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# Mapping Prejudice

## The Limits and Opportunities of Data for Anti-Racist Planning

Rebecca H. Walker  Kate D. Derickson

### ABSTRACT

**Problem, research strategy, and findings:** Following the murder of George Floyd, Minneapolis (MN) residents and city officials turned to Mapping Prejudice—a project that mapped every racial covenant in the city and its suburbs—to understand Minneapolis's deep racial disparities. For this study, we investigated how data on racial covenants, clauses that were used historically to prevent the sale of a property to a person of color, had influenced planning practice in the Twin Cities. In doing so, we considered whether and how engagement with data on structural racism might meaningfully advance anti-racist planning outcomes that enhance the self-development and self-determination of racially marginalized communities. To address this question, we conducted 16 semistructured interviews with 24 planners who have used the data on racial covenants, asking specifically about how racial covenant data shaped planning practice, the planning and policy outcomes that resulted from engaging with racial covenant data, and the characteristics of the racial covenant data that made it influential. This approach assessed planners already interested in addressing racial disparities. Interviews suggest that data on racial covenants were highly influential, leading to a new understanding of structural racism, critical reflection on Whiteness and planning, and a new narrative tool for explaining and addressing racial disparities. Policy outcomes included adopting new housing policies, helping residents remove racial covenants from deeds, and implementing redistributive financial policies. Planners felt these data were important because they could be mapped and visualized and because of their fine geographic scale, narrative qualities, and the process in which they were collected.

**Takeaway for practice:** We draw insights about the kinds of data projects that other planners and researchers might produce to advance and inform anti-racist planning, including data that foreground White privilege, focus on phenomena appropriate for specific geographic and historic contexts, are produced using participatory and transparent processes, and tell a compelling story.

**Keywords:** equity, GIS, housing, land use, racial covenants

In the summer of 2020, when Minneapolis (MN) burned in the wake of George Floyd's murder by the Minneapolis Police Department, journalists and commentators struggled to make sense of why Minneapolis, of all places, set off what ultimately became a global wave of protests for racial justice. Many turned to Mapping Prejudice (MP), a homegrown project that used innovative methods to produce a comprehensive map of racial covenants for Hennepin County, where Minneapolis is located. Racial covenants are restrictive clauses that were inserted into property deeds by real estate developers during the first half of the 20th century that prevented sale to or occupancy by a person of color. The legacy of these covenants looms large in the Twin Cities, which today are home to some of the worst racial disparities in wealth and homeownership in the United States (Ingraham, 2020). Journalists around the world used the MP visualization and narrative to make sense of the racialized exclusion that led to the uprising (e.g., Ellis, 2020; Holder, 2020;

Klein, 2020; Sommer, 2020; Waxman, 2020). Journalists were not alone; during the uprising, guerilla artists papered the city with QR codes linking to MP's website (Figure 1).

The uprising was not the first time a wide mix of stakeholders turned to MP data. Planners from across the metro area have drawn on MP's map of racial covenants in their planning process. Spurred by MP data, 11 cities in the Twin Cities metro area have agreed to use the covenants map to do a racial equity audit of their land use plans (Just Deeds, 2020). When announcing the city's plan to eliminate single-family zoning, Minneapolis city planners repeatedly cited MP data as the bedrock of the plan's racial justice framework (Sommer, 2020). The Twin Cities Metropolitan Council—a regional policymaking body—is working to incorporate covenant data into its new comprehensive effort to lower barriers for fair housing.

The historical perspective provided by the covenants data set illuminates what Ibram Kendi has called



Figure 1. Guerrilla advertisements for the *Mapping Prejudice* data on racial covenants. Source: Photo courtesy of *Mapping Prejudice* (2020).

the “racism behind the racial disparities” (Kendi, 2020). The project has reached thousands of people through its volunteer transcription sessions and millions of people through the PBS documentary *Jim Crow of the North*, which was inspired by MP. Also, the data set has been downloaded 1,500 times since it was first completed. But it remains to be seen whether this work has the power to interrupt a troubling civic dynamic described by Minneapolis city council member Jeremiah Ellison: “During every crisis, well-meaning white people here make a ritual of acknowledging the city’s steep inequities, but we’ve been hearing the same ‘Woe is you’ sentiment for a long time. It’s as if people think the mere acknowledgment is the work,” he wrote in the *New York Times* (Ellison, 2020, p. 4).

We explored how MP’s data on racial covenants have been mobilized by planners in Minneapolis. We approached this question as two academic researchers who are not members of the MP team but who have used their data in our own research (e.g., Keeler et al., 2020; Walker, Derickson, et al., 2022; Walker, Keeler, et al., 2022). Its usefulness to our own work prompted us to question how this data set was informing the work of planners and policymakers outside of academic research. In the context of advancing anti-racist planning outcomes, we interviewed planners using MP’s data on racial covenants to explore what happened when new kinds of data on structural racism were incorporated into planning practices. In the sections that follow, we provide a brief overview of the literature on Whiteness, planning, and data; describe the MP project and the history of racial covenants in Minneapolis;

present results showing that data on racial covenants led to critical reflection on Whiteness in planning and openness to new policies ranging from recognition to redistributive; and conclude with actionable takeaways for planners and researchers working in partnerships among university research teams, urban planners, and historically marginalized communities.

### Planning, Whiteness, and Data

The embrace by Minneapolis-area planners of the MP racial covenant data has come in the context of a paradigm shift in which planners have begun to focus on the advantages and benefits that urban planning confers to Whiteness (Anderson, 2010; Goetz et al., 2019; Lipsitz, 2006). Whiteness, as defined by Harris (1993, p. 1726), refers to “the right to white identity as embraced by law,” which confers privilege through its protection as property by the U.S. legal system (Lipsitz, 2006). Planners have become increasingly attentive to the way in which planning has operated within White supremacist institutions and norms and played a constitutive role in producing these racist outcomes (Goetz et al., 2020; Steil & Delgado, 2019; Thomas et al., 1997; Yiftachel, 1998). In response to this emergent understanding of planning history and practice, planning theorists have called for a move beyond equity planning, often criticized as toothless (Fainstein, 2009; Krumholz, 1982; Zapata & Bates, 2015), and to adopt planning models that promote explicitly anti-racist outcomes. Steil (2018) and Williams (2020) have called for new anti-subordination and reparative planning paradigms, respectively, that re-envision planning as a tool for anti-racist action via the redistribution of social, political, and material capital.

The question remains, however, as to what kinds of data are needed to advance such an anti-racist model. Krumholz (1982), in his reflection on equity planning, argued that to achieve equity goals, activist planners must enter the political arena armed with “hard, relevant information,” saying that “[t]he only legitimate power the planner can count on ... is the power of information, analysis, and insight” (p. 173). In other words, the data sets wielded by planners are their most powerful tools in gaining public buy-in for planning interventions that challenge the status quo (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

New data sets are not only important tools for swaying public opinion: Data may also play an important role in shifting institutional culture within planning agencies themselves. Solis (2020) argued that advancing anti-racist planning outcomes demands shifts in the institutional culture of planning departments, necessitating that planners reflect critically on institutionalized Whiteness and on planning’s role in maintaining racial

disparities (Stinchcombe, 2000). Because race in America is a complete social structural system, even ostensibly race-neutral bureaucratic institutions are racialized and can contribute to the maintenance of racial inequalities (Ray, 2019). Harrison's (2019) study of equity in environmental agencies found that research that illuminates the history and mechanisms of racism was an important tool for confronting institutionalized Whiteness and creating new shared understandings of structural racism. As such, data that link today's disparities to the historic planning policies might serve as a catalyst for planners to confront their role in maintaining White supremacy and racial inequality (Goetz et al., 2020; Lipsitz, 2011).

Yet the data alone are not inherently disruptive to the systems that produce and maintain racial inequality. Scholars of race and power have long argued that how academics produce and interpret data is intimately related to the systems of racial oppression in which they are embedded. The production of data, for planning or otherwise, is rooted in systems of power that elevate the perspectives, voices, and experiences of some while invisibilizing or silencing others (Medina, 2017). As Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008, p. 7) argued about statistical interrogations of race, "Data do not tell us a story. We use data to craft a story that comports with our understanding of the world. If we begin with a racially-biased view of the world, then we will end with a racially-biased view of what the data have to say."

Data sets shape how we frame problems and identify solutions in ways that can have profound consequences for the policies we ultimately enact. One example of this is the recent debate among housing policy scholars about the use of what the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calls "Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty" (RECAPs) as an analytical frame. In 2015, HUD began requiring local planners to collect data on RECAPs that HUD mobilized to determine whether municipalities were reaching fair housing goals, defined by their success at reducing the number and size of RECAPs. This has resulted in the demolition of low-income housing, hastened gentrification of core urban areas and the suburbanization of poverty, shifted funding for affordable housing away from RECAPs, and dismantled community support networks (Goetz, 2015). Thus, the mandate to collect particular data and the RECAP analytical frame defined the goals and established policies that privileged Whiteness while pathologizing communities of color (Feagin, 2014; Goetz, 2018; Goetz et al., 2019; Shelby, 2016; Shelton, 2018).

Not only the knowledge scholars produce but also how that knowledge is produced are fundamental to the future possibilities that might be brought about through that knowledge (Derickson, 2021). Drawing on

Black feminist scholars Kristie Dotson and Katherine McKittrick, Derickson (2021) argued that rather than simply producing data about racial inequalities, advancing anti-racist futures might require that data be produced in ways that are themselves anti-racist (Derickson, 2021; Dotson, 2017; McKittrick, 2014). This might include co-productive approaches in which researchers and community partners collectively identify research questions, collect data, and interpret results (Ehrman-Solberg et al., 2020; Gordon da Cruz, 2017; Robinson & Hawthorne, 2018) or research that leverages academic resources in support of the needs of underresourced communities (Derickson & MacKinnon, 2015; Jackson & Marques, 2019).

In this study, we explored the potential and limitations of data on structural racism to advance anti-racist planning action. We considered whether and how engagement with racial covenant data influenced organizational culture within planning departments and shifted planning paradigms and processes in ways that might meaningfully advance the self-development and self-determination of racially marginalized communities (Williams, 2020).

## The Mapping Prejudice Project

Mapping Prejudice (2022) was established in 2016 as a partnership between university-based researchers, librarians, and community volunteers (see [Technical Appendix 1](#) for detailed project history). The project aimed to map every racially restrictive covenant in Hennepin County, home to Minneapolis and its surrounding western suburbs. Racial covenants prevented the sale of a property to non-White buyers and were a key tool used to establish and enforce racial segregation in both the Jim Crow South and "progressive" northern cities like Minneapolis (Gotham, 2002; Tretter et al., 2012). Unlike racial zoning laws, which were implemented at the municipal level by city governments and were ruled illegal by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1917, racial covenants were added to individual property deeds, typically by real estate developers but also by individual buyers (Silver, 1991). Racial covenants, like other mechanisms promoting racial segregation like redlining, real estate steering, and sundown towns, restricted who was able to purchase a home and accumulate intergenerational wealth in particular neighborhoods (Coates, 2014; Segre, 1996). However, unlike these other mechanisms of racial segregation, racial covenants were particularly insidious in that they operated via the legal system and, once attached to a property, were nearly impossible to remove (Jones-Correa, 2000; Plotkin, 2001).

To produce their data set, the MP team developed two innovative strategies. The first was to use optical

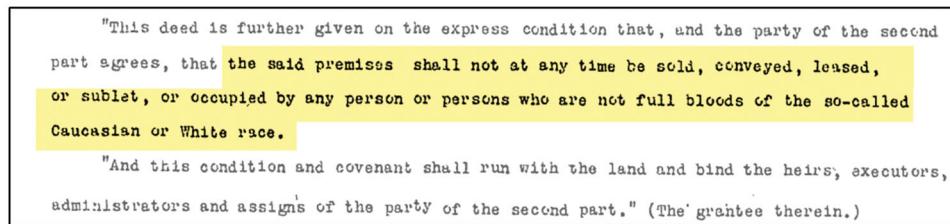


Figure 2. Racial covenant found in a property deed in Hennepin County (MN). Source: Image courtesy of Mapping Prejudice.

character recognition (OCR) to scan millions of deeds to identify any language that could potentially signal the presence of a racially restrictive covenant. The second was to use the Zooniverse platform to enable thousands of volunteers, the overwhelming majority of whom were local to the Twin Cities, to check and transcribe each potential covenant identified by OCR. To recruit volunteers, MP organized more than 200 in-person transcription sessions with local volunteers in which community members used the Zooniverse platform to read OCR-identified deeds for racial restrictions. To organize these sessions, MP cultivated relationships with a diverse range of community organizations—including neighborhood associations, church congregations, housing justice activists, and local businesses—inviting community members to be part of the data generation process. In the period from 2016 to 2019 when the map for Hennepin County was produced, the team regularly published new iterations of the covenant maps to its website that, although requiring the team to declare their data a work in progress, allowed community volunteers to watch the map populate. This increased the transparency of the process and reinforced the idea that the map was created by and for the community.

What resulted was the first complete data set of racial covenants for any county in the United States, with the project identifying and mapping more than 25,000 racial covenants (Ehrman-Solberg et al., 2020). The team uncovered that, beginning in 1910, developers inserted thousands of restrictions into property deeds in Minneapolis and its suburbs, reserving large swaths of land for the exclusive use of White people (Figure 2), with racial covenants attached to roughly 20% of all new homes by their peak use in the 1920s (Sood et al., 2019). Racial covenants remained legal in Minnesota until an act by the state legislature in 1953 (and nationally in the United States by the Fair Housing Act of 1968). Preliminary analytical work by MP showed that the introduction of racial covenants was correlated with significant decreases in non-White populations in covenanted census tracts (Mapping Prejudice, 2022).

In addition to creating the map of racial covenants in Hennepin County, completed in 2019, MP has given more than 300 public talks at local community events,

in classrooms, and for local and state agencies, as well as a TEDx talk and presentations to the Federal Reserve Board. The success of the project has attracted numerous requests to replicate the process, and MP is currently working with Ramsey County (home to St. Paul [MN] and its eastern suburbs) as well as Milwaukee (WI), Washington (DC), and several other municipalities to map their covenants.

## Methods: Assessing the Impact of Racial Covenants Data on Planning Practice

This study is grounded in analysis of qualitative data systematically collected in the fall of 2021 to analyze the impact of MP's data set of racial covenants on planners and planning practice in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area (TCMA). We bounded this study in accordance with the bounds of MP's published and in-progress data sets, including the central cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul and surrounding suburbs (Figure 3).

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul are home to some of the most pronounced racial disparities in the United States, ranking 98th of 100 largest metro areas in the gap between Black and White homeownership and 99th in the median income gap (Ingraham, 2020). One year prior to this study in 2020, the TCMA was at the epicenter of the largest protest movement for racial justice in U.S. history following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. There is no doubt that Floyd's murder, and the protests that followed, dramatically shifted the public conversation—and, likely, the perceptions of interviewees—about racial inequality in the Twin Cities.

### Study Sample and Data Collection

Following the inclusion criteria for this study, interviewees a) were actively involved in planning work, including planners, nonprofit leaders, community organizers, and public officials, and b) had engaged with MP's racial covenants data set in a professional context. To identify interviewees who met the inclusion criteria, we reviewed the records of organizations with whom MP

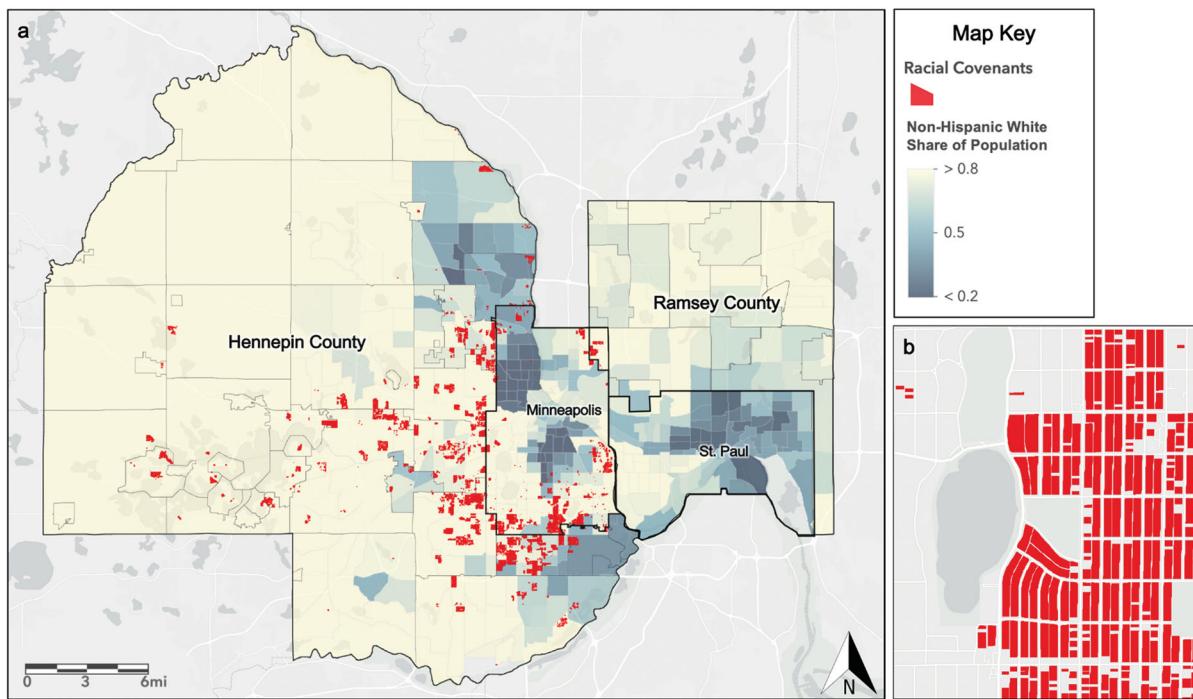


Figure 3. Study boundaries. (a) Minneapolis and St. Paul, located in Hennepin and Ramsey County, respectively. Racial covenants are overlaid with current racial demographics. Lighter colors indicate that a larger proportion of the population identified as non-Hispanic White; darker colors indicate a larger share of the population that did not identify as White. Census tracts are the unit of analysis, and demographic data are from the 2010 U.S. Census. (b) Parcel-level scale at which covenant data were collected.

had given presentations, shared data, or received funding. Initial contact with prospective interviewees was initiated via email by members of the MP research team, drawing on the team's existing relationships. We identified and recruited several additional interviewees via snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). In total, we conducted 16 interviews with 24 interviewees from a range of planning disciplines, including transportation planning, environmental planning, housing and community development, and land use planning, and at scales of planning including neighborhood, city, county, and regional (Table 1). Nearly all interviewees identified themselves racially as non-Hispanic White, with only two interviewees identifying as Black or Latinx.

We pretested, modified, and selected a final set of questions for a semistructured interview guide based on study questions. Interviews lasted from 45 to 75 min, with questions focusing on the following themes: impact of MP data on planning practice, planning, and policy outcomes resulting from engagement with MP data; characteristics of MP data that made it influential; and limitations of these data.

In addition to primary interview data, we collected relevant secondary data to triangulate and verify accounts of interviewees and to provide additional context for interpretation of interview material. Secondary data sources included master planning documents, project reports, fact sheets, memos, and media coverage.

**Table 1. Interview and interviewee characteristics.**

	Interviews	Interviewees
Planning subfield		
Environmental planning	2	5
Housing and community development	6	7
Land use planning	5	9
Regional planning	1	2
Transportation planning	1	1
Geographic scope		
Neighborhood	2	3
City	7	10
County	3	4
Regional	4	7
Interviewee racial demographics		
White		22
Black		1
Latinx		1

### Data Analysis

Interview transcripts and documents were coded in ATLAS.ti 8 (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development, 2022). We identified and defined deductive codes prior to coding and added additional codes using an open

coding approach. We developed the final codebook by iteratively coding sample transcripts and refining the coding constructs collectively (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Consistent with a grounded theory approach, we used the final codebook (Technical Appendix 2) as an interpretive framework for qualitative data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Codes provide structure to qualitative data (i.e., interview transcripts) that facilitate analysis. Codes were not used to convert qualitative data into quantitative data for tabulation, but rather were used to identify themes and insights across entire transcripts.

Quotations included in the results are used to articulate insights in participants' own words.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study is that people who found little value in the MP data were unlikely to engage with the data at length. Thus, these findings speak to the issue of what planners who are interested in engaging with data about racial discrimination in housing and planning can learn from others who are already similarly interested. We did not have data or findings related to whether and how MP or a similar project might shape the attitudes or approaches of planners who are not already interested in addressing racial disparities through their work, though some did report their interests being deepened through engagement with the project.

## **Results: Impacts of Racial Discrimination**

### **Historical Data on Planning Practice**

As described above, we approached this research as academics who had used the MP data set as an analytical tool in quantitative spatial analyses and in interpretation of qualitative archival research. Interviews with planners and practitioners revealed key differences between how we, as academics, engaged with these data versus how planners used these data. Rather than a predictive data set used in decision making or an analytical tool, interviewees reported finding the greatest utility from MP's data on racial covenants as a narrative tool that shifted internal and public discourse. Interview data revealed four key insights:

1. Historical data on racial covenants helped planning agencies develop new shared understanding of and language for structural racism. Interviewees described how this led them to reflect critically on Whiteness and planning.

2. Planners were primarily using covenant data as a narrative tool for political advocacy, rather than as an analytical tool or predictive data set.
3. Planners attributed numerous policy outcomes across a spectrum ranging from recognition to redistributive policies to their engagement with data on racial covenants.
4. Characteristics of MP's data on racial covenants that planners found most useful were its spatial nature, its hyperlocal scale, its qualitative elements, and the data collection and interpretation process itself.

### **New Awareness of Structural Racism**

Planning practitioners reported that historic data on racial covenants led to a) new shared institutional understanding and language about structural racism and b) critical reflection on Whiteness and planning.

Respondents overwhelmingly reported that the MP data increased their understanding of structural racism in general and the origins of racial disparities in the region specifically. As one housing planner stated: "It really encouraged us to look more deeply at the root of racial disparities in the community." This new understanding led planners to reflect on how their work connected to structural inequalities. For example, a land use planner from a regional planning office described how data on racial covenants drove their department to reconceptualize how they approached racially concentrated poverty. MP data helped them reframe the problem to focus on the structural forces that produce racialized poverty, opening the door for new policy solutions:

[C]oncentrated poverty ... really created a strongly deficit narrative where we saw these places as problems to be solved.... And I think that implicitly blames the residents themselves for the conditions in their neighborhoods. So being able to trace this further back in time and look at how external actors have shaped the evolution of these places has been one way that we've tried to take the negative focus off of these neighborhoods and the residents who live in them. This gave us a better understanding of what needs to happen to advance equity.

Respondents stated that these data disrupted the typical ahistorical, future orientation of planning and policymaking, motivating critical reflection on their own work. For example, a city housing planner reflected on how the data on racial covenants provided an entry point to engage with the racially exclusionary history of zoning:

Recognition		Redistribution		
Symbolic Action	Public Participation	Protections for People of Color	Housing Policies	Material Redistribution
Remove racial covenant from deed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training	Remove practices that privilege property owners Prioritize engagement with marginalized groups	Legislative action to protect people of color Police reform	Upzoning Allow multi-family housing Affordable housing Land trusts Down payment and mortgage assistance Community benefits agreements Increase access to "opportunity" areas Rethink moving to opportunity	Reparations Invest in disinvested neighborhoods Prioritize people of color for policy benefits

Figure 4. Policies linked by interviewees to engagement with Mapping Prejudice data on racial covenants. Policies are organized into five categories, ordered on a spectrum from those aimed primarily at recognition of past harms to those aimed primarily at distribution of resources.

When people first said to me, "Zoning is part of the problem," it was a hard thing for me to accept ... my general reaction was, "What are you talking about, I'm not an evil person, I've been doing this for 20 years and I'm not ... zoning is not racist in any way, shape, or form!" But then when this data gets put in front of you ... it made a convert out of me.

Planners noted that the historical nature of the data allowed them to reflect more critically on the policies they are enacting today, the implications of those policies for racial equity, and how those policies will be viewed in the future. A county community development planner said:

I think it helps guide us in avoiding similar mistakes in the future ... to avoid doing the same thing all over, just through a different mechanism than explicitly restricting people from living in certain areas.

Echoing this sentiment, another interviewee from a housing nonprofit saw this data set as calling on planners to ask themselves, "Are we rhyming with history?"

### Historic Data as a Narrative Tool

Interviewees reported that data on historic racial covenants were particularly used as a narrative tool to communicate with both elected officials and the public about interventions needed to disrupt racial disparities. Interviewees working for local governments, for nonprofits, and in community organizing all cited the use of MP's data on racial covenants as a powerful tool for

policy advocacy and political mobilization. Planners described using the data as a tool for framing and justifying policies to the public, particularly ones likely to meet resistance. An environmental planner described how their agency used the data to make the case for directing additional resources to historically marginalized communities:

It's something that's really helpful for justifying directing resources to specific areas. ... When competing for limited resources, having something that we can point to as saying, [this disparity] was a result of institutional racism, I think is really helpful.

Planners saw this data set as a powerful tool for problem definition and building public support for policy solutions.

### Planning and Policy Outcomes Following Engagement With Mapping Prejudice

We prompted interviewees to describe a) policies adopted as a result of engagement with MP data, b) policies for which organizations advocated using MP data, and c) aspirational policies not yet adopted but motivated by engagement with MP data. Given this prompt, interviewees attributed 17 different policies to engagement with data on racial covenants that fell into five broad categories: symbolic actions, changes to public participation, protections for people of color, housing policies, and policies aimed at achieving material redistribution (Figure 4). The most often discussed were changes to housing policies, plans for discharging

racial covenants, and material redistribution or reparations.

Policies that aim to improve access to housing and homeownership for people of color were those most often linked by planners to their engagement with data on racial covenants. Planners stated that data on racial covenants provided a key narrative tool to advocate for policies aimed at reducing the racial homeownership gap. The most-discussed housing-related policy was upzoning areas historically zoned as single family. To explain the link between upzoning and racial covenants, interviewees cited the exclusionary history of zoning codes, which, like covenants, were a tool for restricting who could live in an area. Though Minneapolis and its suburbs never implemented explicit racial zoning codes, regulations like single-family zoning were used in tandem with racial covenants to restrict the occupancy of neighborhoods by race and class. Beyond upzoning, interviewees pointed to the need for policies that directly increase housing for low-income people of color. These included investments in affordable housing, providing down payment assistance to low-income or first-generation homebuyers, and solutions like community land trusts that increase affordability by removing land from the speculative real estate market.

Interestingly, interviewees cited both increasing regional mobility (i.e., Moving to Opportunity [MTO] programs) and, conversely, re-evaluating the MTO framework as policy outcomes following their engagement with MP data. Interviewees who supported MTO policies said data on covenants highlighted the need to make areas of concentrated privilege more accessible, whereas those who were re-evaluating MTO said that MP data helped them think more critically about how MTO privileges Whiteness. This suggests that although engaging with MP data might lead to agreement on the need to address racial housing disparities, opinions on appropriate solutions are context dependent and vary among agencies.

In addition to instigating new housing policies, one of the most common policy responses to the data on racial covenants by Twin Cities municipalities was establishing protocols for removing racial covenants from property deeds. Residents who remove covenants from their deeds are required to go through an education program that teaches residents to recognize racism. Neighborhood activists described their experience with discharging covenants, saying,

I think there's an eye-opening educational piece that is attached to the process of discharging that covenant ... it starts to get people really thinking about land ownership and the privilege associated with ownership.

Interviewees described the process of discharging covenants as a first step toward moving people to more redistributive actions, including material reparations. For example, a grassroots organization called Free the Deeds encouraged residents who discharged their racial covenant to donate to the African American Community Land Trust, a program run by the City of Lakes Community Land Trust, as a form of reparations for those harmed by racial segregation (Pearson, 2021).

Planners described how the data on racial covenants opened the door for conversations about redistributive policies and the need for reparations. Interviewees saw planning as a tool to enact material reparations:

[MP data] talks very specifically about intergenerational wealth and communities that have experienced historic wealth extraction. And so, I'm comfortable with using the term reparations, because I think we all need to get comfortable with that idea. ... [S]o often, people attribute reparations to a one-time "Here's your check," and we're talking about generations of wealth extraction for decades and decades. A check isn't going to do it. [Planners] need to ensure that we are intentionally creating programs that allow for ongoing wealth building.

However, although many planners discussed reparations as a potential policy solution, no municipality in the TCMA has actually launched a reparations program (though St. Paul has initiated a reparations commission).

### ***What Made Mapping Prejudice's Data Influential***

Respondents identified unique characteristics of the MP data that led to its particularly profound impact. The four most-often cited characteristics were the spatial nature, the scale, the narrative quality, and the data collection and interpretation process (Table 2).

The spatial nature of the data was widely cited as fundamental to the data's utility for planners. Planners reported that the ability to visually represent the data on a map gave planners and their audiences new insights into the local geography of structural racism. Moreover, it enabled planners to overlay the covenants with other maps to illustrate the interconnected nature of racialized exclusion and the distributions of amenities and disamenities. The individual parcel scale at which the data were collected and reported was also valuable for planners because it allowed viewers to identify their homes and neighborhoods, making the concept of structural racism more concrete and personal. The narrative elements of MP's data, including both the historical context and the qualitative language of the deeds,

**Table 2. Characteristics of Mapping Prejudice data on racial covenants interviewees identified as valuable.**

Data characteristics	Representative quote
Spatial data	Seeing it, having visuals, it shows, wow, this really—this was very intentional. This wasn't like this—you wonder why one of the greatest homeownership disparity rates in the country, between White and people of color. It's because of this—it's because of intentional discrimination in policy that took many different forms, including racial covenants. (City housing planner)
Scale of data	People can pinpoint, "That's my home and that's my neighborhood," then you're telling them their own story and the story of what came before them, and the story of their own home in their own neighborhood, and it makes it much more personal for them. (Regional land use planner)
Narrative data	I think this data has a narrative and a story. Normally, we have to remind our staff to understand that data is people, data is stories. But I think that this type of data already comes with a story. ... I think this data tells you a larger story of how deliberate, racist, and White supremacist policies are and can be. (Regional environmental planner)
	A lot of the other data is very mathematical. ... [MP data], just because of the language, it's very visceral. ... By showing the source materials as they were written, I think there's power in that. (County land use planner)
Legitimacy of process	I think it helps make it accessible and discoverable, the fact that Mapping Prejudice not only said, "Hey we did this work," but also, "You can go do this work too and here's how you go do it." (Regional housing planner)

allowed users to tell a story with the data set, which interviewees cited as more compelling than quantitative data alone. Interviewees reported that reading the specific, racist language of the racial covenants was particularly effective. Finally, the participatory data collection process, the hands-on interpretation of the data, and the public availability of the data increased the perceived legitimacy of the data among participants. As described above, a key step in MP's process of producing this data was inviting community volunteers to search deeds for racial covenants. Respondents reported that this transparency created public buy-in.

### **Data Limitations**

Although interviewees spoke overwhelmingly positively about MP data, several noted the immense amount of time, labor, and expertise needed to produce a complete data set of racial covenants, noting the value of collaboration with academic researchers to produce transformative data sets. In addition, two interviewees from housing nonprofits expressed concerns over the potential for this to be co-opted or misconstrued in support of policies or narratives with less anti-racist agendas. One housing activist stated:

[If] there's no specific redistribution to people of color, even though these were restrictive racial covenants ... I think it's a really slick marketing maneuver. It's branding [a policy] as racial justice by naming the past, naming the wrong, and then putting forward their own agenda as redress, even if it doesn't necessarily address the racial harm.

These interviewees pointed out that even data sets that document structural racism may not necessarily advance anti-racism.

### **The Limits and Opportunities of Data for Anti-Racist Planning**

Our interviews with planning professionals who use data on racial covenants in their work suggest that new data products centering the machinations of structural racism, rather than simply documenting its consequences, have the potential to lead to shifts in organizational culture that open new avenues for anti-racist action.

The data on racial covenants precipitated a shift in the analytical focus of planners from pathologizing communities of color to focusing on the mechanisms that produced and maintain racial disparities. Rather than another data set cataloging racial disparities, data on racial covenants forced data users to contend with the consequences of racialized access to housing, casting racial disparities in a new light. As a result, disparities in wealth or pollution exposure are reinterpreted as consequences of structural inequalities in access to homeownership, rather than simply variables correlated with racialized groups. Rather than statistical correlation analyses that serve to reproduce racial categories in relation to their dispossession (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), data on racial covenants historicize the construction of racial categories and demonstrate how the construction of these categories worked to the advantage of those who could claim Whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006, 2011).

Our interviewees, who, like the field of planning were overwhelmingly White (Sweet & Etienne, 2011; Wubneh, 2011), widely stated that this data set allowed them, for the first time, to understand racism as functioning on the structural level, rather than only on the individual level, affording them a new shared understanding and vocabulary for discussing the machinations of racism in the Twin Cities. This new shared understanding shifted perceptions of the types and scale of policy interventions that might be necessary to contend with the region's racial disparities. More broadly, planners reflected on the institutionalized Whiteness of their planning departments and their protocols and considered more critically whose voices are and are not heard and valued during both internal and public meetings. This evidence suggests that this type of critical reflection on institutionalized Whiteness could be the first step toward broader institutional change that increases opportunities for anti-racist action (Ray, 2019; Solis, 2020). Planners reflected critically on the racially discriminatory origins of common planning practices like zoning laws (Goetz, 2021; Silver, 1991) or the problematic philosophical underpinnings of a fair housing policy, such as MTO, that prioritizes bringing people of color into proximity with Whiteness (Shelby, 2016). Further, interviewees expressed a new openness to anti-racist action such as new reparations programs and incorporation of a reparative framework into planning protocols (Williams, 2020). As such, this research suggests that new data sets might create opportunities for new anti-racist policies.

Beyond its effects on the internal culture of planning departments, the racial covenants data set has become a powerful narrative tool embraced by planners to communicate to the public the need for planning interventions, ranging from tree planting campaigns and highway land bridge projects to upzoning and new affordable housing projects. Like its success at shifting internal discourse within planning agencies, planners are using the data on racial covenants to historicize racial disparities and explain the need for their proposed planning interventions. This reflects a long-held truism in planning that planners' most effective tool for shaping public opinion is their ability to wield data and technical expertise (Flyvbjerg, 1998).

Still, although these findings demonstrate the value of data sets that illuminate the structural and historical nature of racial inequalities, they also point to the limitation of data alone for advancing more anti-racist futures. Despite reflecting on the internalized Whiteness of their planning departments, the policy responses described by interviewees were overwhelmingly top-down and technocratic; no interviewee described efforts to meaningfully empower and promote the self-determination of historically disenfranchized communities. Although

this data set did enable planners to develop a new understanding of racism that includes its material dimensions, it appears to have done little to broaden perceptions of who should hold and wield political decision-making power. Instead of describing strategies to empower historically disenfranchized communities, planners discussed top-down policy prescriptions for addressing racial inequality. Williams (2020) argued that advancing a model of reparative planning demands that planners "reject the paternalistic impulses of entrenched planning traditions which would deny African Americans the right to assert, to the extent possible within planning processes, principles of self-determination and self-development," (p. 8). In other words, anti-racist futures require not only top-down policy interventions but also meaningful efforts to advance the self-determination of Black and other racially marginalized groups.

It is worth noting that, in addition to sharing data and insights with local governments, MP *has* prioritized public education and collaboration with grassroots, Black-led community partners who are mobilizing MP data in their own advocacy and self-determination. This points to the importance of collaborative, co-productive research among academic researchers and the communities most affected by racist policies, if data are to be a tool for building political power among historically disenfranchized communities (Ehrman-Solberg et al., 2020; Jackson & Marques, 2019).

## Takeaways: Data for Anti-Racist Planning

Drawing on insights from interviewees, we conclude by reflecting on insights for planning practitioners and researchers interested in conducting or supporting data projects aimed at addressing structural racism.

### Highlighting the Creation of Whiteness

Though much data on urban inequality tends to focus on the negative outcomes for non-White people, the MP data set has the benefit of illustrating the specific ways that Whiteness was made and concretizing the ways that White people benefited from policies at the expense and exclusion of non-White people. This prompts White people to reflect on the specific material ways they have benefited from racial discrimination. Planners should consider how they research and represent the advantages that past and future policies accrue to White people specifically to avoid colorblind analyses that reveal little about structural racism and to avoid solely focusing on the harms to non-White people (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Goetz et al., 2019; Lipsitz, 2011).

### Local-Scale Data Are Optimal

Creating a data set at the fine grain of the parcel level allowed planners to render concrete processes that had largely felt abstract. Moreover, it allowed residents to connect their own contemporary experiences of home-ownership to structural and historic processes of racialized exclusion. Planners should consider developing spatial data sets at the finest grain possible.

### Identify the Right Data Set for Your Region, Context, and Capacity

Following the success of the MP project, numerous organizations have sought to map covenants in their municipalities. Yet although it may be the case that racially restrictive covenants provide an especially powerful way to illustrate the legacies of structural racism, it is also the case that there are a variety of other policies and practices that were of a piece with the broader formation of structural racism. Planners interested in fostering conversations about structural racism in their region or municipality should consider what data sets specific to their geographic, historic, and political context might be most illustrative.

### Make the Data Collection Process Transparent and Inclusive

Public participation in the production of the data set and the iterative publication of in-progress maps contributed to a public perception of the quality and objectivity of the final map. Planners and researchers interested in creating data sets should consider whether the data collection process can include public participation and whether it is feasible to share in-progress results.

### Keep Data Sets Simple

As one respondent put it, part of the power of the data set lies in the fact that “there’s no value statement ... you either had [a covenant] or you didn’t. It’s not debatable.” Others confirmed that the straightforward nature of the data set itself allowed it to be broadly relevant through overlays with spatial data layers relevant to particular agencies. Planners should consider developing spatial data sets that can be represented simply and made widely available so they can be overlaid with an array of other data layers.

### The Data Are Not the Whole Story

MP’s data are an effective tool for learning about structural racism and generating organizational and public buy-in for initiatives to address racial disparities not simply because of the points on the map but because of the stories those points tell. That the data set put racial

inequality in a historical and regional context was influential in creating political buy-in for policies addressing racial inequality, reinforcing the importance of storytelling and narrative in planning advocacy (Goetz, 2008; Polletta & Lee, 2006; Sandercock, 2003). Planners should consider developing narrative presentations about the stories told by the data sets as they develop.

### Conclusion

In this study, we aimed to understand how a novel data set on the history and geography of housing discrimination shifted organizational culture and planning paradigms in ways that might meaningfully advance anti-racist action. Through its attendance to the structural dimensions of racism, engagement with MP’s data on racial covenants led to shifts in organizational culture that contributed to the way planners understand and address racial inequality. Although we found significant evidence that the project was influential and resulted in some policy changes, we did not see evidence of efforts among planning organizations to meaningfully enhance the self-determination of racially marginalized groups. Finally, although many have expressed interest in mapping covenants in their region, we identified a broader set of characteristics that made MP so successful that might inform the development of a wide diversity of new data projects, including a focus on the production of Whiteness, local specificity of data, and transparent and inclusive data production. If data are to be a tool for advancing anti-racist futures, data production must be grounded in collaborative, co-productive partnerships with the communities most affected by the history of racism.

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#### SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Supplemental data for this article can be found on the publisher’s website.

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