Warning: This book excerpt contains racially-insensitive language.

Sundown Towns

James W. Loewen

Chapter One

> "Is it true that "Anna" stands for "Ain't No Niggers Allowed?" I asked at the convenience store in Anna, Illinois, where I had stopped to buy coffee.
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> "Yes," the clerk replied. "That's sad, isn't it," she added, distancing herself from the policy. And she went on to assure me, "That all happened a long time ago."
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> "I understand [racial exclusion] is still going on?" I asked.
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> "Yes," she replied. "That's sad."
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> — conversation with clerk, Anna, Illinois, October, 2001.

Anna is a town of about 7,000 people, including adjoining Jonesboro. The twin towns lie about 35 miles north of Cairo, in Southern Illinois. In 1909, in the aftermath of a horrific nearby "spectacle lynching," Anna and Jonesboro expelled their African Americans. Both cities have been all-white ever since. Nearly a century later, "Anna" is still considered by its residents and by citizens of nearby towns to mean "Ain't No Niggers Allowed," the acronym the convenience store clerk confirmed in 2001.

It is common knowledge that African Americans are not allowed to live in Anna, except for residents of the state mental hospital and transients at its two motels. African Americans who find themselves in Anna and Jonesboro after dark — the majority-black basketball team from Cairo, for example — have been treated badly by residents of the towns and by fans and students of Anna-Jonesboro High School. Towns like Anna and Jonesboro are often called "sundown towns," owing to the signs that many of them formerly sported at their corporate limits — signs that usually said, "Nigger, Don't Let The Sun Go Down On You In ____." Anna-Jonesboro had such signs on Highway 127 as recently as the 1970s. In some areas, these communities were known as "sunset towns" and, in the Ozarks, "gray towns." In the East, although many communities excluded African Americans, the term "sundown town" itself was rarely used. Residents of all-white suburbs also usually avoided the term, though not the policy.

Sundown towns are almost everywhere.

A sundown town is any organized jurisdiction[1] that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was thus "all-white" on purpose. There is a reason for the quotation marks around "all-white": requiring towns to be literally all white in the census — no African Americans at all — is inappropriate, because many towns clearly and explicitly defined themselves as sundown towns but allowed one black household as an exception.[2] Thus "all-white" town may include nonblack minorities and even a tiny number of African Americans.

It turns out that Anna and Jonesboro are not unique, or even unusual. Beginning in about 1890, and continuing until 1968, white Americans established thousands of towns across the United States for whites only. Many towns drove out their black populations, then posted sundown signs. Other towns passed ordinances that African Americans were not allowed after dark or prohibiting them from owning or renting property; still others established such policies by informal means, harassing and even killing those who violated the rule. Some sundown towns similarly kept out Jews, Chinese, Mexicans, Native Americans, or other groups.

Independent sundown towns range from tiny hamlets like De Land, Illinois (population 500), to substantial cities like Appleton, Wisconsin (57,000 in 1970).[3] Sometimes entire counties went sundown, usually when their county seat did. Independent sundown towns were soon joined by "sundown suburbs," which could be even larger: Levittown, on Long Island, had 82,000 residents in 1970, while Livonia, Michigan, and Parma, Ohio, had more than 100,000. Warren, a suburb of Detroit, had a population of 180,000, including just 28 minority families, most of whom lived on a U.S. Army facility.[4]

Outside the "traditional South"[5] — where sundown towns are rare — probably a majority of all incorporated places kept out African Americans. My book shows Illinois, for example, had

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[1]Mere neighborhoods won't do.

[2]Such communities forced me to ease my definition of "all-white town" to include places with as many as nine African Americans, since a single household might easily include six or seven. Non-household blacks, such as prison inmates, live-in servants, and interracial children adopted by white parents, also do not violate sundown town rules that forbid African American households, so they should be excluded from census totals.

[3]I give 1970 populations because in that year, most sundown towns and suburbs had not changed and definitely still maintained sundown policies.

[4]John M. Goering, "Introduction," in John M. Goering, ed., Housing Desegregation and Federal Policy (Chapel Hill: U NC P, 1986), 10; Michael N. Danielson, The Politics of Exclusion (NY: Columbia UP, 1976), 223.

671 towns and cities with more than 1,000 people in 1970, of which 475 — 71% — were all-white in census after census.[6] Almost all of these 475 were sundown towns. There is reason to believe that more than half of all towns in Oregon, Indiana, Ohio, the Cumberlands, the Ozarks, and diverse other areas were also all-white on purpose. Sundown suburbs are found from Darien, Connecticut, to La Jolla, California, and are even more prevalent; indeed, most suburbs began life as sundown towns.

Sundown towns also range across the income spectrum. In 1990, the median owner-occupied house in Tuxedo Park, perhaps the wealthiest suburb of New York City, was worth more than $500,000 (the highest category in the census). So was the median house in Kenilworth, the richest suburb of Chicago. The median house in Pierce City, in southwestern Missouri, on the other hand, was worth just $29,800, and in Zeigler, in Southern Illinois, just $21,900. All four towns kept out African Americans.

This history has been hidden.

Even though sundown towns were everywhere, almost no literature exists on the topic.[7] No book has ever been written about the making of all-white towns in America.[8] Indeed, this story is so unknown as to deserve the term "hidden." Most Americans have no idea such towns

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[6]The total includes 50 towns smaller than 1,000 whose racial histories I learned.

[7]I would like to thank the Newberry Library for an Arthur Weinberg fellowship early in my research. Their staff proved very helpful even though their extensive collection of local histories did not. I also want to thank the University of Illinois Chicago, especially Anthony Martin and his student advisors, and the University of Illinois Urbana, especially Unit One/Allen Hall, for extending month-long residences, access to students and colleagues, and use of their libraries. The Library of Congress, Catholic University library, and the census at the University of Maryland were also helpful, as was David Andrew Timko when he was at the Census Bureau library. David Cline was a fun and helpful intern.

[8]My website, www.uvm.edu/~jloewen/sundown, contains a bibliography on sundown towns. The topic is at least mentioned in Ray Stannard Baker, Following the Color Line (NY: Harper Torchbook, 1964 [1908]); V. Jacque Voegeli, Free But Not Equal (Chicago: U Chi. P, 1967); Frank U. Quillen, The Color Line in Ohio (Ann Arbor: Wahr, 1913); David Gerber, Black Ohio and the Color Line (Urbana: U of IL P, 1976); Emma Thornbrough, The Negro in Indiana (Indianapolis: IN Hist. Bureau, 1957); Howard Chudacoff, Mobile Americans: Residential and Social Mobility in Omaha (NY: Oxford UP, 1971); James DeVries, Race and Kinship in a Midwestern Town (Urbana: U of IL P, 1984); Roberta Senechal, The Sociogenesis of a Race Riot (Urbana: U of IL P, 1990); and unpublished papers by Jack Blocker Jr. on Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. A few sources treat individual sundown towns.

or counties exist or think they happened mainly in the Deep South. Ironically, the traditional South has almost no sundown towns. Mississippi, for instance, has no more than six, mostly mere hamlets, while Illinois has no fewer than 456.

Even book-length studies of individual sundown towns rarely mention their exclusionary policies. Local historians omit the fact intentionally, knowing that it would reflect badly on their communities if publicized abroad. I read at least 300 local histories — some of them elaborate coffee-table books — about towns whose sundown histories I had confirmed via detailed oral histories, but only about 1% of these mentioned their towns' racial policies. In conversation, however, the authors of these commemorative histories were often more forthcoming than in print, showing that they knew about the policy but didn't care to disclose it in print.

Social scientists and professional historians often have done no better in their books. During the Depression, for instance, Malcolm Brown and John Webb wrote Seven Stranded Coal Towns, a report for the federal government. All seven were sundown towns in Southern Illinois — most still are — yet the authors never mention that fact. In 1986, anthropologist John Coggeshall wrote about thirteen Southern Illinois communities; most were probably sundown towns when he wrote; I have confirmed at least five. Yet he never mentions the topic. In Toward New Towns for America, C. S. Stein treats Radburn, New Jersey; "the Greens" — Greenbelt, Maryland, near Washington, DC; Greenhills, Ohio, near Cincinnati; and Greendale, Wisconsin, southwest of Milwaukee, planned towns built by the FDR administration — and several other planned communities, all sundown towns, without ever mentioning race. This takes some doing; about Radburn, for example, Stein details the first residents' occupations, religious denominational memberships, educational backgrounds, and incomes, without once mentioning that all of them were white — and were required to be. Lewis Atherton's Main Street on the Middle Border treats small towns across the Midwest but makes no mention of sundown towns or indeed of African Americans or race relations in any context.[9]

Historians and sociologists may have omitted the fact because they simply did not know about sundown towns. For example, several historians assured me that no town in Wisconsin ever kept out or drove out African Americans. James Danky, librarian at the Wisconsin Historical Society, whose book on the black press in America is the standard reference, wrote:

> I have checked with three of my most knowledgeable colleagues and there is consensus, we do not know of any such towns in Wisconsin. Clearly the Badger State has a full

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[9]Malcolm Brown and John Webb (WPA), Seven Stranded Coal Towns (DC: GPO, 1941); John Coggeshall, "Carbon-Copy Towns? The Regionalization of Ethnic Folklife in Southern Illinois's Egypt," in Barbara Allen and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds., Sense of Place (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1990), 103-119; C. S. Stein, Toward New Towns for America (Boston: MIT Press, 1966); Lewis Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border (Bloomington: IN U P, 1954).

> supply of racism, just no such towns or counties. I believe you have found such entities elsewhere, it is just that I think that it is a small category, at least in terms of being formally established.

Later Danky was surprised and intrigued to learn I had confirmed nine sundown towns in Wisconsin and 194 — no "small category" — in neighboring Illinois. Across the northern United States, many social scientists and historians have gone slack-jawed when hearing details of community-wide exclusion from towns and counties in their state, lasting at least into the late twentieth century.[10]

Overlooking sundown towns stands in sharp contrast to the attention bestowed upon that other violent and extralegal race relations practice, lynching. The literature on lynching is vast, encompassing at least 500 and perhaps thousands of volumes; at this point we have at least one book for every ten confirmed lynchings. Still the books keep coming; Amazon.com listed 126 for sale in 2004. Yet lynchings have ceased in America.[11] Sundown towns, on the other hand, continue to this day.

Sundown towns arose during a crucial era of American history, 1890-1940, when, after the gains of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, race relations systematically grew worse. Since the 1955 publication of C. Vann Woodward's famous book, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, historians of the South have recognized that segregation became much stricter after 1890. No longer could African Americans vote; no longer could they use restaurants and public parks that whites used; even streetcars and railroad waiting rooms now put up screens or signs to isolate blacks into separate sections. African Americans were also beset by violence, as lynchings rose to their highest point.[12] However, most Americans have no idea that race relations worsened between 1890 and the 1930s. As Edwin Yoder Jr. wrote in 2003 in the Washington Post, "Notwithstanding the brilliant revisionist works of the late C. Vann Woodward, few Americans even remotely grasp the earthquake of 1890-1901 that overthrew biracial voting in the South."[13]

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[10]James Danky, email 6/2002.

[11]To be sure, whites still occasionally kill African Americans because they are black, the most notorious recent incident being the 1998 murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas, dragged to death behind a pickup truck, but these incidents are not lynchings. A lynching is a public murder, and the dominant forces in the community are usually in league with the perpetrators. Byrd's death was "merely" a hate crime, and a homicide.

[12]Historians debated Woodward's thesis and persuaded him to recognize that he had overstated it, but 1890-1920 or so is now recognized as a crucial formative period for the "new South."

[13]C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow (NY: Oxford UP 1975 [1955]); Edwin Yoder Jr., "The People, Yes," Washington Post Book World,

This backlash against African Americans was not limited to the South, but was national. Neither the public nor most historians realize that the same earthquake struck the North, too. Woodward actually did; he wrote in the preface to the second edition of his classic that the only reason he did not treat the worsening of race relations in the North was because "my own competence does not extend that far." Unfortunately, except for a handful of important monographs on individual states and locales,[14] few historians have tried to fill the gap in the half century since. Thus they missed one of the most appalling and widespread racial practices of them all: sundown towns. While African Americans never lost the right to vote in the North (although there were gestures in that direction), they did lose the right to live in town after town, county after county.[15]

My own ignorance

Initially I too thought sundown towns, being so extreme, must be extremely rare. Having learned of perhaps a dozen sundown towns and counties — Anna and Edina; Cicero and Berwyn, suburbs of Chicago; Darien, Connecticut, a suburb of New York City; Cedar Key, Florida; Forsyth County, Georgia; Alba and Vidor, Texas; and two or three others — I imagined there might be 50 such towns in the United States. I thought a book about them would be easy to research and write. I was wrong.

I began my on-site research in Illinois, for the simple reason that I grew up there, in Decatur, in the center of the state. Coming of age in Central Illinois, however, I never asked why the little towns clustered about my home city had no black residents. After all, I reasoned, some communities are not on major highways, rivers, or rail lines, are not near African American population concentrations, and have not offered much in the way of employment. Probably they never attracted African American residents. I had no idea that almost all all-white towns and counties in Illinois were all white on purpose.

The idea that intentional "sundown towns" were everywhere in America, or at least everywhere in the Midwest, hit me between the eyes two years into this research — on October 12, 2001. That evening I was the headliner at the Decatur Writers Conference. It was an interesting homecoming, because at the end of my address, I mentioned my ongoing research on

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6/15/2003, 6.

[14]The most important national treatment of this backlash is Rayford W. Logan's The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, reprinted as The Betrayal of the Negro (NY: Macmillan Collier, 1965 [1954]), although it too focused on the South. George Sinkler's The Racial Attitudes of American Presidents (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1971) includes some treatment of the North.

[15]Woodward, ibid., xiii.

sundown towns and invited those who knew something about the subject to come forward and talk with me. In response, a throng of people streamed to the front to tell me about sundown towns they knew of in Central Illinois. Moweaqua (2000 population 1,923, 0 African Americans) was all-white on purpose, two people said. Nearby Assumption (1,261, 0 African Americans) was also a sundown town, except for its orphanage, Kemmerer Village, and the few African American children there often had a hard time in the Assumption school because of their color. A man who "grew up on a farm just west of Decatur and attended high school in Niantic," a hamlet just west of Decatur (738, 0 African Americans), wrote later, "I had always heard that it was against the law for blacks to stay in Niantic overnight. Supposedly, when the railroad section crew was in the area, they would have to pull the work train, with its sleeping quarters for the section hands, out on the main track for the night." Another person confirmed the railroad story, and two others agreed separately that Niantic kept out black people, so I had to conclude that Niantic's population was not all-white because it was so small, but was purposeful. Still others came down with information about De Land, Maroa, Mt. Zion, Pana, Villa Grove, and a dozen other nearby towns.

That evening in Decatur revolutionized my thinking. I now perceived that in the normal course of human events, most and perhaps all towns would not be all-white. Racial exclusion was required. "If they did not have such a policy," observed an African American resident of Du Quoin, Illinois, about the all-white towns around Du Quoin, "surely blacks would be in them." I came to understand that he was right. "If people of color aren't around," writes commentator Tim Wise, "there's a reason, having something to do with history, and exclusion..."[16]

Though mind-boggling to me, this insight proved hardly new. As early as 1858, before the dispersal of African Americans throughout the North prompted by the Civil War, the Wyandotte Herald in Wyandotte, in southeastern Michigan, stated, "Wyandotte is again without a single colored inhabitant, something remarkable for a city of over 6,000 people." Even then, the Herald understood that a city of over 6,000 people was "remarkable" for being all-white. We shall see that a series of riots and threats were required to keep Wyandotte white over the years.17

Later, after slavery ended, African Americans moved throughout America, making it "remarkable" even for smaller towns to be all-white. The anonymous author of History of Lower Scioto Valley, south of Columbus, Ohio, writing in 1884, recognized this in discussing Waverly, a sundown town since before the Civil War:

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[16]John Peters, Du Quoin, 9/2002; Tim Wise, White Like Me (NY: Soft Skull P, 2005), 17.

17 "Edwina M. DeWindt, "Wyandotte History; Negro" (Wyandotte, MI: typescript, 1945, in Bacon Library, Wyandotte), 12, citing Wyandotte Herald, 10/7/1898."

> In 1875 a local census showed Waverly to have 1,279 inhabitants ... It will be seen that the fact of Waverly's not having a single colored resident is a rare mark of distinction for a town of its size. And what makes the fact more remarkable, there never has been a Negro or mulatto resident of the place.[18]

Sundown towns are recent.

In 1884, it was "a rare mark of distinction" for a town the size of Waverly to be all-white. A few years later, however, beginning around 1890 and lasting until at least 1968, towns throughout Ohio and most other states began to emulate the racial policy of places like Wyandotte and Waverly. Most independent sundown towns expelled their black residents, or agreed not to admit any, between 1890 and 1940. Sundown suburbs arose still later, between 1900 and 1968. By the middle of the twentieth century, it was no longer rare for towns the size of Waverly to be all-white. It was common, and usually it was on purpose.

So sundown towns are not only widespread, they are also relatively recent. Except for a handful of places like Wyandotte and Waverly, most towns did not go sundown long ago during slavery times or right after the Civil War, during Reconstruction. On the contrary, blacks moved everywhere in America between 1865 and 1890. African Americans reached every county of Montana. More than 400 lived in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. City neighborhoods across the country were fairly integrated, too, even if their black inhabitants were often servants or gardeners for their white neighbors.

Between 1890 and the 1930s, however, all this changed. By 1930, although its white population had increased by 75%, the Upper Peninsula was home to only 331 African Americans, and 180 of them were inmates of the Marquette State Prison! Eleven Montana counties had no blacks at all. Across the country, city neighborhoods grew more and more segregated. Most astonishing, from California to Minnesota to Long Island to Florida, whites mounted little race riots against African Americans, expelling entire black communities or intimidating and keeping out would-be newcomers.

The role of violence

Whenever a town had African American residents and then had none, we should seek to learn how and why they left. Expulsions and prohibitions often lurk behind the census statistics. Vienna, a town in Southern Illinois, provides a rather recent example. In 1950, Vienna had 1,085 people, including a black community of long standing, dating to the Civil War. In the 1950 census, African Americans numbered 34; additional black families lived just outside Vienna's city limits. Then in the summer of 1954, two black men beat up a white grandmother and allegedly tried to rape her teen-age granddaughter. The grandmother eventually died, and "every [white] man in town was deputized" to find the culprits, according to a Vienna resident in 2004.

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[18]DeWindt, "Wyandotte History; Negro," 4; ---, History of Lower Scioto Valley (Chicago: Interstate, 1884), 736.

The two men were apprehended; in the aftermath, whites sacked the entire black community. "They burned the houses," my informant said. "The blacks literally ran for their lives." The Vienna Times put it more sedately: "The three remaining buildings on the South hill in the south city limits of Vienna were destroyed by fire about 4:30 o'clock Monday afternoon." The report went on to tell that the state's attorney and circuit judge later addressed a joint meeting of the Vienna city council and Johnson County commissioners, "telling them of the loss sustained by the colored people." Both bodies "passed a resolution condemning the acts of vandalism" and promised to pay restitution to those who lost their homes and belongings. Neither body invited the black community to return, and no one was ever convicted of the crime of driving them out. In the 2000 census, Vienna's population of 1,234 included just one African American.[19]

Violence also lay beneath the surface of towns that showed no sudden decline in black residents, never having had any. In 1951, for example, a Chicago bus driver, Harvey Clark, a veteran, tried to move into an apartment in suburban Cicero. First, the police stopped him by force, according to a report by social scientist William Gremley:

> As he arrived at the building with the moving van, local police officials, including the Cicero police chief, stopped him from entering. When he protested, they informed him he could not move in without a "permit." Clark argued in vain against this edict and finally telephoned his solicitor, who assured him that there was no provision in local, state, or federal laws for any such "permit." The police officials then bluntly ordered him and the van away, threatening him with arrest if he failed to comply with their demand. Clark then left, after being man-handled and struck.

Two weeks later, with help from the NAACP, Clark got an injunction barring the Cicero police from interfering with his moving in and ordering them "to afford him full protection from any attempt to so restrain him." As he moved in, a month after his first attempt, whites stood across the street and shouted racial epithets at him. That evening, a large crowd gathered, shouting and throwing stones to break the windows in the apartment Clark had just rented. Prudently, the Clark family did not occupy the apartment. The next night the mob attacked the building, looted the Clarks' apartment as well as some adjoining flats, threw the Clarks' furniture out the window, and set it afire. Local police stood by and watched.[20]

The following night, a mob of 3,500 gathered and rioted. According to a summary by Peter and Mort Bergman, "Gov. Adlai Stevenson called out the National Guard, and 450

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[19]Vienna city employee, 2/2004, confirmed by two other residents; ---, "Three Negro Homes Burned Here Monday," Vienna Times, 9/9/1954.

[20]William Gremley, "Social Control in Cicero," in Allen Grimshaw, Racial Violence in the U.S. (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 170-83.; Stephen G. Meyer, As Long As They Don't Move Next Door (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 118.

guardsmen and 200 Cicero and Cook County police quelled the disorder; 72 persons were arrested, 60 were charged, 17 people were hospitalized." Violence like this happened repeatedly in Cicero and adjacent Berwyn. In the 1960s, a white mob stoned members of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) marching through Cicero supporting open housing. Whites in Cicero beat 17-year-old African American Jerome Huey to death in the summer of 1966. In 1987 Norbert Blei, a Cicero resident, wrote Neighborhood, a warm memoir about the city. He told how an African American family

> "almost" moved into Cicero on West 12th Place last spring. But they didn't make it. The black family said that they didn't know the home they bought was in Cicero. They thought it was in Chicago. But Cicero reminded them with gas-filled bottles and shots in the dark. "The area is well-secured," said Cicero's council president, John Karner, after the incendiary incident...

So far as I know, no one was ever convicted in Cicero or Vienna.[21]

This is not ancient history. Many victims of Vienna's ethnic cleansing[22] are still alive; some even return to Vienna from time to time to obtain birth certificates or transact other business. The perpetrators and the victims of the 1987 Cicero incident still live. Moreover, African Americans who tried to move into other sundown suburbs and towns have had trouble as recently as 2004.

Across America, at least 50 towns, and probably many more than that, drove out their African American populations violently. At least 16 did so in Illinois alone. In the West, another 50 or more towns drove out their Chinese American populations.[23] Many other sundown towns and suburbs used violence to keep out blacks or, sometimes, other minorities.

Sundown nation

Sundown towns are no minor matter. Millions of Americans — including many of our country's leaders — live in or grew up in sundown towns and suburbs. An interesting way to see the ubiquity of these towns is to examine the backgrounds of all Northern candidates for

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[21]Peter M. Bergman and Mort N. Bergman, The Chronological History of the Negro in America (NY: Mentor, 1969), 527; David Lewis, King (Urbana: U of IL P, 1978), 321; Norbert Blei, Neighborhood (Peoria: Ellis Press, 1987), 29.

[22]The term "ethnic cleansing" grew popular in the 1990s to describe what happened as Yugoslavia broke apart. From areas under Serb control, Muslims and Croatians fled, were expelled, sometimes even murdered; pretty much the same happened to Serbs and Muslims in areas under Croatian control; and so forth. The term does not mean "mass murder"; most victims fled but did not perish.

[23]My website, uvm.edu/~jloewen/sundown, lists some of these riots.

President nominated by the two major parties since the twentieth century began and sundown towns became common.[24] Of the 27 candidates for whom I could readily distinguish the racial policies of their hometowns, one third were identified with sundown towns. Starting at the beginning of the century, these include Republican William McKinley, who grew up in Niles, Ohio, where "a sign near the Erie Depot," according to historian William Jenkins, "warned 'niggers' that they had better not 'let the sun set on their heads.'" McKinley defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan, who grew up in Salem, Illinois, which for decades "had signs on each main road going into town, telling the blacks, that they were not allowed in town after sundown," according to Ed Hayes, who graduated from Salem High School in 1969. Teddy Roosevelt was most identified with Cove Neck, a tiny upper-class peninsula on Long Island that incorporated partly to keep out undesirables, including African Americans, by requiring that building lots be large. As late as 1990, its small black population consisted overwhelmingly of live-in maids. In 1920, Warren G. Harding ran his famous "front porch campaign" from his family home in Marion, Ohio; a few months before, Marion was the scene of an ethnic cleansing as whites drove out virtually every African American. According to Harding scholar Phillip Payne, "As a consequence, Marion is an overwhelming white town to this date [2002]." Herbert Hoover grew up in a part of Iowa that may have getting rid of its blacks around that time, but I cannot confirm his hometown as a sundown town.[25] Wendell Willkie's father was mayor of Elwood, Indiana, a sundown town that is still all-white today, where Willkie gave his speech in 1940 accepting the Republican nomination. Owosso, Michigan, briefly became mildly notorious as a sundown town in 1944 and 1948 because Thomas Dewey, Republican candidate for President, grew up there. But Democrats couldn't make too much of that fact, especially in 1948, because their own candidate, Harry Truman, also grew up in a sundown town, Lamar, Missouri. Reporter Morris Milgram pointed out that Lamar "was a Jim Crow town of 3,000, without a single Negro family. When I had spoken about this with leading citizens of Lamar ... they told me, all using the word 'n----r,' that colored people weren't wanted in Lamar." Another Democrat, Lyndon Johnson, grew up in Johnson City, Texas, probably a sundown town.[26] The trend continues to the present: George W. Bush lived for years in Highland Park, a sundown suburb of Dallas; so did his Vice President, Dick Cheney, from 1995 until he moved to Washington to take office.[27] The first

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[24]Since sundown towns are rare in the traditional South, I excluded Wilson, Carter, Clinton, and Gore.

[25]Cedar County had 37 African American residents in 1890; just two remained by 1930. West Branch has a substantial Quaker population, however, and initial research unearthed no oral tradition of sundown practices in the town.

[26]Even in 2000, Johnson City, Texas, had not one black resident among its 1,191 total population; in Master of the Senate (NY: Knopf, 2002), Robert A. Caro implies but does not quite state that they were not allowed.

[27]Cheney traveled to Wyoming to register to vote shortly before the 2000 nominating convention to avoid conflict with the 12th Amendment, which prohibits electing a president and vice-president from the same state.

African American to buy a home in Highland Park did so only in June, 2003. In all, nine of America's presidential candidates since 1900 grew up in probable sundown towns and suburbs, eighteen came from towns where blacks could live, and five from towns[28] whose policies I haven't been able to identify.[29]

Besides presidents, such famous Americans as public speaker Dale Carnegie (Maryville, Missouri), folksinger Woody Guthrie (Okemah, Oklahoma), Sen. Joe McCarthy (Appleton, Wisconsin), etiquette czar Emily Post (Tuxedo Park, New York), and architect Frank Lloyd Wright (Oak Park, Illinois) grew up in towns that kept out African Americans. So did novelists Ernest Hemingway (Oak Park), Edna Ferber (Appleton), and James Jones (Robinson, Illinois), although as far as I can tell, they never mentioned the matter in their writing. I do not know if apple pie was invented in a sundown town, but Spam (Austin, Minnesota), Kentucky Fried Chicken (Corbin, Kentucky), and Heath Bars (Robinson) were. Other signature American edibles like Krispy Kreme Donuts (Effingham, Illinois[30]) and Tootsie Rolls (West Lawn, Chicago) also come from sundown communities. The highest grossing movie of all time (in constant dollars), Gone with the Wind, was made in a sundown town, Culver City, California, from which vantage point producer David Selznick was baffled by petitions from African Americans concerned about the racism in its screenplay.[31] Gentleman's Agreement, on the other hand, the only feature film to treat sundown towns seriously,[32] was made in Los Angeles.

Large cities could not exclude blacks completely — the task was simply too daunting —

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[28]McKinley, Bryan, Teddy Roosevelt, Harding, Willkie, Dewey, Truman, LBJ, and George W. Bush grew up or lived in confirmed or probable sundown towns (TR and LBJ are "probable"). Parker, Taft, Hughes, Davis, Cox, Smith, FDR, Landon, Eisenhower, Stevenson, JFK, Goldwater, McGovern, Ford, Reagan, Bush I, Dukakis, and Dole grew up in towns that probably did allow African Americans. I haven't confirmed or disconfirmed the towns identified with Coolidge, Hoover, Nixon, Humphrey, and Mondale.

[29]William D. Jenkins, Steel Valley Klan (Kent: Kent State UP, 1990), 65; Ed Hayes, email to Salem HS bulletin board, Classmates.com, 11/2002; Phillip Payne, email, 10/2002; Morris Milgram, "South Has Little to Fear from Truman of Missouri, Pittsburgh Courier, 10/2/1944; David Mark, "Carpetbagging's Greatest Hits," Washington Post, 8/15/2004.

[30]Since 2002, most Krispy Kreme mix has been made in a new factory in Effingham.

[31]For a discussion of race in Gone with the Wind see Loewen, "Teaching Race Relations Through Feature Films," *Teaching Sociology, 19* (1/91), 82-83, reprinted in Diana Papademas, Visual Sociology (Washington, DC: ASA, 1994).

[32]Three Hollywood films that set sundown towns in the traditional South, where they rarely existed in real life.

although residents of New York City, Fort Wayne, Tulsa, and several other cities tried. Nevertheless, whole sections of cities did keep out African Americans, and sometimes other groups. Although this book doesn't usually treat "mere" neighborhoods, some sundown neighborhoods are huge. West Lawn in Chicago, for instance, has its own Chamber of Commerce, whose executive director brags that it is "a small town in a big city." It is also the birthplace of the Dove Ice Cream Bar and the Tucker automobile and, according to reporter Steve Bogira, in 1980 had 113,000 whites and just 111 African Americans. Every large city in the United States has its all-white neighborhoods, all white by design; certainly the West End of Decatur, where I grew up, was that way. All too many small towns, meanwhile, if they are interracial at all, still consist of sundown neighborhoods on one side, overwhelmingly black neighborhoods on the other, with the business district or a railroad in between. So sundown neighborhoods form another major part of the problem.[33]

Why dwell on it now?

Since 1969, I have been studying how Americans remember their past, especially their racial past. Sometimes audiences or readers ask, "Why do you insist on dredging up the abominations in our past?" About sundown towns in particular, some people have suggested that we might all be happier and better off not knowing about them. "Why focus on that?" asked an old African American man in Colp, in Southern Illinois, in 2001, when he learned I was studying the sundown towns that surrounded Colp in every direction. "That's done with."[34]

I thought about his suggestion seriously. After all, during the 1980s and 1990s, many communities relaxed their prohibitions and accepted at least one or two black families, sometimes many more. But I concluded there were several reasons why the sad story of sundown towns should not be kept out of view.

First — and most basically — it happened. Our country did do that. Surely the fact that since about 1890, thousands of towns across the United States kept out African Americans, while others excluded Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, Native, or Mexican Americans, is worth knowing. So is the panoply of methods whites employed to accomplish this end. I hope this book prompts readers to question all-white communities everywhere, rather than take them for granted. Whenever the census shows that a town or county has been all-white or overwhelmingly white for decades, we do well to investigate further, since across the nation, most all-white towns were that way intentionally. Telling the truth about them is the right thing to do.

It is also true that the powers that be don't want us to learn about their policy of exclusion

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[33]Kathy Orr, "West Lawn: From marsh to thriving neighborhood," West Lawn Chamber of Commerce, westlawncc.org, 1/2004; Steve Bogira, "Hate, Chicago Style" Chicago Reader, 12/5/86.

[34]Colp resident, 9/2002.

and have sometimes tried to suppress the knowledge. The truth about sundown towns implicates the powers that be. The role played by governments regarding race relations can hardly be characterized as benign or even race-neutral. From the towns that passed sundown ordinances, to the county sheriffs who escorted black would-be residents back across the county line, to the states that passed laws enabling municipalities to zone out "undesirables," to the federal government — whose lending and insuring policies from the 1930s to the 1960s required sundown neighborhoods and suburbs — our governments openly favored white supremacy and helped to create and maintain all-white communities. So did most of our banks, realtors, and police chiefs. If public relations offices, Chambers of Commerce, and local historical societies don't want us to know something, perhaps that something is worth learning. After all, how can we deal with something if we cannot even face it?

There are other reasons to incorporate sundown towns into our accounts of our nation's past. "I am anxious for this book," a high school history teacher in Pennsylvania, wrote.

> I tend to collect evidence for my students that racism and discrimination still exist. Many like to pass it off as a part of the distant (before they were born) past, thus no further energy or thought need be expended on the issue!

Chronicling the sundown town movement teaches us that something significant has been left out of the broad history of race in America as usually taught. It opens a door into an entire era that America has kept locked away in a closet. I hope that Sundown Towns will transform Americans' understanding of race relations in the North during the first two thirds of the twentieth century. Realizing that blatant racial exclusion increased during the first half of the twentieth century and in many places continues into the twenty-first can help mobilize Americans today to expend energy to end these practices.[35]

Many people wonder why African Americans have made so little progress, given that 140 years have passed since slavery ended. They do not understand that in some ways, African Americans lived in better and more integrated conditions in the 1870s and 1880s, that residential segregation then grew worse until about 1968, and that it did not start to decrease again until the 1970s and 1980s, well after the Civil Rights Movement ended. Recovering the memory of the increasing oppression of African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century can deepen our understanding of the role racism has played in our society and continues to play today.

Sundown towns persist.

In other spheres of race relations, America has made great strides. The attention given to Southern segregation — not just by historians but, more importantly, by the Civil Rights Movement and the courts, beginning in 1954 — ended its more appalling practices. Whites,

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[35] Pennsylvania teacher, email, 8/2002.

blacks, and other races ride the same subways, buses, trains, and planes. Americans of all backgrounds work together in offices, restaurants, factories, and the military. Universities, North and South, now enroll African American undergraduates; some even compete for them. Republican as well as Democratic administrations include African Americans in important positions as a matter of course. We have made far less progress, however, regarding where we live. Aided by neglect, the number of sundown towns and suburbs continued to grow after 1954, peaking around 1968. Many sundown towns had not a single black household as late as the 2000 census, and some still openly exclude to this day.

Many whites still feel threatened at the prospect of African American neighbors — maybe not just one, but of any appreciable number. Residential segregation persists at high levels. "What is more," wrote Stephen Meyer in his 2000 book, As Long As They Don't Move Next Door, "many Americans of both races have come to accept racial separation as appropriate." Indeed, most whites see residential segregation as desirable. Across America, elite sundown suburbs[36] like Darien, Connecticut; Naperville, Illinois; and Edina, Minnesota, are sought-after addresses, partly owing to, rather than despite, their racial makeup.[37]

Therefore this book has important implications for current racial policies. Most attempts to understand or ameliorate America's astounding residential concentrations of African Americans and Latinos have focused on the ghetto, barrio, or "changing neighborhood." We shall see, however, that these problem areas result primarily from exclusion elsewhere in the social system — from sundown towns and suburbs. But despite their causal importance, these white "ghettoes" have been dramatically under-researched. As a result, few Americans realize that metropolitan areas are not "naturally" segregated and that suburban whiteness has been produced by unsavory policies that continue in part to this day. If Americans understood the origins of overwhelmingly white communities, they might see that such neighborhoods are nothing to be proud of.

On the contrary, all this residential exclusion is bad for our nation. In fact, residential segregation is one reason race continues to be such a problem in America. But "race" really isn't the problem. Exclusion is the problem. "The ghetto" — with all its pathologies — isn't the problem; the elite sundown suburb — seemingly devoid of social difficulties — is the problem. As soon as we realize that "the problem" in America is white supremacy, rather than black existence or black inferiority, then it becomes clear that sundown towns and suburbs are an intensification of the problem, not a solution to it. So long as racial inequality is encoded in the

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[36]In 2000 Naperville was 3.0% African American, Edina 1.2%, and Darien 0.4%. Thus all three may have passed beyond being sundown suburbs, although since the totals include nonhousehold blacks, Darien may not have. Please note my repeated cautions against concluding that a sundown town or suburb remains sundown as of the date you read about it.

[37]Meyer, As Long As They Don't Move Next Door, 1.

most basic single fact in our society — where one can live — the United States will face continuing racial tension, if not overt conflict.

Thus the continued existence of overwhelmingly-white communities is terribly important. Moreover, residential segregation exacerbates all other forms of racial discrimination. Segregated neighborhoods make it easier to discriminate against African Americans in schooling, housing, and city services, for instance. We shall see that residential segregation also causes employment inequalities, by isolating African Americans from the social networks where job openings are discussed. Thus some of the inadequacies for which white Americans blame black Americans are products of, rather than excuses for, residential segregation.

All-white communities also make it easier for their residents to think badly of nonwhites. Because so many whites live in sundown neighborhoods, their stereotypes about how African Americans live remain intact, unchallenged by contact with actual black families living day-to-day lives. In fact, these stereotypes get intensified, because they help rationalize living in sundown neighborhoods in the first place. Black stereotypes about whites also go unchallenged by experience. Trying to teach second graders not to be prejudiced is an uphill battle in an all-white primary school in a culture that values all-white communities. Among adults, living in overwhelmingly white neighborhoods and suburbs ties in with opposing policies that might decrease the sharp differences between the life chances of blacks and whites in our society….

The penultimate denial of human rights

How could America do these things? How could white Americans drive Chinese Americans and African Americans and sometimes other groups from hundreds of towns in the past? How could thousands of other towns and suburbs flatly prevent African Americans, Jewish Americans, or others from living in them? After all, after life itself, allowing someone to live in a place is perhaps the most basic human right of all. If a people cannot live in a town, they cannot attend school in it, work, make friends, vote, or participate in any other form of civic life or human interaction.

In the 1857 Dred Scott decision, that most racist of all Supreme Court decrees, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney held that African Americans "had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect." Between 1890 and the 1930s — and continuing to the present in some places — many white Americans actually tried to put his words into practice, in the form of sundown towns and suburbs. After all, they reasoned, if the founding fathers and their successors, including Taney, thought African Americans were "altogether unfit to associate with the white race," then let's stop associating with them. And let's do this, not by altering our behavior, but by limiting their choices — by excluding them.

Of course, other countries have flatly denied the rights of an entire race of people to live in a town or wider area. In Germany, beginning in 1934, according to historian James Pool, local

Nazis began to put up signs "outside many German towns and villages: JEWS NOT WANTED HERE." Pool goes on:

> Before long the signs outside some towns were worded in more threatening terms: JEWS ENTER THIS TOWN AT YOUR OWN RISK. At this point the Nazi government in Berlin reluctantly intervened.... Although Berlin ordered all threatening signs removed, most of them stayed up.

Two years later, most German sundown signs actually came down at Berlin's insistence as Germany prepared for the 1936 Olympic Games. During this period, hundreds and perhaps thousands of towns in America already displayed signs like the ones the Germans were putting up, directed against African Americans, but our government in Washington never ordered any of them removed, not even those on California highways as America prepared for the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics. To be sure, beginning in 1938, Germany's "Final Solution" made communities free of Jews in a much more vicious way than anything the United States ever achieved. Still, it is sobering to realize that many jurisdictions in America had accomplished by 1934-36 what Nazis in those years could only envy.[38]

Residential segregation lives on.

Germany reversed course in 1945. The Allies forced it to. The sundown town movement in the United States did not begin to slow until 1968, however, cresting in about 1970, and we cannot yet consign sundown towns to the past. More than half a century after the U.S. Supreme Court decreed in Brown v. Board of Education that whites cannot keep blacks out of white schools, and more than forty years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act made it illegal to keep them out of a restaurant, hundreds of towns and suburbs still keep African Americans out of entire municipalities.

Several towns near Colp, Illinois, for example, are not "done with" being sundown towns. Consider the town with which we began, Anna, some 30 miles southwest. In September, 2002, to the best knowledge of Anna's reference librarian and newspaper editor, neither Anna nor its companion city of Jonesboro had a single African American household within their corporate limits. In 2004, a rural resident of the Anna-Jonesboro School District confirmed, "Oh no, there are no black people in Anna today." Do these towns still actively keep out African Americans, or is their all-white nature merely the result of inertia and reputation? At the very least, Anna and Jonesboro — like most other sundown towns — have taken no public steps to announce any change in policy.[39]

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[38]James Pool, Hitler and His Secret Partners (NY: Pocket Books, 1997), 117; Jewish Virtual Library, us-israel.org/jsource/Holocaust/kristallnacht.html, 11/2003.

[39]Editor, 10/2002; Anna librarian, 10/2002; Union County farmer, 1/2004.

Anna is only an example, of course. Hundreds of other towns and suburbs across the United States have kept out African Americans even longer than Anna and are equally white today. Unfortunately for our country, America has not reached the point where all-white towns and suburbs are seen as anachronisms. Indeed, in a way sundown towns are still being created. White families are still moving to exurbs, distant from inner suburbs that have now gone interracial, and overwhelmingly if not formally all-white. And Americans of all races are moving to gated communities, segregated on income lines and sometimes informally segregated on racial grounds as well.

Not only our sundown past but also our sundown present affronts me. I believe that Americans who understand that all-white towns still exist — partly owing to past government actions and inactions — will share my anger and will support government and private actions in the opposite direction, to open them to everyone. I hope also that lifting the veil of secrecy that conceals the overt and often violent cleansings that produced sundown towns and suburbs will prompt Americans to see these "racially pure" communities as places to be avoided, rather than desired.

Where we live does affect how we think, and eliminating all-white towns and neighborhoods will decrease racial prejudice and misunderstanding. Social psychologists have long found that a good way to reduce prejudice is for different people to live together and interact on an equal footing. We will see in "The Remedy" that racial integration usually does work. It helps to humanize most individuals who live in interracial communities, and the existence of such communities helps to humanize our culture as a whole. As sociologist Robert Park wrote decades ago, "Most if not all cultural changes in society will be correlated with changes in territorial organization, and every change in the territorial and occupational distribution of the population will effect changes in the existing culture." So if we want American culture to be nonracist, Park would tell us, we have to eradicate our racially exclusive communities.[40]

I am optimistic: at last, many people seem ready to talk about sundown towns, ready even to change them. Americans have come to decry overt racism, after all, and the task could hardly be more important. Indeed, integrating sundown towns and suburbs becomes, ultimately, a battle for our nation's soul, and for its future.

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[40]Dorothy K. Newman, et al., Protest, Politics, and Prosperity (NY: Pantheon, 1978), 137; Robert Park, Human Communities: The City and Human Ecology (NY: Free Press, 1952), 14.