

[NEWS & FEATURES](#) ▾ [ALL SECTIONS](#) ▾ [EVENTS](#) ▾[OBITS](#) [SISTER SPOKESMAN](#) [E-EDITIONS](#) [JOBS](#) ▾

Exposing Minnesota-style bigotry inspires movement for change

by [Tony Kiene](#) — February 22, 2023



Courtesy of TPT

Structural barriers stopped many people who were not white from buying property and building wealth for most of the last century... Contemporary white residents of Minneapolis like to think their city never had formal segregation. But racial covenants did the work of Jim Crow in northern cities like Minneapolis. — Mapping Prejudice

On February 25, 2019, Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) debuted “Jim Crow of the North.” Produced by “Minnesota’s storyteller,” Daniel Bergin, this critically acclaimed, Emmy Award-winning documentary shines a light on the revolutionary research of Mapping Prejudice and some of our more sordid racial history here in Minneapolis.

A University of Minnesota-based team of historians, geographers, library professionals, activists, volunteers, and scholars in the field of digital humanities, Mapping Prejudice unearthed the city's shameful legacy of restrictive housing covenants and redlining dating back more than a century.

Many scholars, including Dr. Samuel L. Myers, Roy Wilkins professor of human relations and social justice at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, cite how the local housing policies and practices of the past have helped to fuel the North Star State's 21st-century status as one of the worst states for African Americans to live.

Overall, Minnesota ranks at or near the top of nearly every quality-of-life measure that one could imagine. Nevertheless, when the curtain is pulled back, we find this state still maintains some of the widest racial gaps in the nation around such things as employment, education, homeownership and affordable housing, median income, health care and wealth.

- ADVERTISEMENT -

Thanks to Myers and others, this is no longer a secret. Yet it remains a stark and startling reality. Referring to what he calls the "Minnesota Paradox," Myers writes that "In short, racially discriminatory policies became institutionalized and 'baked into' the fabric of Minnesota life. When racism becomes institutionalized, you do not need individual racists for there to be structural racism."

That said, there is some good news to report. The Mapping Prejudice and TPT's documentary have spawned several resistance movements that collectively seek not only to expunge these restrictive covenants from the record, but effect real change that punches a hole in the racial wealth and homeownership gaps that have plagued the Twin Cities metro and greater Minnesota for decades.



Courtesy of TPT

Daniel Bergin

Resistance and resilience

The efforts of four such movements have now been captured in a series of documentary shorts, also produced by Bergin and TPT, aptly titled “Jim Crow of the North Stories.”

“I didn’t necessarily imagine the original film would elicit a response like this. New organizations have been born out of the amazing work done by Mapping Prejudice and our ability to demonstrate their triumphs at TPT,” explains Bergin, “So, it’s a little surprising, yeah, but also makes sense. It speaks to the tradition of someone like a Gordon Parks, whose camera lens always bent toward justice and truth, while inspiring others to act. And, I think maybe that is what is happening here.”

Each of the new stories produced by Bergin received their public premiere on February 6 at Breck School in Golden Valley, as part of “Bridging the Faultlines: Stories of Racism, Resistance and Repair.”

In addition to the four short films, the program included powerful artistic interludes and testimonials from host Hawona Sullivan Janzen, author Erin Harkey, poet and scholar Taiyon J. Coleman, and musicians Mayyadda and Oliver Lyle.

Golden Valley proved a fitting location to launch “Jim Crow of the North Stories” as the first episode in the series, “A Racial Border in Minneapolis,” chronicles the historic tools and strategies used by this first-ring suburb to not only ensure Black residents in North and South Minneapolis wouldn’t move there, but think twice about even visiting.

One of those featured in the film is local jazz legend Oliver Lyle, who in 1969 began a regular engagement at the popular Point Supper Club on 7711 Golden Valley Road. Golden Valley police routinely stopped Lyle on his way to his gigs until he’d finally had enough and sued. His successful suit against these officers resulted in the first damages ever paid out in the State of Minnesota since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Also highlighted in this first episode is the story of Golden Valley City Attorney Maria Cisneros, who discovered that the home she and her husband planned to buy still had a racial covenant in its title.

They were able to officially discharge that vestige of the past. Today, community-based coalitions like Just Deeds and Free the Deeds are discharging scores of restrictive covenants for homeowners across the Twin Cities.

Making an impact

As such covenants are no longer enforceable, some have suggested their removal is purely symbolic. But others see it much differently. Moreover, these efforts are part and parcel of a larger movement toward reparations, the emergence of community land trusts, and the push to increase Black homeownership, all matters at the center of the other three episodes in “Jim Crow of the North Stories.”

Asked if plans exist to tell even more Jim Crow stories, Bergin says that's something he and his colleagues at TPT talk about. "I'm hopeful that we'll revisit this again.

"It's exciting to hear from others from around the state, even across the country—educators, activists and others who've been impacted by what we've done here. And, this is not revisionist history. It's a data-driven process, one that is quite extraordinary, actually. And we must thank Mapping Prejudice for that."

- ADVERTISEMENT -

All four episodes are now available to view at tpt.org, as is the original documentary and several other films that address the history of housing disparities in Minnesota.

"Jim Crow of the North Stories" will receive another public screening Monday, March 6, at the historic Capri Theater in North Minneapolis. This second offering of "Bridging the Faultlines: Racism, Resistance and Repair" will once again include a live musical performance from Oliver Lyle, plus contributions from Rose McGee, Ricki Monique, and Kenna-Camara Cottman. Admission is free, but advanced registration is encouraged at eventbrite.com.

Previous Post

Panel explores Minnesota's glaring racial inequities

Tony Kiene

Tony Kiene's experience in the Twin Cities nonprofit and entertainment industries includes work with Minneapolis Urban League, Penumbra Theatre, Hallie Q. Brown, and Pepé Music. He welcomes reader responses to tkiene@spokesman-recorder.com.

You Might **Also Like**



Film links Minneapolis' Jim Crow past to present-day disparities

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Name *

Email *

Website

POST COMMENT

