

# Sundown America Today: Understanding Public Experiences of Modern Racism in Historical Sundown Towns

**Ella Osweiler, Morgan Wilson, Jahkaris Johnson, Jack M. Mills, and Brendan Lantz**  
College of Criminology and Criminal Justice

## Background

- **Sundown towns** are known as historical communities in the United States which held particularly explicit practices of violent racial exclusion.
- Despite the commonly accepted notion that sundown towns are a “thing of the past,” the primary scholar on the topic—James W. Loewen—urged scholars to reframe the issue as a reoccurring, continuous phenomenon that is still present in America.
- In the current UROP study, we explore qualitative personal experiences of modern racism in communities with historical sundown designations.

## Methodology

**Our qualitative analyses was completed in 2 steps.** UROP coders were trained to identify and discern modern racialized experiences in communities with sundown histories. These experiences were then contextualized by coders.

**Modern racism** included experiences which occurred after 2000. Experiences were identified through open-source internet searches (a conservative estimate of such behaviors, given selection bias)

Three general themes

- **Non-violent racism:** prejudice and discrimination without threat of violence
- **Violent racism:** behaviors which threatened or activated violence
- **Segregation:** institutional exclusion (e.g., housing zones, employee discrimination)

## Project series

**This research is part of a broader dissertation project examining modern social outcomes in communities with a historical sundown presence.** Please refer to this QR code to view other posters contributing to this larger initiative, including:

- Last year’s project on sundown counties and racial hate crimes.
- A quantitative poster of historical sundown counties and a more completed sundown county dataset using novel methods.
- A qualitative poster emphasizing regional differences in sundown behaviors

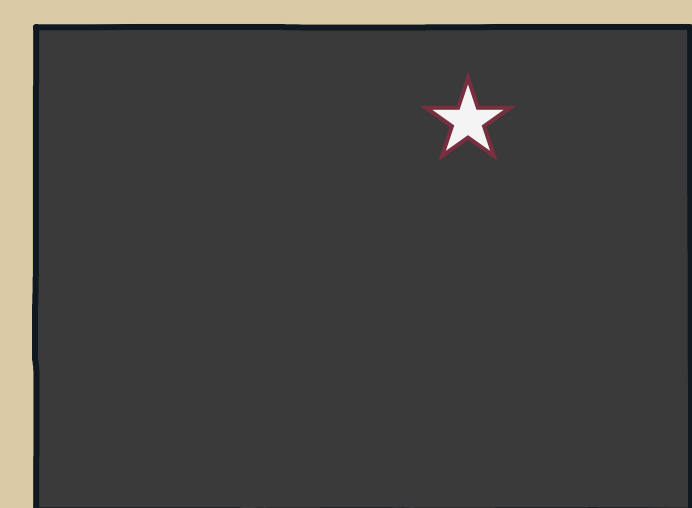


## Non-violent racism



In **Georgetown, South Carolina**, the NAACP held a press conference in 2023 after a Black middle school student was suspended more harshly than a white peer in a vandalism

incident. Specifically, the Black student had *recorded* the vandalism, but was punished more severely than the vandals themselves. At a later date, that same Black student was suspended after being harassed and fighting back. We found no evidence of punishment for the harasser. A spokesperson for the NAACP said “Blacks get punished, Whites get to do what they want ... we are looking for someone to hold that superintendent accountable.”



At a truck stop in **Evans, Colorado**, multiple racist signs were placed inside a fuel station. While the sign began with a more

general statement about loitering concerns, the sign explicitly ended with “This goes for all truckers, but especially if you are of Mexican descent.” The coverage of this incident, which occurred around spring of 2024, by news media and officials was confusing and contradictory. At times, local law enforcement refuted that the incident had even happened, but it appears they have since quietly recanted from this position. We could not find serious records proving a robust investigation of the incident.

## Violent racism



In 2024, a White man was traveling with his Black co-worker through **Anna, Illinois**. At a gas station, the Black man was approached by a White local who warned

that “Anna” stood for “Ain’t No N\*\*\*\*\* Allowed.” The White local then returned to his truck and waited until the two co-workers left town.



In 2005, a federal appeals court argued that two men convicted in a cross-burning hate crime were under-sentenced.

The men were deemed major actors in a cross-burning near a mixed-race family home to drive out a Black man from a neighborhood in **Fouke, Arkansas**. Despite hate crime convictions, no penalty enhancements were given. The men served one month in prison.

Following a heated social media exchange, a White commenter urged others to identify the



original poster—a Black woman—and wrote, “let’s lynch her.” The statement alarmed campus officials which ultimately prompted authorities to arrest the students on hate crime charges. The case ultimately resolved with probation for the offender.

## Segregation



**Greenwich, Connecticut** is among the most segregated communities is one of the most segregated states of the country.

During a 2021 state legislative hearing on (racially) discriminatory zoning reform, New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker criticized affluent suburbs—including Greenwich—arguing that zoning practices were directly perpetuating racial exclusion. Despite its size, Connecticut maintained a striking *eight* historical sundown towns, all of which still appear to be racially exclusive.



A report from the *Othering & Belonging Institute* at the University of California, Berkeley, highlighted how residential segregation has continued its persistence across California in recent years.

**Watsonville, California**, has stood out for persistently high levels of racial and economic segregation. Although the city itself has become more racially diverse over time, spatial patterns remain largely segregated. 2020 Census estimates reveal that the Hispanic population—comprising ~80% of the city—live in low-income neighborhoods relative to the very small White population, which mostly lives in wealthier racial enclaves. School segregation appears prevalent throughout the city and across Santa Cruz county, more broadly. Recent estimates reveal that no city in the county were considered racially integrated.