Mapping Racial Covenants in Stearns County, MN

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Background
Over the past year, CSB and SJU Honors students have uncovered racial covenants included in some property deeds in Stearns county. Racial covenants prevent people of certain races from owning or occupying property, thus creating and maintaining segregated neighborhoods. The Great River Covenants Project (greatrivercovenants.org) has been created to educate the public about this work.
I worked as the client of a group of Honors Students, currently enrolled in HONR 395: Liberal Arts in Action, to create these maps and others showing the relationship between household income and current property values for parcels with racial covenants.

Text found on Covenants
- This property shall not be occupied by anyone not a member of the Caucasian race.
- That the same shall not be sold, conveyed or leased to, or occupied by any person of the Negro, Chinese or Japanese races.
- That no person or persons other than of the Caucasian race shall be permitted to occupy said premises or any part thereof.
- This lot is sold with the express covenant that it shall never be occupied by a Negro.

Methods
I started with a spreadsheet of information directly transcribed from property deeds containing racial covenants. Location information from the property deeds included the neighborhood, block, and lot number for each property. Using historical plat maps obtained from the Stearns County Recorder’s Office and a GIS file of the current Stearns County plat map, I identified and digitized the location of the original properties indicated on the deeds. Data for each property includes the property grantor (seller), grantee (buyer), year of sale, and location information for each property.

Resources
Parcels – March 2024 (2024) [downloaded file], Stearns County GIS, MN. URL: https://gis.co.stearns.mn.us/glodata/parcels.zip [April 2024]
Plat maps of Villa Park (1919), Memorial Acres (1947), Cedar View (1956), and Islewood Beach (1956) obtained from Stearns County Recorder’s office.