

TimeMapping a Library of Congress Collection: “Camilo José Vergara Photographs-Tracking Time to Document America's Post-Industrial Cities”

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Abstract: The Library of Congress’ Prints and Photographs Division possesses a collection of photographs taken by Chilean-American photographer Camilo José Vergara. There are over 5000 photographs at present and the collection is expected to increase to 10,000 photographs. Many of these consist of time-lapse sequences of individual locations taken in US inner cities from the 1970s to the present. The sequences document the changing nature of these communities. They also display diverse aspects of African-American and Hispanic creativity in creating art and adapting old buildings to new purposes. Vergara was a pioneer in bringing much of this material to public attention.

I investigated the following question: How does one optimally take Vergara’s photographs of locations and create timelines to display each sequence of photographs next to a map of the geographic location photographed?

To answer this question, I used a number of tools. First, I standardized Vergara’s sample photo metadata, using OpenRefine. Then, I used Google Maps and a latitude/longitude locating website to pinpoint the exact coordinates of 28 of Vergara’s photograph sites. After these two steps were complete, I experimented with various applications for displaying maps and timelines. I chose TimeMapper, an open-source application. While imperfect, this program easily displayed all the photographs corresponding with maps of the locations. I learned two lessons from this project: 1) Keep experimenting (When installation of one application failed, TimeMapper provided an acceptable alternative); 2) Reach out for help (I contacted the co-creator of TimeMapper, and suggested refinements for the future when funds are available).

About the Author:

Ariel Segal is a Digital Conversion Technician at the Library of Congress. He rotates among different divisions of the Library, supporting digitization of collections so that they will be available to the public. In addition to digitizing collections, he also creates and edits metadata related to the collection items. He has worked on maps, serials, prints, photographs, and manuscripts. Most recently, he has assisted the Manuscript Division in transferring the papers of Theodore Roosevelt and African-American civil rights activist Mary Church Terrell from microfilm to digital format. Ariel previously worked for the Smithsonian Institution Archives, surveying born-digital collections across various Smithsonian units. He has an MLS, specializing in Archives, and an BA and MA in History, specializing in the History of Science, all from the University of Maryland. He has processed the papers of University of Maryland historian of science Dr. Stephen G. Brush, and collaborated with Dr. Brush in the publication of the book *Making 20th Century Science: How Theories Became Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2015). He recently completed the University of Maryland iSchool’s post-masters’ Digital Curation for Information Professionals (DCIP) Certificate Program. This poster summarizes his DCIP capstone project.