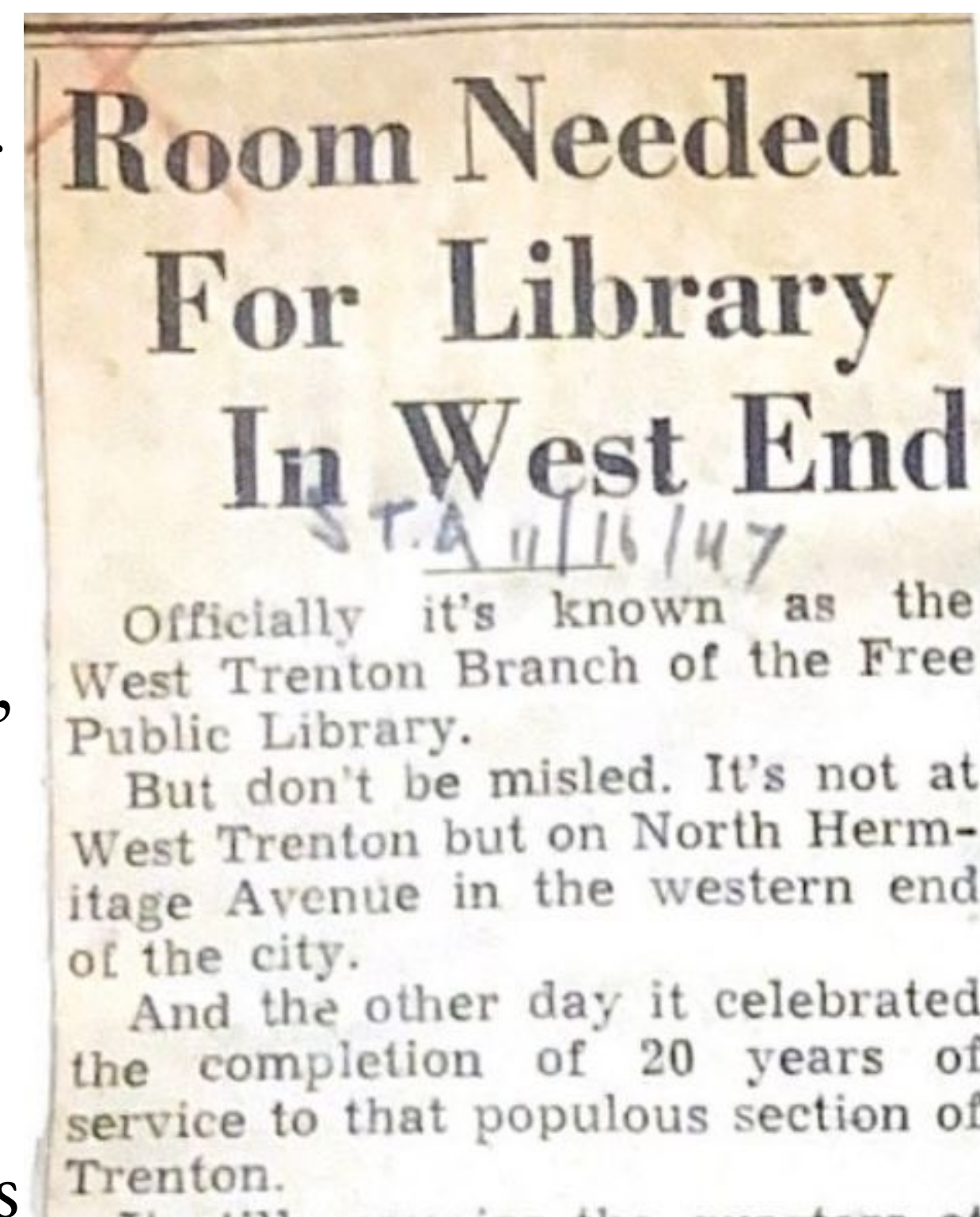


Mapping Trenton's Library Closures: An in-progress, preliminary study of the impact of Trenton's branch libraries closures on climate resilience

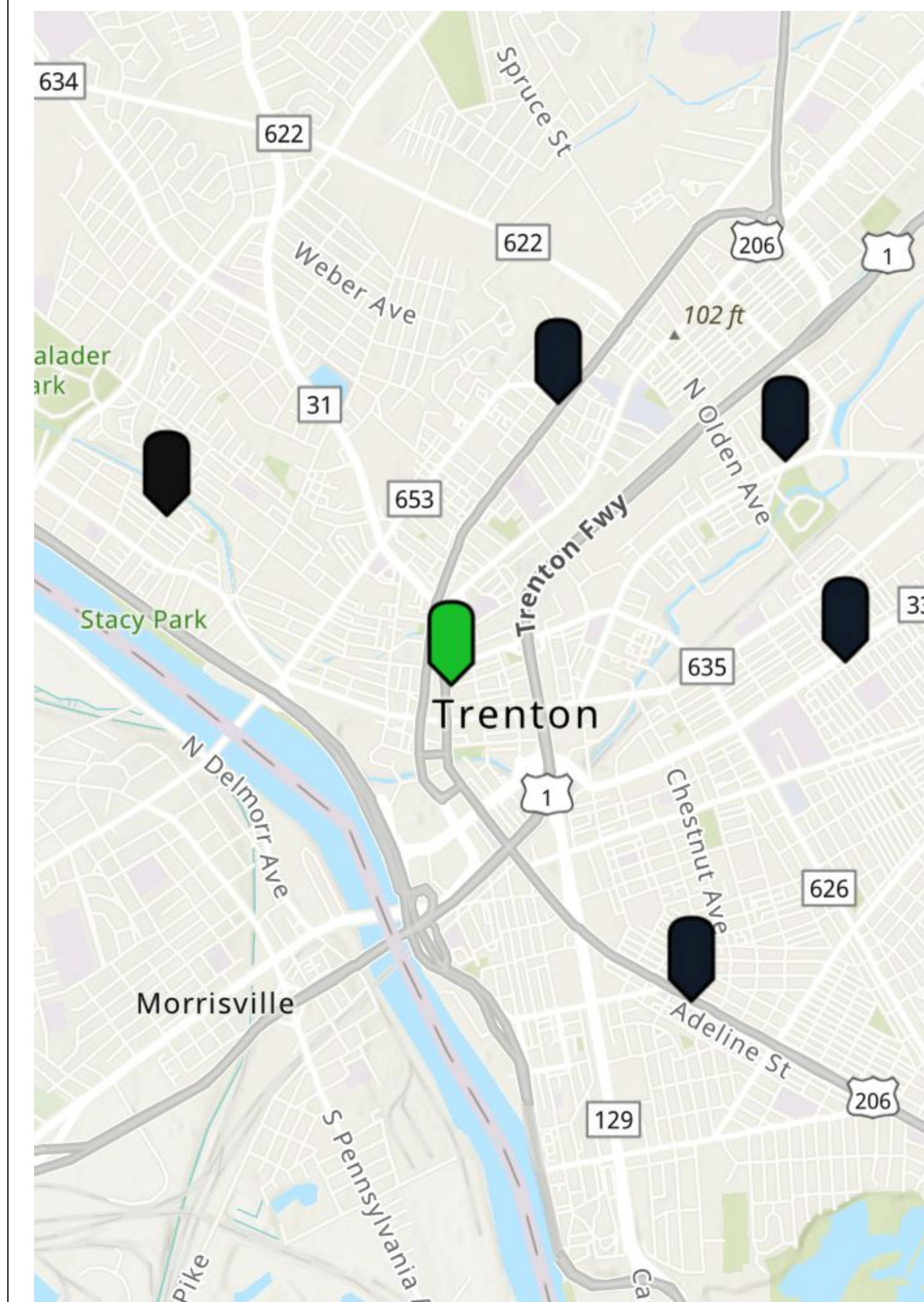
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Introduction

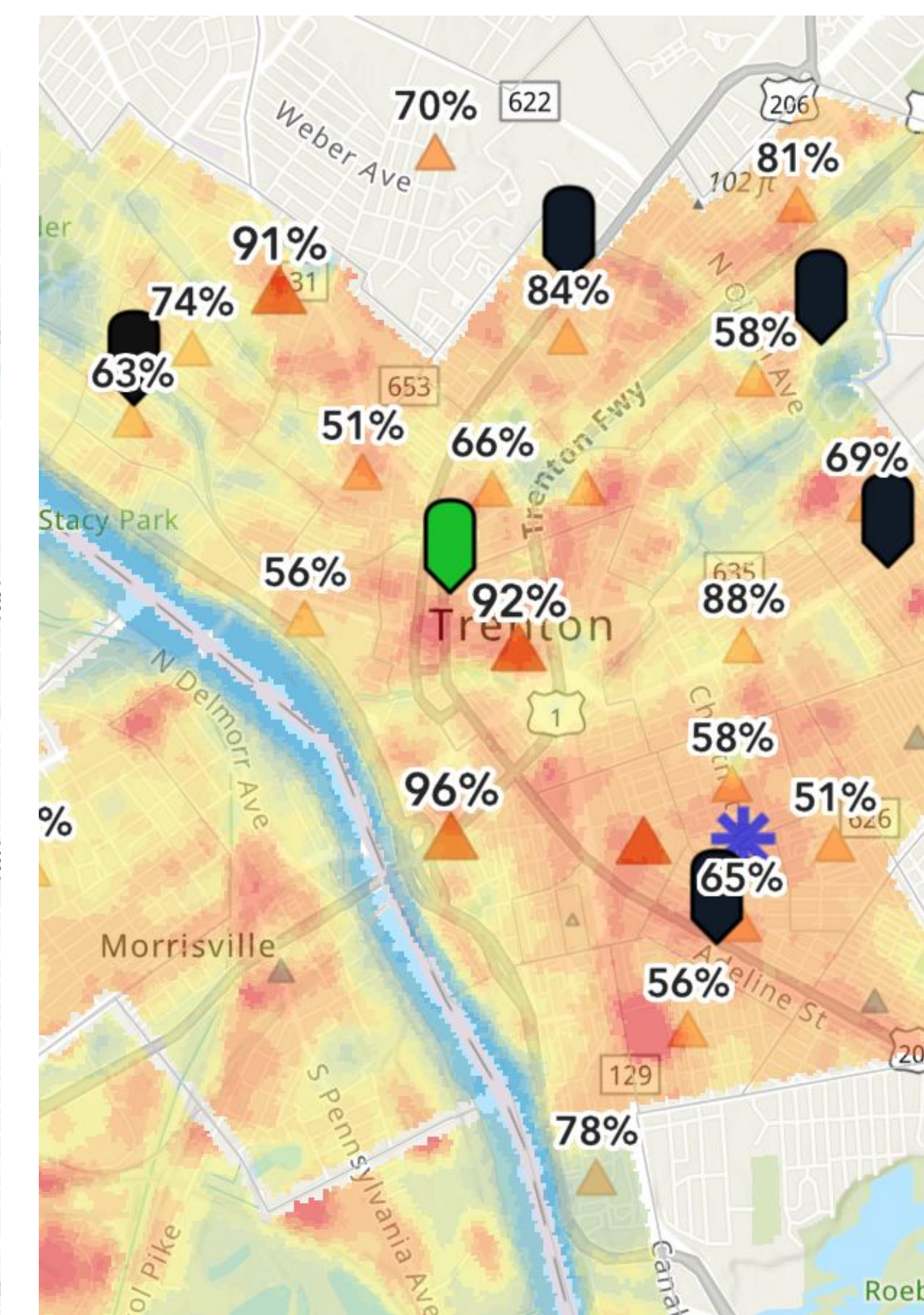
This poster represents the beginning of research into the history as well as the social and environmental implications concerning closings of five of the six branches of the Trenton Free Public Library (TFPL) by 2010. The branches, once popular public institutions and resources began to close in the mid-1980s with North Trenton closing first, followed by Skelton, Briggs, Cadwalader, and East Trenton branches (represented by the black dots in the findings section). The only remaining open branch is the Main Library (represented by the green dot in the findings section). The history of the closing requires more critical historical research as there were many national political and economic trends to defund and/or question/reassess a library's utility in the second half of the 20th century as well as broad social information behavior changes toward information seeking via television and then digitally. The closures have additional social and information precarity/marginalization implications for Trenton communities, but I'm also curious the impact closures have on community sustainability, access to climate action, resilience resources.



Findings



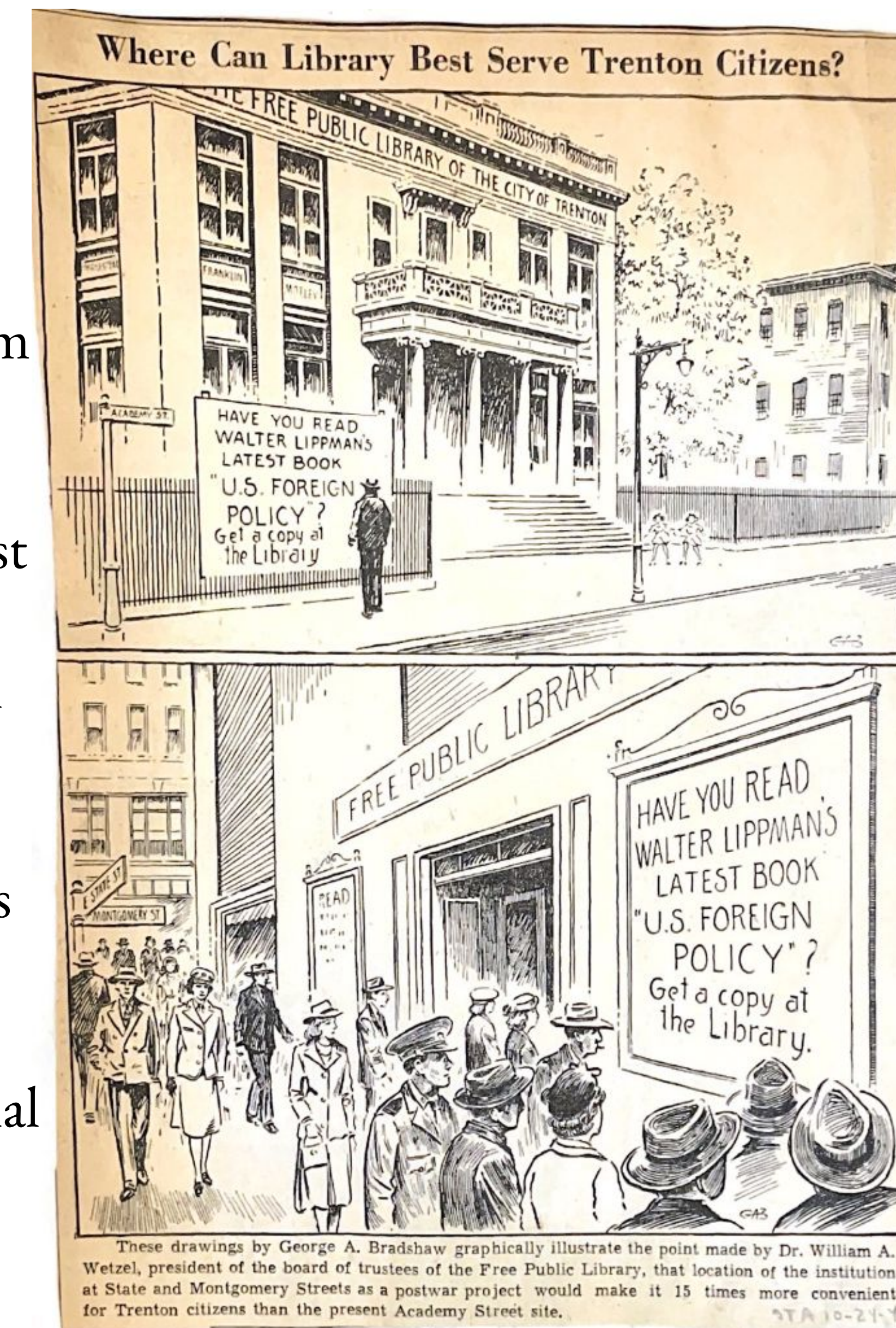
Map of closed library branches (in black), clockwise from the left: Cadwalader, North, East, Briggs, and Skelton. Main branch (in green) is currently only open library branch



Library branches overlaid with Landsat 8 Heat Anomalies (2022), pixel color representing degree difference from average heat value. Percentages reflect EPA cooling center recommendations. Blue star (next to former Skelton branch) is Trenton's one indoor cooling center in 2024

Discussion

Looking through the archival materials, the location of the TFPL has long been one of debate (as seen here in clips from the 1940s). With arguments for/against certain locations playing out in the archive almost since the TFPL's founding in 1750. There is still more critical research to be done concerning how these debates shifted over time with demographic changes and de-industrialization of Trenton. There is a compelling case though, looking at the initial correlation between closed branches and need for climate resilience resources in various parts of Trenton, to again assess the locations and potential opportunity for library resources. Also historical TFPL services such as suggested reading lists and weekly library radio shows offer potential ideas for present day climate resilience and civic engagement resources.

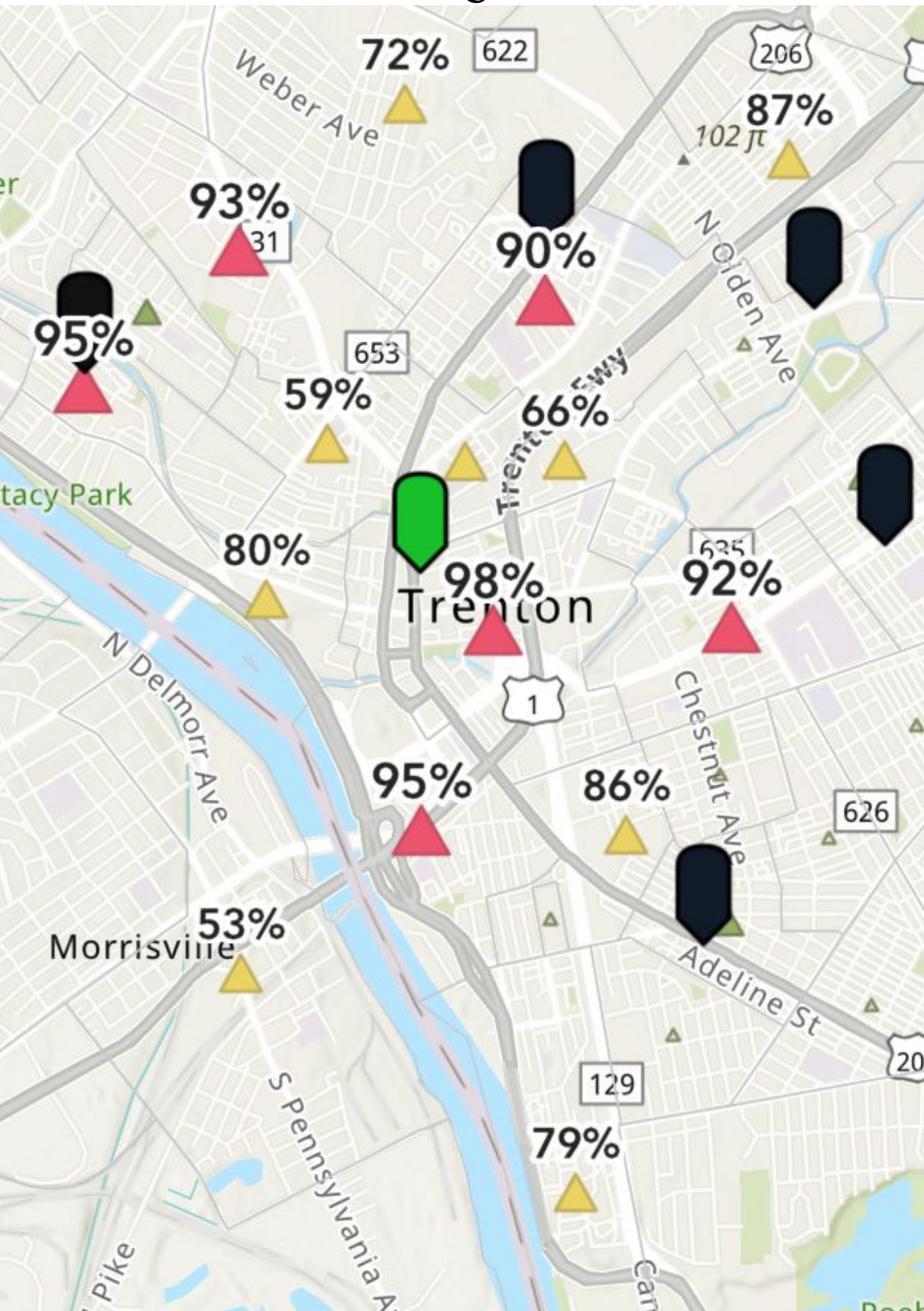


Methods

- Discourse and archival analysis of unprocessed branch libraries archival collection at Trenton Free Public Library's Trentoniana Room focusing on:
 - Librarian scrapbooks from 1938 -1954
 - Newspaper clippings predominately from *State Gazette*, *Trenton Times*, *Sunday Times Advertiser*
 - Branch library history, debates, and finances through 1986
- Outlined branch locations based on 1985 circulation report (to account for final branch locations)
- Utilized ArcGIS mapping of free publically available ESRI Living Atlas datasets combining census tract data, EPA data, The Trust for Public Land, and Landsat 8 imagery of 2022 Heat Anomalies
- I then mapped the current and previous locations of the branch libraries and assessed where climate resilience needs could be met. I also looked at historic services the branch libraries were provided to the community that the TFPL no longer has the resources for.



TFPL librarians Howard Hughes (not that one) and Veronica Carey deliver books to elderly patrons and patrons that cannot visit the library in-person. TFPL no longer has the resources for this service



Branch map overlaid with EPA data based on census tract (pop 65+ and living alone) and urban heat recordings for recommendations for "buddy programs" to improve urban heat health and climate resilience

Further Research

- The reasons for Trenton's libraries have roots in both national and local neoliberal political/economic and social trends that require further critical analysis as this project develops
- Archival analysis of remaining boxes in unprocessed Trentoniana collection (estimated 40+ linear feet)
- Discourse analysis of Trenton library portrayal/outreach in newspaper outlets included in librarian scrapbooks, other 20th century historic newspapers not included in scrapbook, contemporary news media
- Review potential for additional ArcGIS mapping data sources (i.e. flooding, environmental information behavior, socio-economic indicators, air quality, tree cover, etc.)
- Quantitative analysis of circulation/use of branches with key moments in Trenton Free Public Library history and Trenton city history
- WPA New Deal Historical Records Survey impact on Trenton Free Public Library - library staffing, opening, and resources