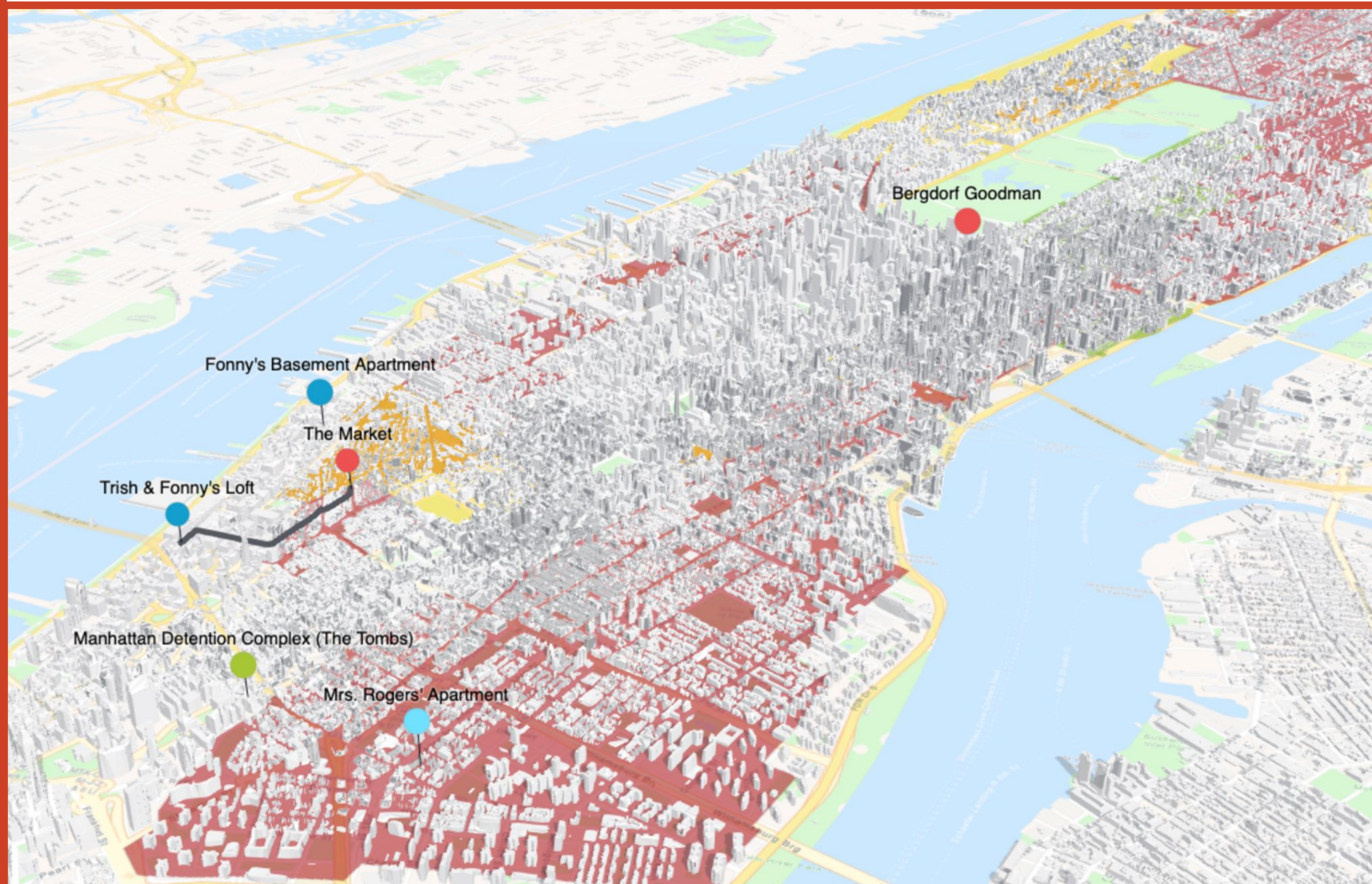
ABSTRACT

This project illustrates the way segregation practices, particularly the practice of red lining, has impacted the lived spatial lives of Black individuals — both in fiction and in reality. The project maps Manhattan-based Black novels to consider the legacy of red-lining across eras and demonstrates that though the practice is no longer in use, its impact is still prevalent: In northern Manhattan, for instance, rent prices still roughly correspond to red-lining districts.

DATA OVERVIEW

To collect this data, I sorted through a number of books — not just the three above, though I ultimately narrowed down my mapping in the interest of time. I took note of any walking scenes and assembled all walks in Google Sheets, organizing them accordingly.

My columns were as follows:

- Book title
- Author
- Character(s)
- Year of publication
- Route taken
- Route direction
- OLC plus code
- Page of occurrence
- Text quotation

I also assigned a number to each location, with whole numbers representing destinations and decimals representing roads specified between the two locations.

MAPPING PROCESS

While my initial project utilized ARCGIS Storymaps, I was dissatisfied with the basic capabilities of those features. For this new iteration, I chose to map my routes using an in-browser GeoJSON program I found through GitHub.
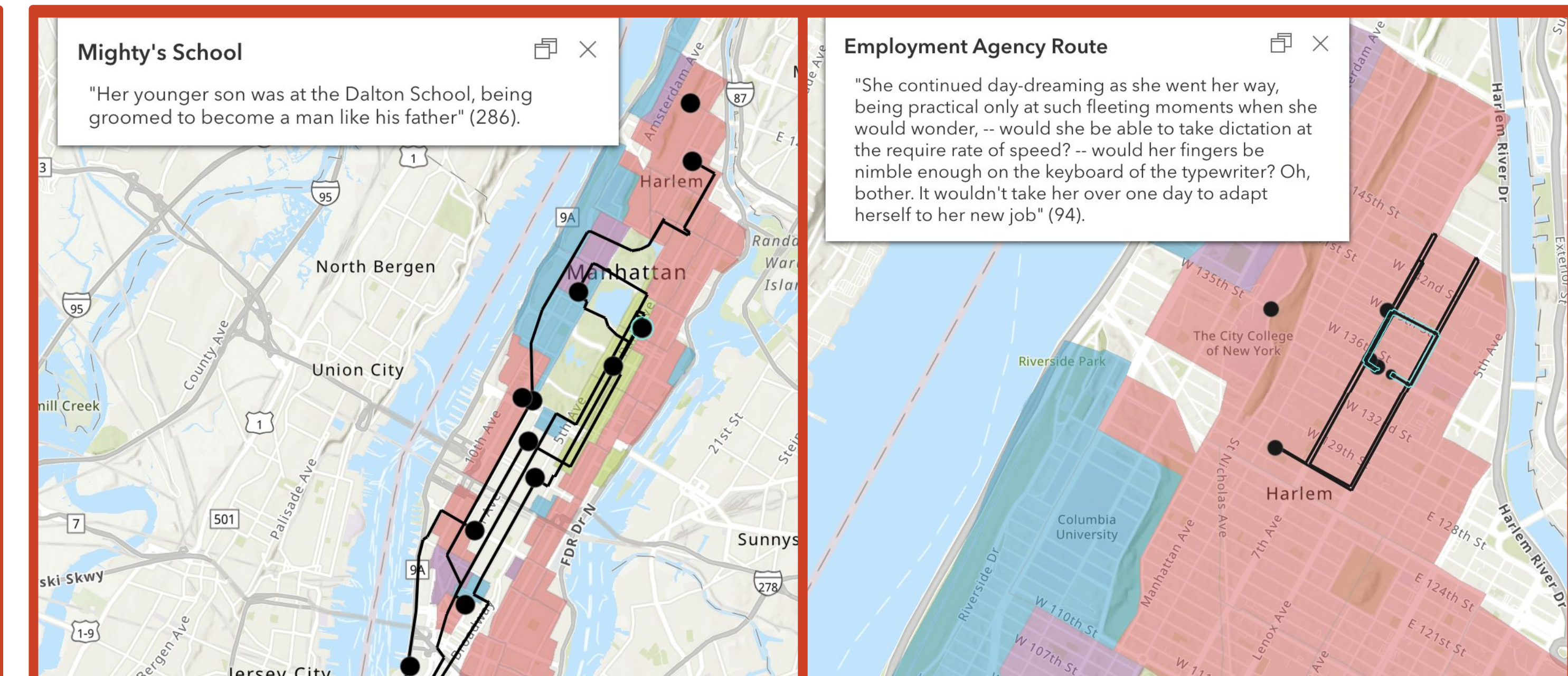
I then exported these to ArcGIS and layered them in Map Viewer, utilizing an open source GeoJSON file provided by Robert K. Nelson and LaDale Winling's "Mapping Inequality" project.

At points I considered utilizing a 3D model of New York provided by the Department of City Planning (see left), but ultimately I did away with this feature, as it slowed my map's loading to a glacial pace.

MAPPING RESULTS

Unsurprisingly, these maps vary greatly in scope. There is a clear correlation between the year in which the novel takes place and the total area wandered.

While I expected this result, I did not expect the extent to which redlining plays an invisible and persevering hand in these texts. For instance, much of *If Beale Street Could Talk* takes place outside of Harlem, yet when I layered my maps with red-lining data, I was surprised at how the novel still takes place almost entirely in red-lined districts.

Mighty's School
"Her younger son was at the Dalton School, being groomed to become a man like his father" (286).

Employment Agency Route
"She continued day-dreaming as she went her way, being practical only at such fleeting moments when she would wonder, -- would she be able to take dictation at the require rate of speed? -- would her fingers be nimble enough on the keyboard of the typewriter? Oh, bother. It wouldn't take her over one day to adapt herself to her new job" (94).

TAKEAWAYS

The formatting for this project is still largely a work in progress. While I have learned a great deal about mapping in general and ArcGIS in specific, I have still not yet identified exactly the right mode of presentation for this data.

For instance, the project's current format does not allow for a thorough analysis of the textual content of these novels (specifically characters' internal monologues), which its former iteration did. I remain interested in illustrating and unraveling the relationship between geographical exploration and self-exploration in these texts.

As I close this phase of my project, it's clear to me that there's a clear correlation in these maps between year and total area wandered. This is is not unrelated to New York City's history of redlining and segregation. Nor are the gender dynamics in the various periods these novels cover irrelevant -- indeed, one can easily note that the novels' Black male characters have more freedom to wander, even if that wandering is fraught.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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