

Reckoning with Racism: The Mapping Prejudice Project

The Mapping Prejudice Project at the University of Minnesota Libraries is mobilizing volunteers to map racial covenants, legal clauses embedded in property deeds that were used to bar people who were not white from owning or occupying property. One common restriction embedded in Hennepin County property deeds declared that the “premises shall not at any time be conveyed, mortgaged or leased to any person or persons of Chinese, Japanese, Moorish, Turkish, Negro, Mongolian or African blood or descent.” Before the Minnesota legislature banned these restrictions in 1962, and the federal government followed suit in 1968, developers inserted these legal clauses into millions of property deeds across the United States.

Mapping Prejudice finished mapping covenants in Hennepin County at the end of 2019. The project is now working with the “Welcoming the Dear Neighbor?” group at St. Catherine University to engage community members to identify covenants in Ramsey County, Minnesota.

Here’s why we need to know about these restrictions today:

1. Racial covenants were used to deliberately [reserve huge swaths of land for the exclusive use of white people](#). They show the “racism behind the racial disparities” in American communities today.
2. Racial restrictions like covenants depressed homeownership rates for Blacks. This has intergenerational consequences. Today the [Twin Cities metropolitan area has the lowest African-American homeownership rate](#) in the country.
3. Obstacles to property ownership [made it hard for Black families to amass wealth. Today the average white household in the United States has ten times as much wealth as the average Black household](#).
4. Racial covenants provide tangible examples of structural racism. These deeds and the map of covenants helps [white people who have not personally experienced discrimination “see” structural racism, which is different from personal bias](#).
5. This research [provides validation for the lived experiences of Black people and other groups targeted by these covenants](#), who have faced enormous barriers as they sought housing, credit, and education.
6. Awareness of historical injustice is the first step towards real change.
7. Data about these racial exclusions supports transformative policymaking.

Thanks for volunteering for Mapping Prejudice!

If you have one hour. . .

1. **Watch “[Jim Crow of the North](#)”:** This one-hour documentary uses the history of racial covenants in Minneapolis to explore the complex history of discriminatory housing policies and their contemporary legacies. This Emmy award-winning film explains why mapping racial covenants is so important.
2. **Reflect on the connections between the past and the present.** Read [one of the articles written in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd](#). How does this history help us understand his death and the protests that followed?
3. **Create a blueprint for action.** Start by looking into your own backyard. What have the housing practices and policies been in your community? What have the historical barriers for homeownership been? What is the situation now? What organizations are working on housing justice? How can you support this work? What’s one action you can take? What’s one action an organization you belong to can take? What’s one action your community can take? How can you educate others about housing injustice? Will you talk to family members? Write a letter to the editor or contact your elected officials? How are the children in your community being educated around this history?
4. [Make a donation](#) to support this work.

If you have two hours...

1. **Watch “[Jim Crow of the North](#)”:** This one-hour documentary uses the history of racial covenants in Minneapolis to explore the complex history of discriminatory housing policies and their contemporary legacies. This Emmy award-winning film explains why mapping racial covenants is so important.
2. **Complete our pre-volunteer survey.** [This survey](#) helps us to understand the impact that this work is having on our community.
3. **Follow [these steps](#) to register and get started transcribing.** If you do not have a chance to attend one of our guided volunteer sessions, we ask that you start by reading deeds in our “training set.” Once you become proficient with these documents, you can move to the “live” workflow.
4. **Tell us what you learned:**
http://stkate.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dosmloOhDWzmNzD
5. **Create a blueprint for action.** Start by looking into your own backyard. What have the housing practices and policies been in your community? What have the historical barriers for homeownership been? What is the situation now? What organizations are working on housing justice? How can you support this work? What’s one action you can take? What’s one action an organization you belong to can take? What’s one action your community can take? How can you educate others about housing injustice? Will you talk to family members? Write a letter to the editor or contact your elected officials? How are the children in your community being educated around this history?
6. [Make a donation](#) to support this work.

If you are inspired to do more...

1. **Watch “[Jim Crow of the North](#)”:** This one-hour documentary uses the history of racial covenants in Minneapolis to explore the complex history of discriminatory housing policies and their contemporary legacies. This Emmy award-winning film explains why mapping racial covenants is so important.
2. **Attend one of our [weekly online training sessions](#)** to learn how to transcribe deeds.
3. **Complete our pre-volunteer survey:** [This survey](#) helps us to understand the impact that this work is having on our community.
4. **Follow [these steps](#) to register and get started transcribing deeds from Ramsey County.**
5. **Tell us what you learned:**
http://stkate.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dosmloOhDWzmNzD
6. **Reflect on the connections between the past and the present.** Read [one of the articles written in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd](#). How does this history help us understand his death and the protests that followed?
7. **Create a blueprint for action.** Start by looking into your own backyard. What have the housing practices and policies been in your community? What have the historical barriers for homeownership been? What is the situation now? What organizations are working on housing justice? How can you support this work? What’s one action you can take? What’s one action an organization you belong to can take? What’s one action your community can take? How can you educate others about housing injustice? Will you talk to family members? Write a letter to the editor or contact your elected officials? How are the children in your community being educated around this history?
8. **[Make a donation](#)** to support this work.