

SANKOFA

@Home

*Arthur and Edith Lee House/
Housing Covenants*



Transform Minnesota

ARTHUR AND EDITH LEE HOUSE

Our next Sankofa at Home stop is at the corner of E 46th St and Columbus Ave S in South Minneapolis.

In June 1931, Arthur and Edith Lee purchased a home at 4600 Columbus Ave S. Upon moving in that July, the neighborhood association offered to purchase the home from the Lees, who were Black, for \$300 more than the family had paid in an attempt to keep the family out of the neighborhood.

When the family refused to sell, violence ensued. A crowd numbering between 3,000-6,000 people surrounded the house nightly, with many yelling taunts or throwing rocks at the house. The family's dog was also poisoned and killed.

"Nobody asked me to move out when I was in France fighting in mud and water for this country. I came out here to make this house my home. I have a right to establish a home."

-Arthur Lee to the Minneapolis Tribune, July 1931



Arthur and Edith Lee House
4600 Columbus Ave S
Minneapolis, MN 55407

All available police in the city were called in an attempt to protect the house and disperse the crowd. Arthur Lee, a WWI veteran and postal worker, also had fellow vets and coworkers protecting the house.

OPPOSITION TO INTEGRATION

Crowds eventually dissipated following a statement from the family's lawyer, Lena O. Smith, that the family would not move. However, "the police presence remained at the Lees' house for more than a year thereafter; the Lees' daughter was escorted to and from school by police ([link](#))."

The family moved to Minneapolis' Central neighborhood in 1934 "only after waiting long enough to prove they could not be forced out ([link](#))."

The house was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2014.

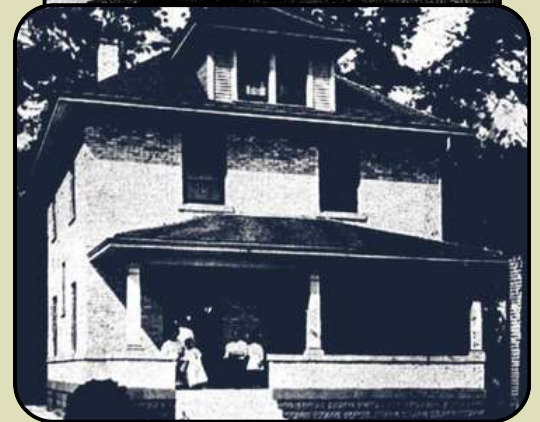
THE JACKSON AND SIMPSON HOMES

The Lee family was not the first Black family white Minneapolitans tried to force from their home.

In 1908, **Madison and Amy Woods Jackson** were the first African American family to move into the all-white **Prospect Park** neighborhood. When their friends **William and Daisy Simpson** bought a lot around the corner, the neighborhood association launched what the *Minneapolis Tribune* described as a "race war ([link](#))."

A group of 125 residents confronted the families at the Jackson house on October 21, 1909, and warned of potential future violence. Neighbors also attempted to purchase the lot from the Simpsons and impeded work on the house.

Both families stood their ground. The Jackson family remained until 1927; the Simpsons until 1931.



Top: Simpson family home at 17 Melbourne Ave

Bottom: Jackson family home on Hamline Ave (now Franklin Ave)

HOUSING COVENANTS

While violence and intimidation were used numerous times in an attempt to force Black families from their homes around the Twin Cities, other structural tools were far more pervasive.

Racially restrictive housing covenants are covenants which were entered into housing deeds to prohibit sale of the property to a person of a specified minority group.

If anyone were to sell (or lease, in many cases) the property to a member of the restricted group, the property would revert to the owner who had entered the covenant into the deed.

The first racially restrictive housing covenant in Minneapolis was created in May 1910 (likely by real estate developer **Edmund G. Walton**). From 1910 through the early 1960s, these covenants were inserted into thousands of property deeds around the metro to prevent houses from being sold to people of color and to maintain all-white neighborhoods.

MAPPING PREJUDICE

Since 2016, the Mapping Prejudice project at the University of Minnesota has identified and mapped more than 30,000 racial covenants in property deeds from **Anoka, Hennepin, Ramsey, and Dakota** counties. The project is continuing to actively pursue a comprehensive database of covenants across the Twin Cities metro and partnerships with additional counties around the state.

[Click here](#) to view a map of the covenants and see the effect this practice has had on present-day Minnesota.



REDLINING

In 1934, the same year the Lee family moved out of their house on Columbus Ave, the **Federal Housing Administration (FHA)** was created to underwrite and insure housing mortgages.

In order to determine which properties would be eligible for an FHA-backed mortgage, the **Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC)** was tasked with creating “residential security maps” of major U.S. cities to identify the level of security for real estate in these cities. The maps used a color-coded system to identify the “best” areas (colored green); “still desirable” areas (colored blue); “definitely declining” areas (colored yellow); and “hazardous” areas (colored red).

The term “redlining” is derived from this coloring system. Decisions about which areas would be redlined were made based on race. Areas were redlined if they contained a large Black or minority population. Banks would not grant mortgages in these areas.

Racial consideration was present beyond redlined areas. The HOLC refused to give an area a green line designation unless restrictive covenants were already in place ([link](#)).

REDLINING VS. HOUSING COVENANTS

Redlining

The term **redlining** comes from the color of the HOLC housing maps which indicated “hazardous” areas for investors. Redlined areas were almost exclusively majority-minority communities. Banks did not grant mortgages in these areas.

Housing Covenants

A **racially restrictive housing covenant** is a covenant which was entered into housing deeds prohibiting sale of the property to a person of a specified minority group.

LEGACY OF REDLINING IN MSP

Though the practices of redlining and racially restrictive housing covenants were officially ended through the **1968 Fair Housing Act**, the impact of these practices continues to be felt across the U.S. Many cities remain largely segregated in line with the HOLC maps. BIPOC individuals also had much greater difficulty building wealth through home ownership.

The impact of these systems can also be seen in the Twin Cities. Many redlined communities were destroyed to make way for highways, such as **St. Paul's Rondo Neighborhood**. Others were cut off by highways, including **E 38th St and 4th Ave S in Minneapolis** (this [map](#) demonstrates this by laying the HOLC map over a modern street layout).

Disparities in homeownership between Black and white owners in the Twin Cities remain among the highest in the country. Redlined communities have also had to deal with school closings such as **Minneapolis Central High School**, the decline of business corridors like **4th Ave S** and **Plymouth Ave N**, and other lasting negative effects of these systemic practices.



Top: I-94 looking east at the Dale St bridge in the heart of Old Rondo

Bottom: Minnesota Spokesman Recorder building at the corner of E 38th St and 4th Ave S in South Minneapolis

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

As you visit the Arthur and Edith Lee House:

- What do you feel?
- What's new to you?
- Stand on the corner and imagine being surrounded by 3,000 people.
 - What would that have looked and felt like?
 - What would that experience have been like for the Lee family?
- While the Lee, Jackson, and Simpson families were able to maintain their property in the face of racial injustice, this was often not the case (including in Minneapolis).
 - How was violence used against the Lee, Jackson, and Simpson families? How is violence used to maintain injustice today?

As you learn more about housing covenants and redlining in the Twin Cities:

- What do you feel?
- What's new to you?
- How have our neighborhoods been shaped by redlining? By housing covenants?
- Visit the Mapping Prejudice website:
 - Does your home have a housing covenant?
 - Are there any in your neighborhood? Your city?
- How does the location where people live fuel injustice?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[The Geography of Inequality](#)

Kevin Ehrman-Solberg |
TEDxMinneapolis - YouTube

In this talk, Kevin Ehrman-Solberg shows how contemporary racial disparities in housing are rooted in the spatial practices of the past.

[Jim Crow of the North | Redlining and Racism in Minnesota | Full Documentary](#)

Twin Cities PBS and Mapping Prejudice

Roots of racial disparities are seen through a new lens in this film that explores the origins of housing segregation in the Minneapolis area.

[The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America](#)

Richard Rothstein

Richard Rothstein makes clear that it was de jure segregation—the laws and policy decisions passed by local, state, and federal governments—that actually promoted the discriminatory housing patterns that continue to this day.

[Racial Housing Covenants in the Twin Cities](#)

MNOpedia

[With covenants, racism was written into Minneapolis housing. The scars are still visible.](#)

MinnPost

[Twin Cities homeowners want to remove racial covenants, but cities are struggling to keep up](#)

Star Tribune

[Deeds barred home buyers of color in parts of Dakota County](#)

Star Tribune

[St. Paul announces program to help homeowners discharge racial covenants](#)

Star Tribune

[I-35W freeway uprooted and divided African American business district](#)

FOX 9



Minneapolis "Race War"
1909: Prospect Park
The Historyapolis Project

The Arthur and Edith Lee House is Preserved
African American Registry

The Jackson/Simpson Families
Owning Up

Minnesota Black History Salute: Lena O. Smith
Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder

Lake Harriet neighbors rejected black minister in 1909
Star Tribune

Lena Olive Smith House
City of Minneapolis

July 16, 1931 - Angry white mob surrounds Minneapolis home
Minneapolis Tribune
(now the Star Tribune)

Disparities in the Minneapolis park system and their health implications on communities of color
MinnPost

Arthur and Edith Lee House
City of Minneapolis

A Relic of Racism: The hidden history of discrimination behind a small house in Minneapolis
FOX 9



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COMPLEX ISSUES. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE.

This resource list is part of Transform
Minnesota' Sankofa @ Home series

Inclusion of a resource on the list does
not represent a full endorsement of
stated beliefs