

Revealing Sundown America: The Extrapolation of Historical Sundown Datasets Using a Novel Propensity Score Application

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Background

Sundown towns, by conventional definition, are historical communities which prohibited many non-White racial groups (and especially Black people) residency and often any entry at all. However, seminal research on sundown communities suggests that many sundown-like communities exist, without being labeled as sundown in historical records (Loewen 2018). Moreover, an amassing theoretical perspective—path dependence (Acharya et al. 2018)—has increasingly levied evidence supporting the notion that America’s racial past has followed into the present.

Methodology

We examine this notion by taking seven primary steps:

1. Reconstructed Loewen’s sundown towns dataset and aggregated it to the county level (see Rigby et al. 2025)
2. Merged ACS 2008-2012 data to capture modern racial composition and spatial structures
3. Constructed six covariates reflecting racial composition
4. Estimated a logistic regression propensity score model predicting historical sundown designation
5. Evaluated model diagnostics (distributional overlap, KS test, ROC/AUC)
6. Classified counties using percentile thresholds (30th, 40th, and 50th) to identify “sundown-like” counties
7. Adopted 30th percentile cutoff for visualization

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.
- Two qualitative posters emphasizing state and regional sundown behaviors



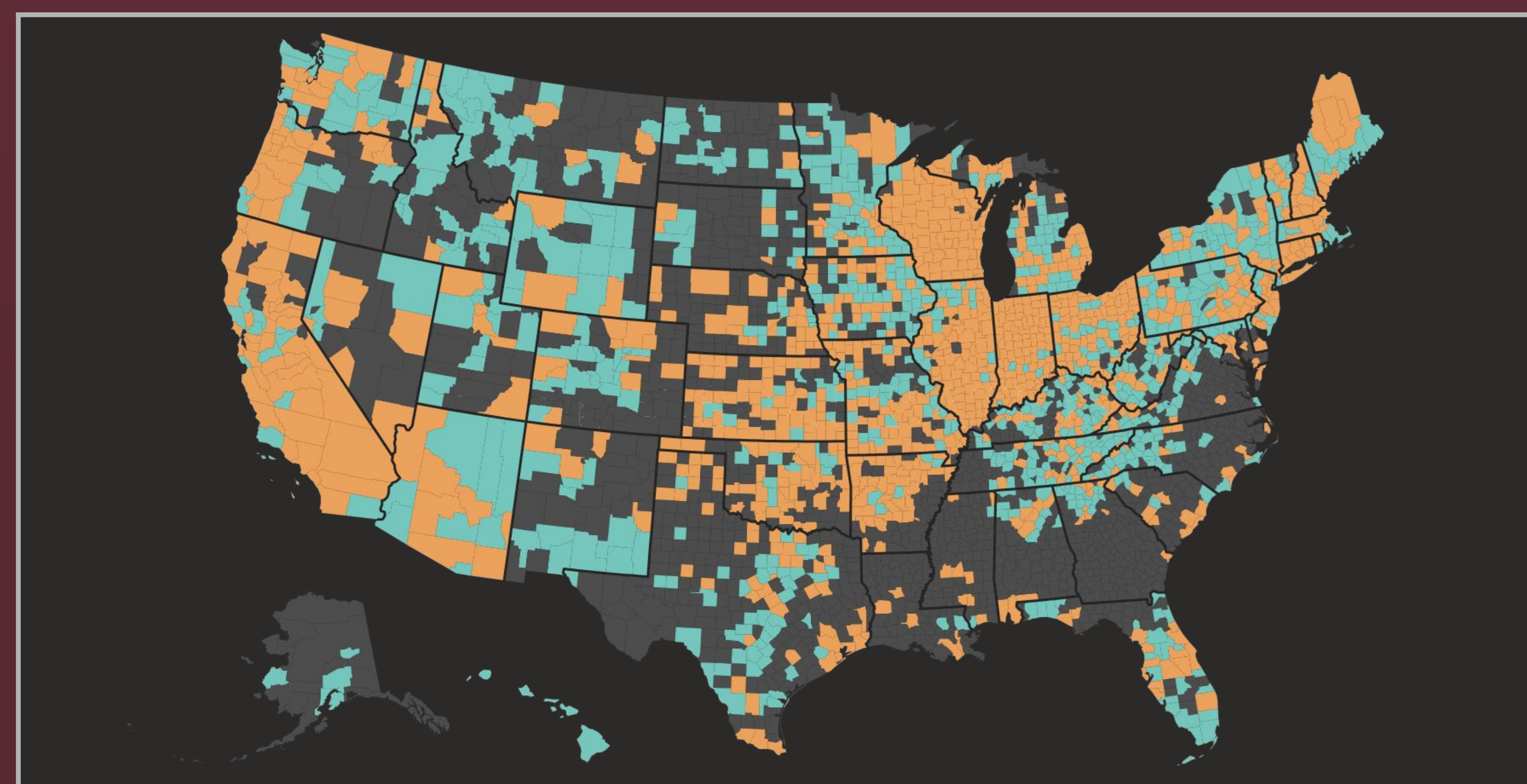
Sundown Data

Loewen’s historical data

Region	Number of sundown towns	Share of region counties
Northeast	101	47%
Midwest	537	51%
West	116	26%
Confederate South	95	34%
Non-Confederate South	182	16%

Mills’ propensity-based data

Cases by percentile threshold (analytic sample boldened)			
	30 th	40 th	50 th
	103	99	88
	229	172	131
	145	116	87
	89	60	38
	200	152	105



Historically Sundown
N = 1,031 counties

Sundown-Like (30th pctile)
N = 766 counties

Highlights from Loewen

- Loewen’s data collection project was extensive and robust, capturing ~ 35% of each region of the U.S. on average
- Loewen’s data show clear saturation in Midwest, with more than 80% of Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin counties being documented with sundown presence by his ethnographic efforts
- The American South—and especially the Confederate South—appear at least somewhat unrepresented in his data. Possible exploitation vs. expulsion implications

Highlights from Mills

- Mills’ sundown-like propensity score model generated between 449 counties (50th percentile) and 776 counties (30th percentile) that appear high in structural sundown propensity
- The augmented sample (historical + sundown-like) represents between 47% and 57% of all American counties
- Alaska and Hawaii, which do not appear in Loewen’s data, exhibit multiple sundown-like counties
- Greater than 80% of counties in more than 15 states appear in the augmented sample

Future directions

- More focus on American South and the possibility that exclusion would have destroyed exploitation-based labor market (Loewen 2018)
- More granular spatial propensity score tests to identify micro-exclusion (including in the South).
- Quantitative-based social outcome analyses to evaluate racial discrimination, prejudice, and disparities
- Retroactive searches to identify structural racism in sundown-like counties in historical and current times
- Qualitative-based surveys to examine public opinion on race in sundown America.