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Prospectus

Digital redlining re-invents redlining for a culture that has come to rely on complex algorithms for making choices based on the huge amounts of information stored in databases. Their information is queried in ways that depend on specific values and beliefs, but those values and beliefs are often unrecognized by the people who create the algorithms. Not only are the creators of the algorithms often unaware of the values and beliefs built into their black boxes, but also the people affected by the “outputs” of these boxes are unable to know how they work. The problem becomes even more complex when we realize that there are programs like Hadoop that integrate different databases and create masses of information that can be embedded with prejudice, ignorance, injustice, and inaccuracy. The threat of this new form of redlining is a serious one, and an example of how the assumptions of “data-driven” projects can illustrate what is at stake.

Currently, Macomb is entering a project called “Guided Pathways,” that attempts to have people graduate in fewer years with fewer “wasted” credits. This data-driven project provides an example of how class biases keep working class students from the variety of courses offered at elite schools. It tracks students, creates rigid pathways to follow, and leads students into narrowly scripted educational pathways. By keeping students unaware of other ideas about what “waste” means or about how the working

class is kept in its place by class consciousness, the program amounts to a kind of “digital redlining” that keeps us in our place, a “place” that is no longer geographic, but a fixed place in the class structure of America.

275 words