

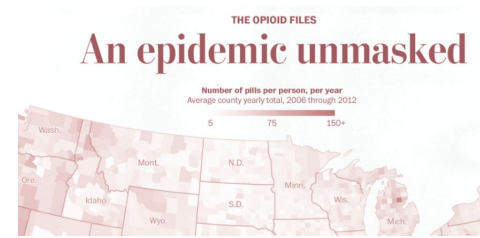
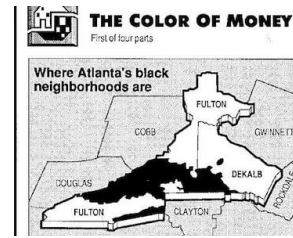
How Journalists Mine the ACS to Tell Data-Driven Stories

Jeff South | Virginia Commonwealth University

John C. Finn | Christopher Newport University

Ryan Murphy | *The Virginian-Pilot*

Rise of data journalism



History of newsrooms using data

Social science journalism, precision journalism,
analytic journalism, computer-assisted reporting

From ‘nerd in corner’ to essential skill
for every journalist (and most big stories)

Why it’s important: Moving beyond ‘he said, she said’ stories;
stories supported by analysis as well as anecdotes;
getting us closer to truth

A journalist's approach to data

Data: More work from home in US, Virginia and DC area

By KELLY BOOTH November 26, 2019

RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — More Americans are working from home, and that's especially true in Virginia and in the Washington, D.C., metro area, according to new data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Numbers alone don't make a story; a story needs people. Data can help us find the most representative people – the people who best illustrate a trend.

What comes first – the data or the story idea?

- Sometimes, it's the data (like poverty rates)
- But ideally, the story idea comes first, and then reporters find the data to explore that idea.

Lebanese Americans Support Reforms in Former Homeland

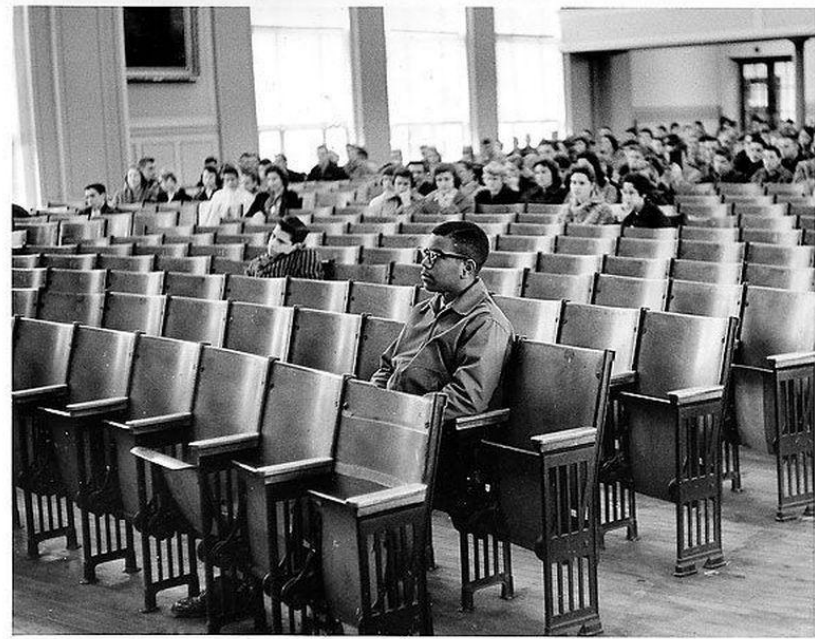
Americans of Lebanese descent have been closely following protests in that Middle Eastern country, where the prime minister resigned.

It's no surprise that many people in the U.S. have been riveted by the developments: A half-million Americans have Lebanese ancestry. They make up the largest Arab ethnic group in the U.S., [according to the U.S. Census Bureau.](#)

How we arrived at this story

Norfolk was a testbed for many racist policies that spread nationwide, including:

- The first federal public housing (under the Housing Act of 1949)
- The first city to be released from federal school integration requirements (busing mandates)

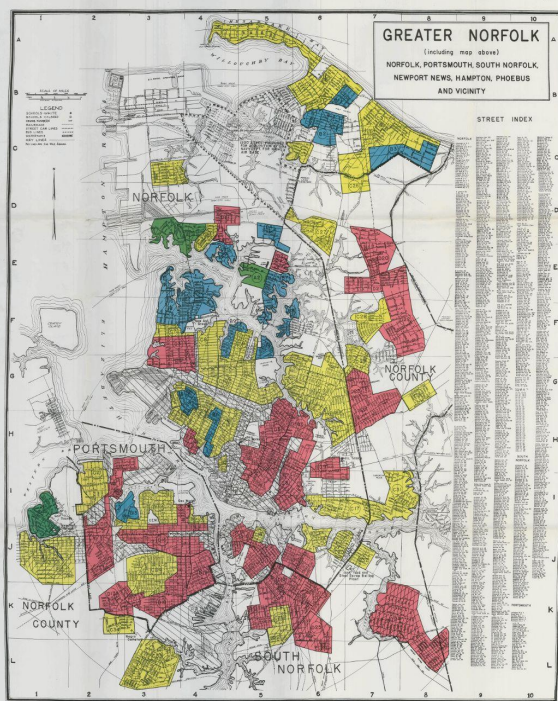


Louis Cousins on Feb. 1, 1959, the first day when the schools reopened after Massive Resistance.
(Photo by J.T. McClenny, The Ledger-Star)

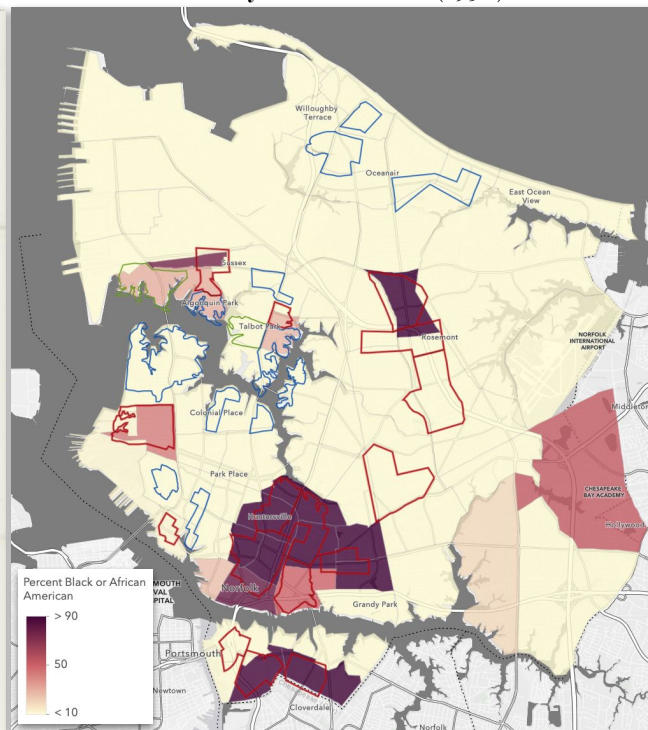
In our daily reporting, it became clear the scars of racial segregation were still visible on the face of the city — and still informed much of the public policy and discussion among city leaders today.

Why data was important for our storytelling

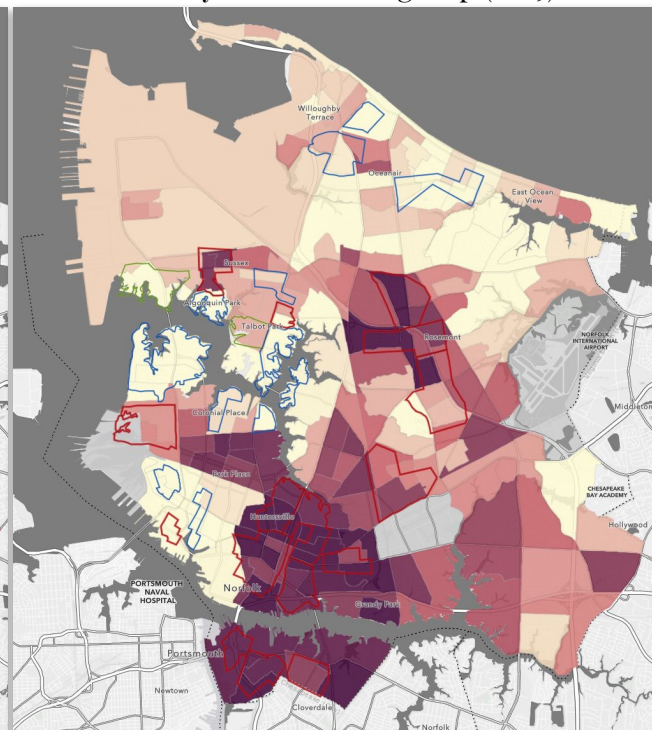
1940 “Redlining” map of Norfolk



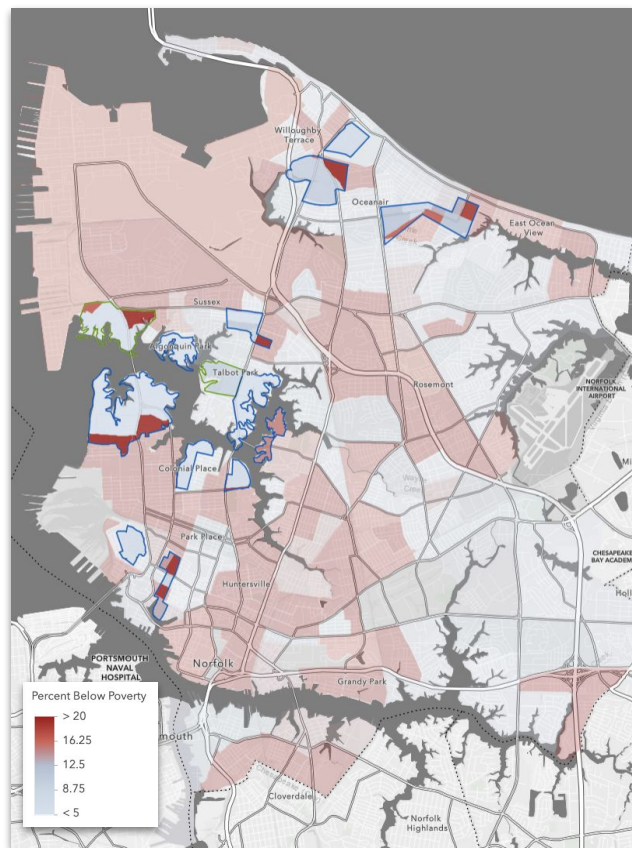
Race by census tract (1950)



Race by census block group (2019)



Beyond race: cascading impacts of segregation



A- and B-Rated Neighborhoods:

70% White

Poverty Rate: 10%

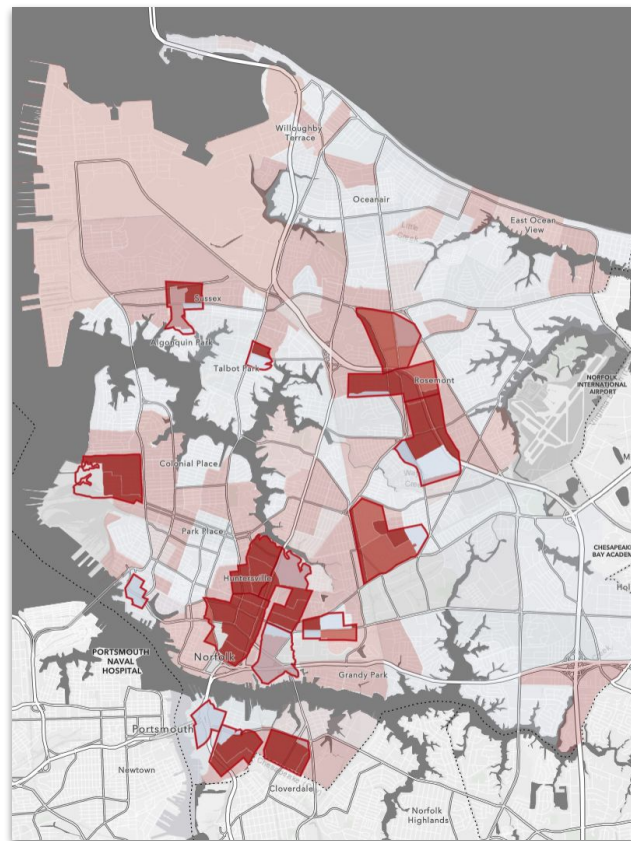
Median Home Value:
\$245,000

D-Rated (i.e. Redlined) Neighborhoods:

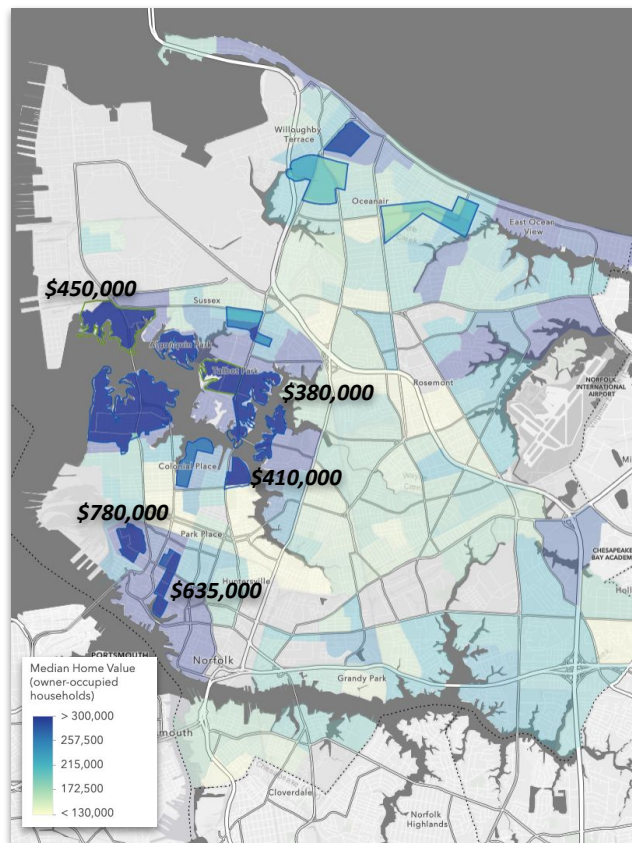
70% Black/African American

Poverty Rate: 25%

Median Home Value:
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Beyond race: cascading impacts of segregation



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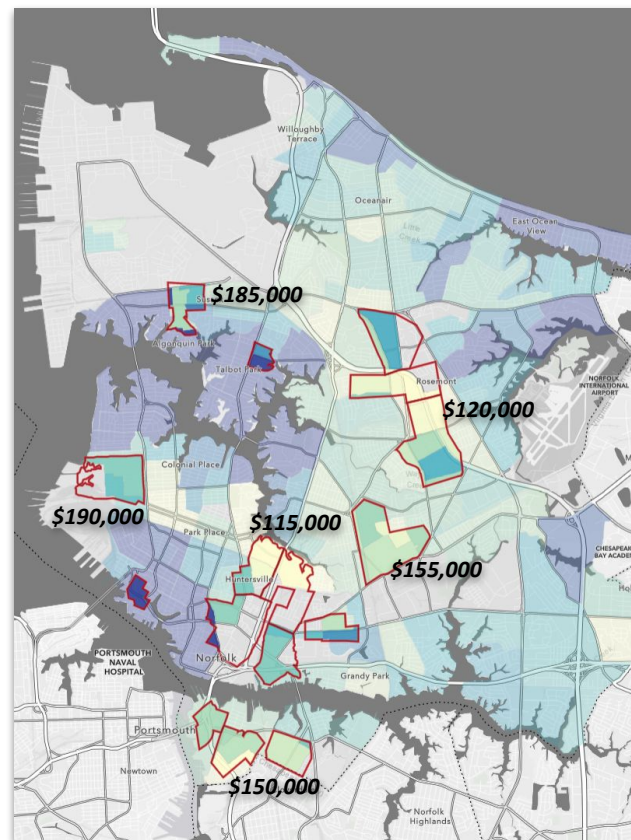
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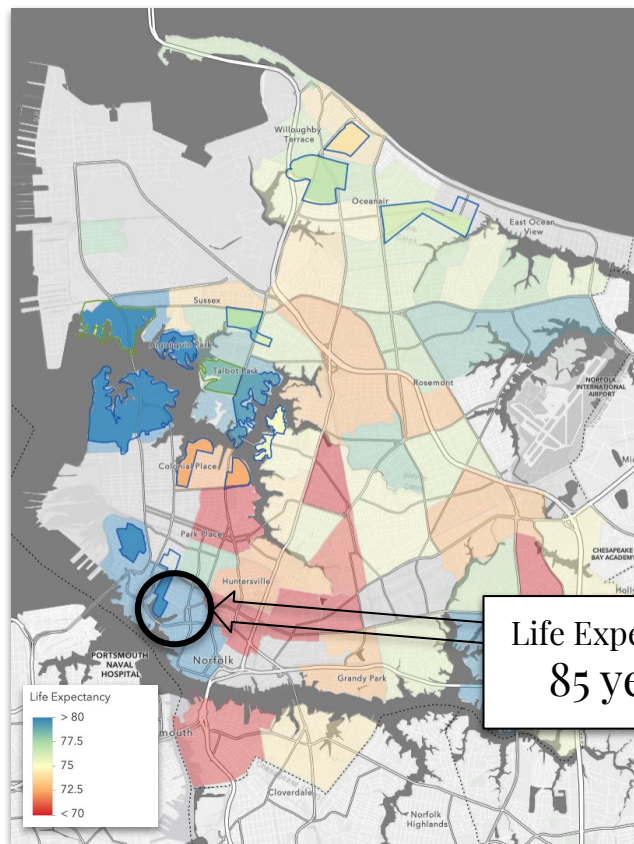
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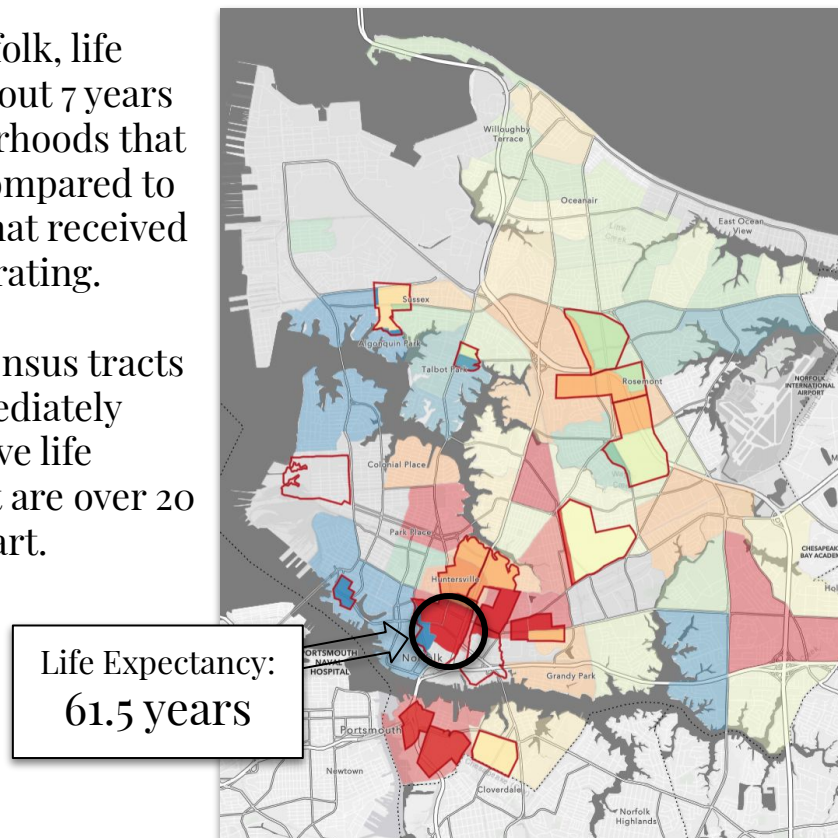


Race & redlining beyond the ACS

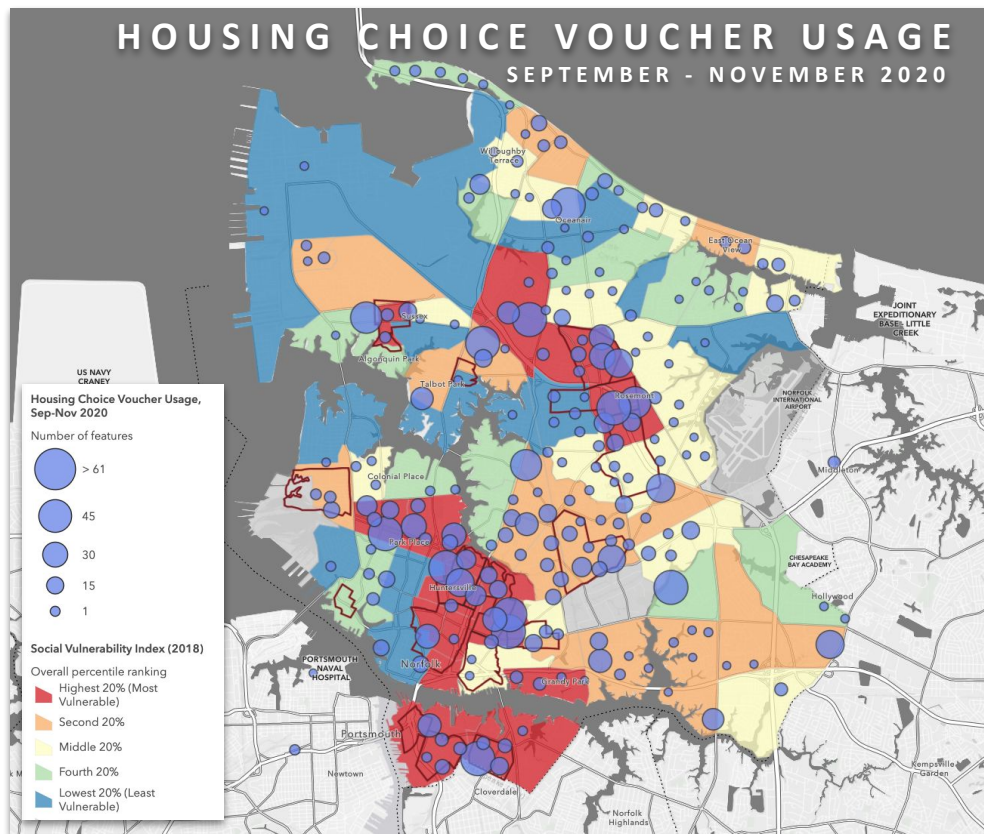


Today in Norfolk, life expectancy is about 7 years lower in neighborhoods that were redlined compared to neighborhoods that received the highest rating.

In some cases, census tracts that are immediately adjacent have life expectancies that are over 20 years apart.



Using the ACS to analyze patterns in housing voucher usage



According to our analysis:

>75% of vouchers are used in census tracts that are disproportionately non-white

>60% are used in tracts with poverty rates above the city-wide average

>70% are used in the 40% most socially vulnerable census tracts

Only 5% are used in the 20% least vulnerable tracts

Why the data isn't the story - or at least, not the only story



Shante Brown and her five children had to move out of public housing using a housing choice voucher.

Officials sold residents on the vouchers by telling them they could use them anywhere, including nicer neighborhoods.

Brown had to call 150 landlords all over the city before finding someone who would take her voucher. Her kids still go to segregated schools.

(Photo by Kaitlin McKeown/Virginia Media)