



Monroe County Clerk
JAMIE ROMEO

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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***** Media Release *****

Statement from Monroe County Clerk Jamie Romeo Regarding Racial Covenants of Monroe County's Past

August 3rd, 2020 (Rochester, NY) Earlier today, the Yale Environmental Protection Clinic and City Roots Community Land Trust released their guide entitled "Confronting Racial Covenants: How They Segregated Monroe County and What To Do About Them." Monroe County Clerk Jamie Romeo issued the following statement:

"I want to commend both the Yale Environmental Protection Clinic and City Roots Community Land Trust for this important report. Racist, restrictive covenants and our community's legacy of this practice is not new, however this report helps identify the remaining issues of equity and integrity that remain. Racial covenants are the embodiment of structural racism, where governments and other systems were designed with the intention of providing white residents more opportunities than people of color. While these covenants may be illegal today, we continue to feel their impacts through the inequities and needs we must address today."

Romeo continued, "The steps our office has taken to acknowledge these covenants is by no means an act of absolution. The history of the Monroe County Clerk's Office is one as an active participant in the racial segregation of our community. We stand ready to partner and walk with stakeholders and residents to address the hard truths about our history, in order build constructive steps towards a more equitable and just Monroe County community."

Since the County Clerk's Office was first approached about this initiative in late 2019, our staff has continued to explore how to address these concerns and also utilize this information towards actionable, positive change.

The County Clerk's Office has taken the following steps to confront the possession of these racist covenants:

- Signage has been installed throughout our Records Department that clearly and plainly state that racial covenants are illegal and unenforceable.
- Language notifying users of our County Fusion online document database also clearly and plainly states that should a document include one of these covenants that it is illegal and unenforceable. However, since documents older than 1968 have not been digitized the likelihood of viewing such remains low.
- Development of public education displays to be installed in the public accessible portions of the Downtown Filing Office. Further plans for online materials and community discussion remain underway.
- Working with the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity (RASE) to identify and develop next steps for the future management of documents containing racial covenants in Monroe County
- Bringing together stakeholders within the community to develop community-based solutions for neighborhoods and property owners who's deeds contain such covenants

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