

A Narrowed Focus on Sundown America: Making Sense of Modern Racism in Historical Sundown Towns Across Four States

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Sundown Towns

California is often framed as a progressive counterpoint to America's most racially antagonistic spaces, but empirical research on sundown America would refute such notions. State patterns suggest high

racial-residential homogeneity, school-based violence, hate group presence, and racial disparities in policing:

- **Berkeley:** Black residents and students reported persistent microaggressions (2022, 2023, 2024), employment discrimination (2024), public avoidance behaviors (2024), and retail surveillance (2024)
- **Piedmont:** Repeated school-based incidents (2000, 2017-2022), including racial slurs (2000, 2017), swastikas (2017), and anti-Black flyers (2017)
- **Orinda:** Investigations into racial slurs (2017), graffiti (2020), and near-exclusive White employment in education and government positions (2020)
- **Antioch:** Online threats against Black public officials (2024), hate crimes (2023-2024), calls for racial violence (2024), such as lynchings (2024)
- **Eureka:** White supremacist propaganda (2019), racially motivated arson (2024), targeted threats (2024)
- **Placerville:** Known as "Hangtown." Racially extremist hate groups (2020-2021), racial profiling (2024-2025), lynching (2024)
- **Selma:** Workplace discrimination lawsuits (2020), racist graffiti (2020), racial disparities in arrests (2020)

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Colorado has relatively few historical sundown towns. However, among such communities, clear patterns involve majority-White suburban enclaves, schools, and other institutional arenas. Growing

evidence of public symbols of hostility, such as swastikas and Nazi flags:

- **Longmont:** Repeated bias incidents (2016-2021), including swastika graffiti (2016), racist letters to Hispanic family in a banishment attempt from the community (2017), other targeted flyers (2021), armed threat against new-coming Hispanic families (2018)
- **Cherry Hills Village:** Students using n-word and stating Black people "should not be alive" (2023), overwhelming White-only racial enclaves (2000s-2010s)
- **Evans:** Business signage threatening arrest for Mexican truck drivers (2014), federal civil rights complaints (2024), Office for Civil Rights investigation into racially hostile school environments (2020), race-based jury disparities (2025)
- **Colorado Springs:** Mosque vandalized (2017), mass shooting linked to racially extremist ideology (2022), fatal police force (2019)

BACKGROUND. Growing research on sundown towns has indicated differential social processes across racially exclusive communities by region. In the current research, we examine possible regional differences in modern experiences of racism within historical sundown towns. Our findings signal several points of convergence, and divergence, across four American regions.

METHODS. This project employed a two-stage qualitative content analysis to identify contemporary racialized experiences within communities with documented sundown histories. Step 1 included incident identification and Step 2 encompassed thematic classification by violence vs. non-violence and prejudice vs. discrimination. The goal of the project is to use key states as analytic anchors for understanding regional differences in America's sundown behaviors

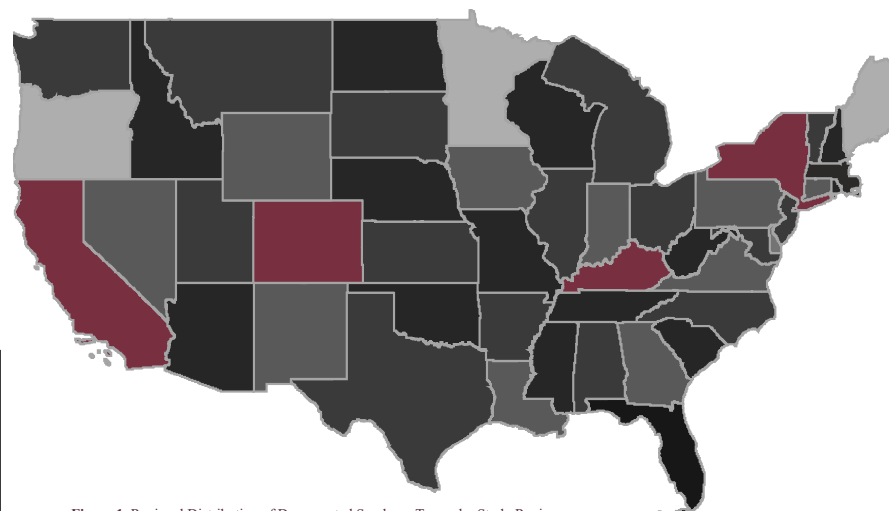


Figure 1. Regional Distribution of Documented Sundown Towns by Study Region.

TAKEAWAYS. We offer several implications through our research. Sundown towns legacies persist through different mechanisms, not different outcomes. Certain institutional arenas such as schools, police departments, courts, and local governments repeatedly appear across sundown town regions. Symbolic intimidation appears as a durable force across the country. Regions with extremely low Black populations (e.g., KY towns) showed overt enforcement of racial boundaries, where more diverse areas (e.g., CA and NY towns), exhibited stronger patterns of surveillance and institutional stratification.



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New York sundown towns include many common features of modern racism today, including suburban enclaves, racism in schools, lynching symbolism, and growing segregation across core

Institutions, including workplaces and law enforcement:

- **Delmar:** Two firefighters charged with felony hate crimes after harassing a colleague with a noose-shaped rope and repeated racist remarks (2024). In another incident, high school threats resulted in student arrests for racial terrorism (2024)
- **Green Island:** Racial slurs and vandalism on school campuses (2022-2024), criminal mischief charges after racial harassment of Black households, racially targeted harassment and assaults with weapons (2024)
- **West Elmira:** Allegation that a police chief was terminated in retaliation for hiring a Black disabled veteran (2026)
- **Amherst:** Hate symbols carved into school property, antisemitic remarks at athletic events, racially-motivated armed assaults (2025), growing anti-Asian hate crimes (2021-2023)
- **Scarsdale:** Repeated school-based racial incidents and discrimination complaints (2022, 2024)

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Kentucky sundown towns exhibit recurring themes of extremely low Black population shares, considerable evidence of Confederate and hate group symbols of racial intimidation, and school-based violence

- **Benton:** Ongoing demographic disparities that appear to illustrate explicit patterns of residential segregation (2018), BLM protests accompanied by deadly threats toward Black families (2020), legal petition alleging rampant racial retaliation within local schools (2022)
- **Corbin:** Fewer than 24 Black residents, KKK flyers distributed in neighborhoods warning violence against non-White households (2023), Black student forced to wear noose around his neck (2022)
- **Calvert City:** Public concern over where Asian residents might experience racism (2023)
- **Florence:** Swastikas and racial slurs etched into park concrete (2025) and residential communities (2022)
- **Mount Washington:** Confederate flag used to damage Black student's vehicle (2016), secret records of jail officials using racial slurs (2022), Republican political candidate posting racist imagery of President Obama (2016), and KKK resurgence (2001)
- **Whitesburg:** Elected officials and deputies disciplined following racist social media activity (2020), public backlash over dismissal of racism concerns (2020, 2025)