

BLOG

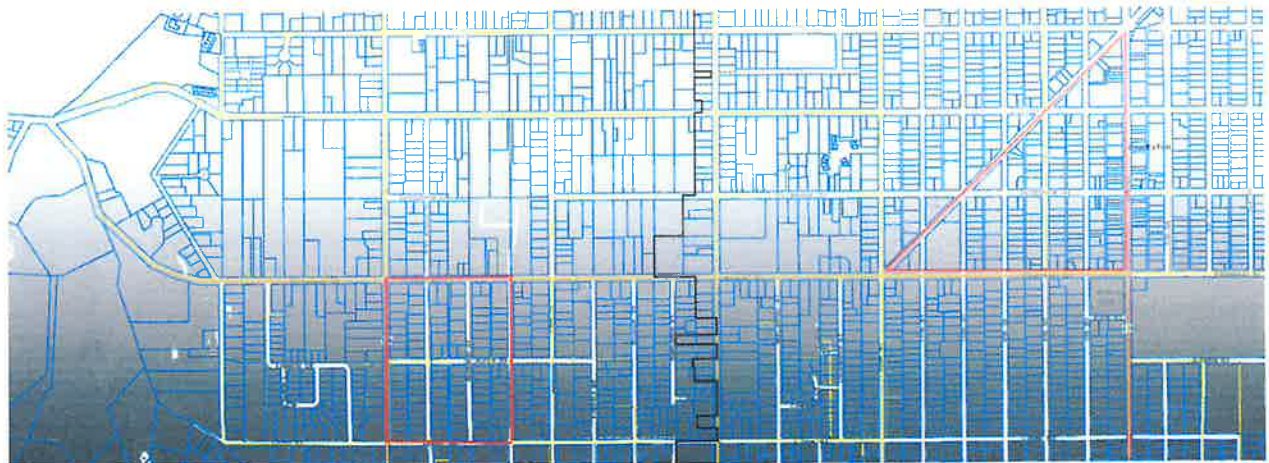
Does Your Home Have a Clause Restricting All “Non-Caucasians” From Living in it?

September 24, 2024

The [Eastern Washington University \(EWU\) Racial Covenants Project](#) is a groundbreaking research initiative that emerged from a need to address historical racial injustices embedded in property records. The project formally began in late 2021/early 2022, following the passage of Washington State’s SHB 1335. This important piece of legislation assigned EWU and the University of Washington (UW) the task of locating and informing homeowners of racially restrictive property covenants recorded in property documents.

[Find out if your home is one of the 6,400 in Spokane County that has a racially restricting covenant.](#) If you find that it does, visit one of our workshops listed below to learn how to remove it from your legal documents!

Historically, racially restrictive covenants were legal agreements written into property deeds and plat maps, prohibiting people of certain racial and ethnic backgrounds from owning or occupying properties. This practice was part of a broader system of racial segregation that persisted throughout the early and mid-20th century in the United States. Although these covenants were declared unenforceable by the Supreme Court in 1948 and were rendered illegal by the Fair Housing Act of 1968, their remnants persist in property records today. This persistence underscores a troubling legacy of exclusion and discrimination that the Racial Covenants Project seeks to uncover.



The EWU Racial Covenants Project’s initial phase involved a meticulous review of historical property records across 20 counties in eastern Washington. Researchers employed a combination of modern technology and traditional archival methods. Optical character recognition (OCR) technology played a crucial role in scanning digitized files to identify key terms related to racial restrictions, such as “white” and “Caucasian.” However, much of the work also required painstaking manual examination of bound deed books and plat maps.

Since 2022, the project had achieved significant milestones. Researchers uncovered thousands of restrictive covenants across several counties, including notable findings in Spokane, Benton and Grant counties. These findings highlighted the pervasive nature of racial discrimination in housing practices historically.

The project's findings were used to inform and enact new legislation, culminating in the enactment of the Covenants Home Ownership Account Act in May 2024. This new law established a special program to assist first-time home buyers and their descendants who were historically excluded by racial covenants. The program offers financial aid to cover down payments and closing costs, aiming to provide a tangible remedy for the discriminatory effects of these covenants. This legislative response represents a significant step toward addressing the systemic impacts of racial exclusion in housing.

In addition to its legislative impact, the project has fostered a deeper understanding of the historical context of racial covenants. EWU's research team has been instrumental in uncovering and documenting these historical injustices. Their work has included analyzing the language and implications of the discovered covenants and presenting their findings at various conferences.

Currently, the project is making a significant technological leap with its comprehensive mapping of racial covenants. [An interactive and searchable map of Spokane County](#) provides a detailed visualization of the locations of identified racially restrictive covenants. The map, the first of our counties to be released – with others slated to follow in coming months – will be an essential tool for both researchers and the public, offering a user-friendly interface to explore affected areas and access detailed information about individual covenants. **This mapping effort aims to enhance transparency, facilitate public engagement, and support ongoing efforts to rectify the legacy of racial exclusion in property records.**

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

The EWU Racial Covenants Project and the Spokane County Auditor's Office, will be hosting workshops with the support of Spokane Public Library, to inform interested homeowners and homebuyers how to navigate the map and how to file a Racial Covenant Amendment form on their working documents* with their county Auditor's office.

Come be a part of addressing the lingering effects of racial segregation.

- [October 26th 10:00am at South Hill Library](#)
- [Nov 9th 3:00pm at Shadle Park Library](#)

*Note that original documents will be preserved for historical posterity.

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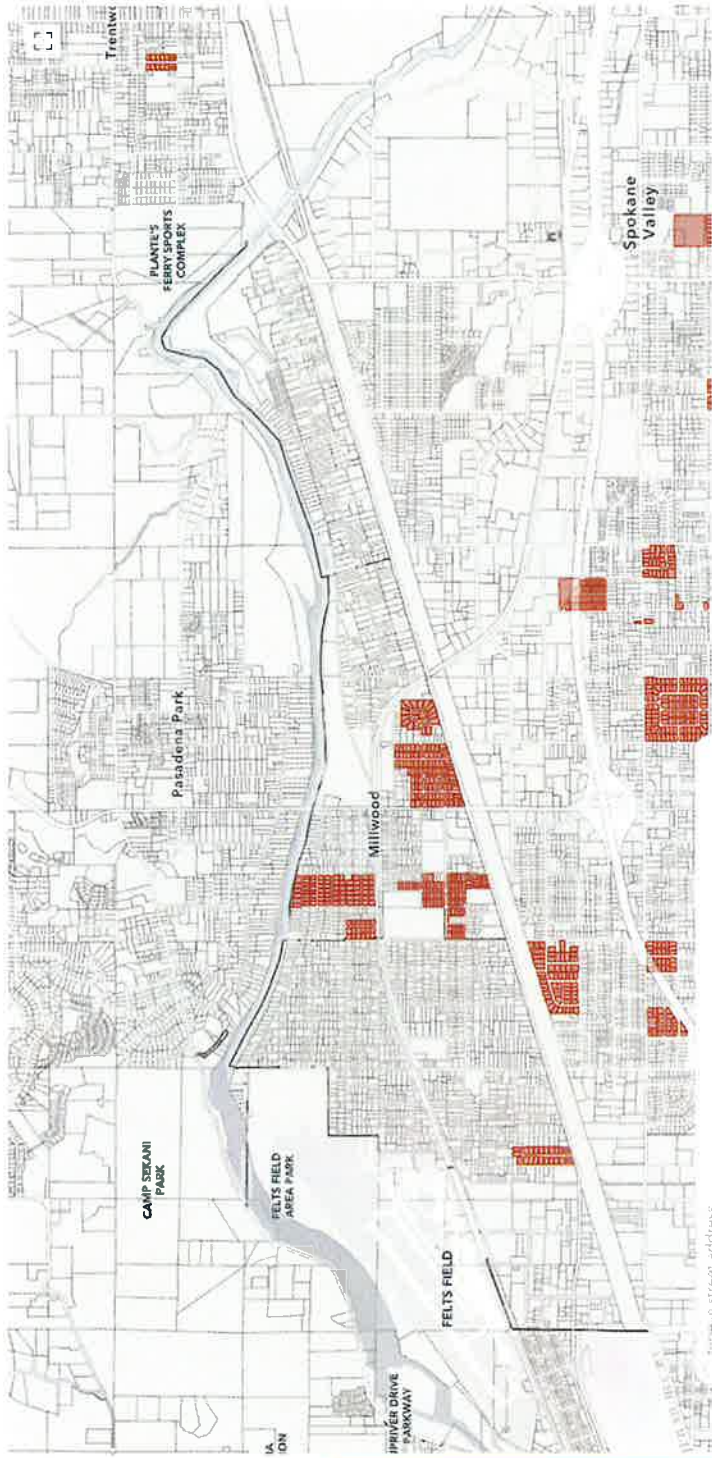
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About Racial Covenants

Racially restrictive covenants were one of many tools used by white segregationists to build all-white neighborhoods in the first half of the 20th century. White property owners added racial restrictions to over 7000 lots in Spokane County between the 1920s and 1950s. Though discrimination based on race was banned by the 1968 Fair Housing Act, the unenforceable language still persists in many property documents.

In Spokane County, covenants were most common in the northwest part of the City of Spokane (Auburn and Shadle), on the South Hill, Airway Heights, and in the Spokane Valley. They were often applied to entire neighborhoods (or even towns) when an addition or subdivision was surveyed and platted, but they were also included in deeds when a single lot changed hands.

Zoom and click to search for covenants



About this Map

