

# Segregation & Sundown Towns in Kentucky

## US History

CommonGood

*This curricular resource was created in collaboration with the Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky.*



Learn to be *human, humane,*  
and to deliberate for the  
***common good.***

CommonGood was founded by educators in order to provide learning resources designed for, and with, diverse communities. Our materials support inquiry-based learning and are designed to center the narratives of communities that are underrepresented in the traditional curriculum.

We believe that for students to learn to be human, humane, and to deliberate for the common good, communities need curriculum that reflects their unique character.

We work directly with communities to collaboratively construct curricular materials that facilitate stronger, more meaningful classroom dialogue. We co-create, curate, and customize learning materials with schools, and community partners.

Our work is grounded in the idea that if teachers have resources designed with their students in mind, and that invites them into co-creating learning experiences for their students, teachers will be more emboldened and effective at meeting their students' learning needs.

Together, we can create  
a more ***humanizing pedagogy***  
for our students.



# Table of Contents

Each section of this inquiry module provides context, tools, strategies, and insights to support teachers as they design and customize learning experiences. Below, the core structures are identified and briefly defined.

## Inquiry Overview

3

*A two-page overview of the inquiry and its components.*

## Core Elements of the Design

*Information to help orient educators to the design structure, demonstrate its alignment to standards and related frameworks, as well as provide supports for teachers' instructional planning.*

### Curriculum Design

6

Design Features

### Alignment & Framing

8

Subject Area(s) and Gradeband

Standards and Framework Alignment

Priority Skills & Competencies

Key Ideas & Essential Understandings

Attributes of Culturally Sustaining Curriculum

Civic Applications

### Planning Instruction

11

Pacing

Modifications

## Intellectual Preparation Essay

*A succinct description of the inquiry's context, including the academic grounding, notable teaching considerations, and reflection questions.*

See collection's essay here: [Intellectual Prep Essay](#)

## Inquiry Sections

12

*Overview of the **formative**, **summative**, and **civic action** sections of the inquiry. Elements include a description of the framing questions, the student task(s), learning objectives, pathway alignment, suggested instructional guidance, discussion prompts, and disciplinary source list.*

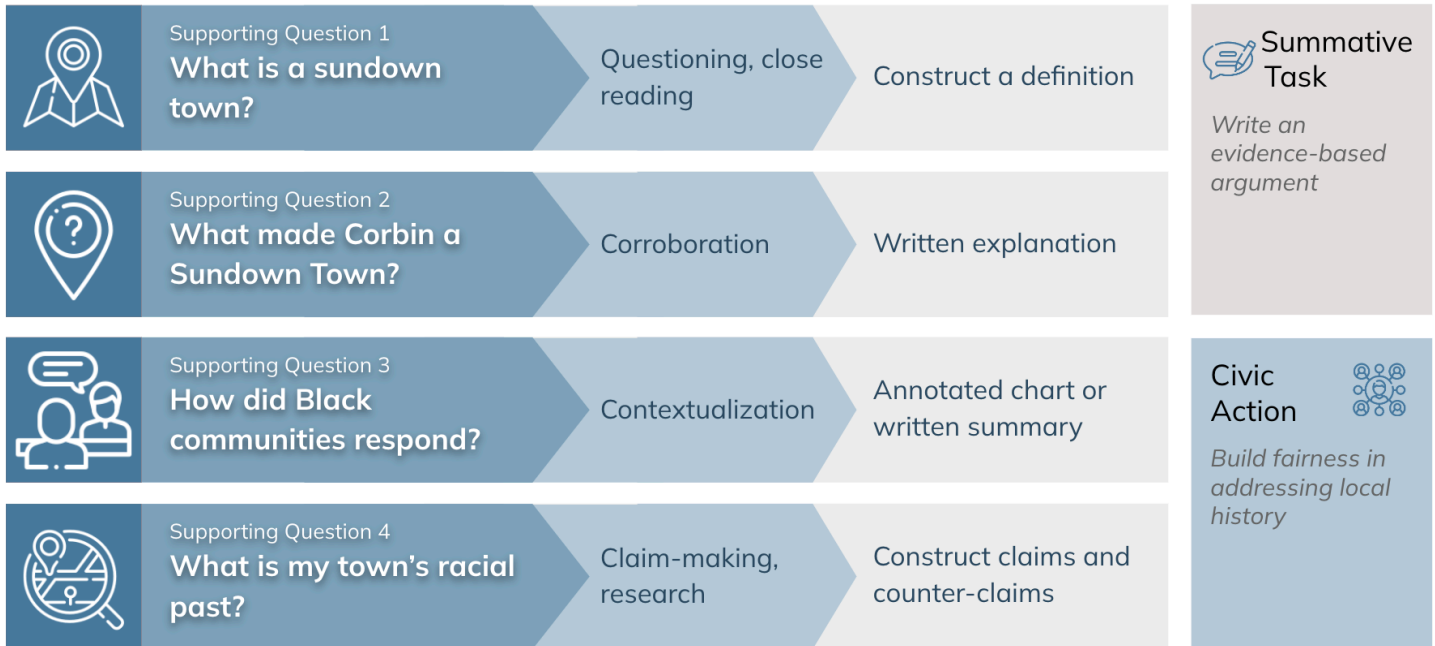
## Source Collection

28

*A curated and annotated collection of the primary, secondary, and tertiary disciplinary sources to support inquiry teaching and learning.*

# Compelling Question: **How did racism shape Kentucky communities?**

Students explore the historical forces of segregation and integration and their impact on the cultural and geographic landscape of Kentucky.



## Supporting Question 1: *What is a sundown town?*

Students explore the different systems of oppression in Jim Crow Kentucky, looking at sundown towns, but also other forms of racial oppression.

<b>Formative Tasks</b>	Construct a definition of sundown towns, including the characteristics, methods, and consequences	<b>Sources:</b> Excerpt from: Loewen, <b>Sundown Towns</b> Loewen, <b>Map of Sundown Towns</b> O'Connell, <b>"Historical Shadows"</b>
<b>Assessment Product</b>	Three-column chart	

## Supporting Question 2: *What made Corbin a Sundown Town?*

After being introduced to sundown towns, the second supporting question looks specifically at a well-known Kentucky example.

<b>Formative Tasks</b>	Explain what factors made Corbin a sundown town, using the definition from Supporting Question 1.
<b>Assessment Product</b>	Written explanation

**Sources:**

Excerpt from: Loewen, ***Sundown Towns***  
 Newspaper Article Collection on the **Corbin Expulsion of its Black Community, 1919**  
**Oral History interview** with Lilian Butner by George C. Wright

 **Supporting Question 3: *How did Black communities respond?***

Students consider the many different ways Black communities responded to Jim Crow oppression, specifically considering migration patterns, the construction of safe spaces (e.g., Black townships), and growth of safe institutions.

<b>Formative Tasks</b>	Summarize how the different ways in which Black communities responded
<b>Assessment Product</b>	Annotated chart, written summary

**Sources:**

Excerpt from Turner, ***Harlan Renaissance***  
 Excerpt from Wilkerson, ***Warmth of Other Suns***  
 Excerpt from: Loewen, ***Sundown Towns***  
 Excerpt from: Brown, ***Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia***

 **Supporting Question 4: *What is my town's racial past?***

Students research their own town or region.

<b>Formative Tasks</b>	Create a series of evidence-based claims about your town/region's racist past.
<b>Assessment Product</b>	Evidence-based claims

**Sources:**

Excerpt from: Loewen, ***Sundown Towns***  
 Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky, ***How to Confirm Sundown Towns***

 **Summative Task**

Students construct an evidence-based argument that answers the compelling question: *How did racism shape Kentucky communities?*

**Summative Task**  
Assessment Product

Written explanation (e.g., essay)

**Alternative Products**

Multimedia presentation



## Civic Action: Fairness-Building

*Students have the opportunity to take informed action by considering the ways in which communities can atone for their past (or how to celebrate local inclusivity).*

**Civic Issue** Student-selected community topic/issue

**Action Tasks** Share perspectives on how community can atone for (or celebrate) its past

**Sources:**

Student-identified, local sources

## Description

This inquiry module leads students through an investigation of the complex history of segregation, integration, and enforcement of Jim Crow in Kentucky, framed specifically around *sundown towns*. By investigating the compelling question—*How did racism shape Kentucky communities?*—students examine sundown towns in Kentucky (as compared to other states), how communities responded, and investigate their town’s racial history. As Kentucky is a mid-South state, their racial history during the Jim Crow era doesn’t necessarily fit the mold of the Deep South, nor other regions; rather, Kentucky reflects a mix of different forms of race-based control and discrimination and, in some cases, was a safer place than other regions. Just as historians would, students have the opportunity to situate state/regional experiences within national phenomena in order to construct their own understanding of how race shaped the state during this era.

This inquiry module reflects the civic theme of *fairness-building*. In the inquiry, students explore sundown towns and other forms of racial oppression, specifically considering how people responded in the past and present to either atone for, or cover up, this problematic past. By considering the ways in which communities can atone for their past, students consider how they contribute to building communities that acknowledge and try to repair past injustices.

### Context Information

Prior to using this module/inquiry, students should have some understanding of the Jim Crow prohibitions, including segregation, race-based laws, and other forms of racial control.

Students should also have had practice in applying **source analysis** and **historical research skills**, where they consider elements of the source that impact its meaning: a source’s author, the source type, its purpose, etc.; as well as how to curate appropriate sources based upon research questions.

### Intellectual Tradition

An intellectual tradition refers to a collection of shared ideas, beliefs, knowledge, and practices that have been passed down over time within a particular academic, cultural, or philosophical community. It encompasses the foundational concepts, theories, and methodologies that shape the way people within that community think, create, and analyze information. Intellectual traditions often influence how individuals approach various disciplines and fields of study, serving as a basis for critical thinking, scholarly inquiry, and the development of new insights.

This module anchors on Black studies, specifically employing the guidance of the Black Historical Consciousness framework, developed by education scholar Lagarrett King.

See the Inquiry Collection’s Intellectual Preparation Essay for more information: [Intellectual Prep Essay - Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky collection](#)

## Design Features

Below are four features that ground the designs, and design processes, of CommonGood curricular materials.

### Teacher as Co-Curriculum Maker

CommonGood materials invite educators into the co-creation of learning experiences. We believe that teachers excel when given the tools and resources to exercise, and further develop, their pedagogical expertise. As such, our curricular materials are designed to intentionally cultivate teachers' content and pedagogical expertise, while not taking away their power or professional judgment.

### Modularity

Materials are designed to be modular in nature, in that we expect teachers to use material to supplement their existing curriculum or combine the different modules to create a core curriculum. We define a quality curricular resource as being purposeful, authentic, adaptable, relevant, and trustworthy. To that end, these materials strive to be clear and concise, avoiding over-prescription in order for teachers to make use of materials in a way that meets their students' needs and learning goals.

### Community Co-Design

We believe that for students to learn to be human, humane, and to deliberate for the common good, they need learning experiences that reflect the unique character of their respective communities. We work directly with communities to collaboratively construct curricular materials that facilitate stronger, more meaningful classroom dialogue. This curricular resource was created in collaboration with the Association for Teaching Black History, whose mission is to: "recover the social, historical, and cultural contributions of black Kentuckians and to make these materials readily available to teachers in the Commonwealth, thereby promoting quality K-12 instruction in history. The goal is to ensure an inclusive, respectful experience for all students that provides for their academic success."

### Data Collection

Throughout this module, each task and sub-task presents teachers with an opportunity to gather both formal and informal data about their students' learning. The flexibility of the materials allows teachers to respond to the data in order to reinforce skills and content, provide additional scaffolds, or apply other instructional practices.

CommonGood is also curious about how designs are working in classrooms. We believe that by understanding what is working, and for whom, everyone's practices improve.

*As you enact this module, please share feedback here: [Feedback: Segregation and Sundown Towns](#)*

## Subject Areas and Grade Bands

This module is designed for **high school** classrooms, reflecting the standards alignment below.

Teachers can adapt this module for a lower grade band by making modifications that scaffold the sources and tasks.

- For sources, teachers should reduce the number of sources or consider modifications to make readings more age-appropriate. The supporting questions may also be combined to reduce cognitive load.

### Suggested Subject Areas

This module was designed for incorporation into a **US History** or **Kentucky history** course. The inquiry module may also be adapted for incorporation into a civics course.

## Standards and Framework Alignment

This module is aligned to the following prioritized standards. Note: this list is not exhaustive, in that it does not include all standards that are aligned, or could be incorporated, into the resources.

### College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

#### Dimension 1: Developing Questions & Planning Inquiries

**D1.1.9-12.** Explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field.

**D1.2.9-12.** Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.

#### Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools

**D2.His.1.9-12.** Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

**D2.Civ.14.9-12.** Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

**D2.Subject.###.** Code text .

#### Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

**D3.1.9-12.** Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

**D3.3.9-12.** Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims, noting evidentiary limitations.

#### Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions & Taking Informed Action

**D4.2.9-12.** Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations given their purpose.

### Kentucky Academic Standards for Social Studies

#### Questioning

**HS.C.I.Q.2** Generate supporting questions to develop knowledge, understanding and/or thinking relative to key civics concepts framed by compelling questions.

#### Investigating Using Disciplinary Concepts



**HS.C.KGO.3** Describe how active citizens can affect change in their communities and Kentucky.

**HS.G.HI.2** Analyze how cultural and economic decisions influence the characteristics of various places.

#### Using Evidence

**HS.UH.I.UE.2** Gather information and evidence from credible sources representing a variety of perspectives relevant to compelling and/or supporting questions in U.S. history.

#### Communicating Conclusions

**HS.C.I.CC.2** Engage in disciplinary thinking and construct arguments, explanations or public communications relevant to compelling and/or supporting questions in civics.

## Key Ideas & Essential Understandings

- Jim Crow laws and the establishment of sundown towns significantly shaped the racial geography of Kentucky, creating lasting patterns of segregation that influenced where people could live, work, and socialize.
- Historical patterns of racial segregation continue to influence contemporary demographic and cultural landscapes in Kentucky, affecting community formation and interaction.
- Despite systemic barriers, Black Kentuckians have demonstrated resilience and agency in shaping their communities, creating spaces of cultural significance and fostering strong community bonds.

## Learning Objectives

*Students will be able to...*

- **construct** evidence-based claims and an argument about how race shaped the state, geographically and demographically.
- **evaluate** primary/secondary sources to situate them in their historical context.
- **research** their own community to consider its racial past; and means to address it.

## Black Historical Consciousness

*This inquiry module is based upon the following theme from the Black Historical Consciousness framework by Lagarrett King (2020).*

**POWER AND OPPRESSION:** Power and oppression as Black histories are narratives that highlight the lack of justice, freedom, equality, and equity of Black people experienced throughout history. Central to these narratives is how Black people have been victims to racism, white Supremacy, and anti-Black societal structures as well as individual actions.

## Civic Applications

Every CommonGood module provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their transferable knowledge and skills by connecting learning to an authentic civic issue. Civic Action tasks are modeled after the C3 Framework's *Taking Informed Action* indicators, where students are expected to:

- (1) **understand** the issues evident from the inquiry in a larger and/or current context;
- (2) **assess** the relevance and impact of the issues; and
- (3) **take action** in ways that allow students to demonstrate agency in a real-world context.

This inquiry has a suggested informed action task. Teachers and students are encouraged to revise or adjust the task to reflect student interests, the topic/issue chosen for the task, time considerations, etc. Taking informed action can manifest in a variety of forms and in a range of venues. They can be small actions (e.g., informed conversations) to the big (e.g., organizing a protest). These actions may take place in the classroom, the school, the local community, across the state, and around the world. **What's important is that students are authentically applying the inquiry to an out-of-classroom context.**

**CIVIC THEME** This inquiry module reflects the civic theme of *fairness-building*. When students engage in fairness-building, they are ensuring equity and justice for all. In the inquiry, students explored the ways in which communities actively drove out or otherwise imparted racialized oppression upon Black community members. By considering how communities atone for their past, students take action to repair historical wrongs and build more free and fair spaces for all community members.

## Pacing

The needed class periods to teach this module will vary depending on teachers' decisions around enactment. The structure of the module's different individual sections is designed to allow for teachers to condense learning into one class period or expand into multiple.

## Course Sequencing

Below is a table that demonstrates an example course sequence that includes this module. The emphasis reflects a curricular sequence of inquiry modules that explore Kentucky-focused Black history, aligned to the Black Historical Consciousness framework.

### State/US History Sequence

Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Module 5	Module 6
Black abolitionism	Horse Racing & Jim Crow	<b>Sundown Towns</b>	Intersectionality & Civil Rights Movement	Folk Music	Black Appalachia & "Affrilachia"

## Modifications

As teachers are positioned to be co-curriculum makers, they are encouraged to adapt this inquiry module to meet the needs and interests of their students. Furthermore, teachers may decide to build out additional supporting questions and tasks to scaffold and/or reinforce learning. Below are some suggestions to consider when designing instruction.

### *For students who need a challenge*

- Provide students the original, rather than modified, versions of the respective texts.
  - Teachers may also substitute or supplement the current texts for ones that provide more of a challenge.
- Allow for independent student research.
  - Each section provides opportunities for students to curate their own sources about the respective supporting questions and other rights' movements.
  - If allowing for student research, provide them guidance for appropriate research methods.

### *For students who need supports*

- Build additional source scaffolds for students.
  - Consider adding additional annotations or notes that will help students access the content.
  - Allow for collaborative reading practices that allow students to discuss information as they read it with peers.
- Provide graphic organizers and other task scaffolds.

Compelling Question: **How did racism shape Kentucky communities?**

## Supporting Question 1: **What is a sundown town?**

Introduction to *sundown towns*

### Supporting Question and Task

In the first supporting question—*What is a sundown town?*—students explore the different systems of oppression in Jim Crow Kentucky, looking at sundown towns, but also other forms of racial oppression. The formative task has students construct a definition of sundown towns including the characteristics, methods, and consequences.

**INQUIRY OPENER** Generate questions about a Kentucky artifact.

#### Task Product

Construct a definition of sundown towns including the characteristics, methods, and consequences (3-column chart).

*Alternative Products:* list, infographic, written description

#### Learning Objectives

*Students will be able to...*

- **construct** a definition of sundown towns.
- **describe** ways in which racialized rules and norms were enforced.

### Instructional Guidance

Teachers may enact this section using the following procedures.



#### 1. **OPENER: GENERATE QUESTIONS:** *Serving spoon artifact*

- Individually, in small groups, or as a class, generate questions using the **Serving Spoon** image.

**OPENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** Use these questions to frame discussion or as inspiration to build your own questions.

- What image is inscribed on the spoon?
- Why do items sometimes depict events?
  - *In short, this is a kind of souvenir commemorating this event.*
- What does this item tell us about how some communities viewed lynching?
- What might such an item communicate to non-white populations?
- Is this commemoration depicting the lynching in a positive or negative light?
  - *This question may be harder for students to decipher. In short, the image is not framing the lynching in a negative light (similar to 9/11 commemorative materials, which will say “never forget” or something similar.)*



## 2. SOURCE ANALYSIS: *Close reading*

- Source reading can be completed in a *jigsaw* (assigning students in a group to each read a different section), *group reading* (assigning one or more sections to each group), or *individually* (each student reads all selected sections).
- Using the **Sundown Towns** source by James Loewen, students identify the:
  - (1) characteristics,
  - (2) methods, and
  - (3) consequences of “sundown towns.”
- Once completed—and during the process—students should consider the following: *What additional information do you need to know to better evaluate the three elements?*
  - This step is important to have students critically evaluate source information for its value and limitations in answering questions.
- Repeat this step with the two remaining sources: **Sundown Town Map** and **Historical Shadows**.
  - To scaffold **Historical Shadows**, break up the reading into parts (or further excerpt it), having students identify a list of consequences noted in their text section.

➤ For a scaffold, use a three-column chart: [Sundown Towns—SQ1: Three-Column Comparison Chart](#).

**LOCAL CONNECTION** Sundown towns don’t necessarily show up in the traditional South as much as they do in other areas, like the midwest. Kentucky being a mid-South state, in many ways, reflects characteristics of different geographic regions, rather than reflecting one region.

As such, consider the *different systems of oppression* in Jim Crow Kentucky, as well as what the sources say (and don’t say) about the Kentucky experience.



## 3. DEFINE: *Construct a definition*

- Using notes from the source analysis, synthesize evidence to construct a definition of *sundown towns*.
- The task product can take a variety of forms, including, but not limited to: the three-column chart, a list, descriptive paragraph, diagram, etc.

## Sources

The listed sources were selected to help students define and contextualize sundown towns, along with other forms of racial discrimination. Teachers should annotate, modify, excerpt, or add/subtract sources based on student interests, needs, and local relevance.

[Source 1.1](#)

(--- words)

**Serving Spoon (1902)** This is a silver plated dessert spoon that is engraved with a lynching scene.

[Source 1.2](#)

(1107 words)

**Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown Towns*** This is the first of several excerpts from James Loewen's *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. In this excerpt, James Loewen describes sundown towns, including their different characteristics, methods of creating/enforcing sundown towns, and the consequences of such actions.

[Source 1.3](#)

(--- words)

**Map of Sundown Towns (2005)** From *Sundown Towns*, this map shows where sundown towns were common in Kentucky and surrounding states.

[Source 1.4](#)

(529 words)

**O'Connell, H.A. (2019). *Historical Shadows: The Links between Sundown Towns and Contemporary Black-White Inequality*** In this article, sociologist Heather O'Connell presents findings on her study that considers the echoing effects of sundown towns into the present.

## Additional Resources

**Survey Data, Report:** Barry-Jester, A.M. (2015, June 23). Attitudes Toward Racism And Inequality Are Shifting. *FiveThirtyEight*. Accessed from: [Attitudes Toward Racism And Inequality Are Shifting](#).

**Article:** Carlson, P. (2006, February 20). When Signs Said 'Get Out': In 'Sundown Towns,' Racism in the Rearview Mirror. *Washington Post*. Accessed from: [When Signs Said 'Get Out' - The Washington Post](#).

**Journal Article:** O'Neal, M. (2023). How to Jim Crow a Coalfield: Land, Politics, and Race in Appalachian Kentucky Before World War I. *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 121(2), 101-139. Accessed from: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/907771>.

Compelling Question: **How did racism shape Kentucky communities?**



## Supporting Question 2: **What made Corbin a Sundown Town?**

A Kentucky Example

### Supporting Question and Task

After being introduced to sundown towns, the second supporting question looks specifically at a well-known Kentucky example: *What made Corbin a Sundown Town?* The formative task has students explain what factors made Corbin a sundown town, using the definition from Supporting Question 1.

To complete this section, teachers should select which sources to use. Teachers can sequence source analysis (e.g., newspaper articles → oral history → Loewen → documentary) or select individual sources on which to anchor analysis. See source options below.

#### Task Product

Explain what factors made Corbin a sundown town.

*Alternative Products:* Written explanation

#### Learning Objectives

*Students will be able to...*

- **connect** Corbin's history to their definition of sundown towns.
- **summarize** the factors that made it a sundown town.

### Instructional Guidance

*Teachers may enact this section using the following procedures.*



#### 1. **SOURCE ANALYSIS:** *Sourcing & Corroboration*

- Source reading can be completed in a *jigsaw* (assigning students in a group to each read a different source), *group* reading (assigning one or more sources to each group), or *individually* (each student reads all selected sources).
- Using the collection of primary and secondary sources, students identify the factors (characteristics, methods, and consequences) that made Corbin, KY a sundown town.
- **For a challenge:** Rather than providing students with a source collection, have them explore the SunUp Corbin website's collection themselves. See links below.

**SOURCING QUESTIONS** Use these questions to help scaffold students' analysis of sources..

- What is the context of the source (who, where, when)?
- What does this source tell you about life in Corbin?
  - What does it tell you about the experience of Black community members, specifically?
- How does this source's information or evidence compare to the other sources?
- Where do they agree?
- Where do they disagree? Or fill in gaps?
- What do the sources say explicitly and what can be inferred about people's experiences?
  - Consider direct connections with learnings from Supporting Question 1.



2. **WRITING:** *Sundown Corbin*

- To prepare to write an explanation, compile previous learning materials.
- *Optional:* Organize evidence according to the three factors (characteristics, methods, and consequences).
- Explanation can be in paragraph form or in a three-column chart, similar to the previous section's graphic organizer.

## Sources

The listed sources were selected to help students give specificity to sundown towns, by considering the experiences of those in Corbin, Kentucky. Teachers should annotate, modify, excerpt, or add/subtract sources based on student interests, needs, and local relevance.

[Source 2.1](#)

(1345 words)

**Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown Towns*** In *Sundown Towns*, author James Loewen considers the different events or contexts that serve as a “catalyst” or triggering event and/or justification for expelling Black populations from a town. For Corbin, Kentucky, Loewen notes that there are competing stories about the catalyst for their violent expulsion.

[Source 2.2](#)

(word count varies)

**Newspaper Article Collection on the Corbin Expulsion of its Black Community (1919)** This collection of newspaper articles document some of the violence that occurred in Corbin. Be sure to read these alongside the Loewen source in order to corroborate the stories they tell.

[Source 2.3](#)

(--- words)

**Interview with Lillian Butner (1987)** Lillian Butner was a child during the 1919 race riot in Corbin, Kentucky. In this interview she discusses the riot, and why her family was unaffected by it.

## Additional Resources

**Source Collection:** The SunUp Initiative, The Sunup Initiative is a coalition of community members who are working in partnership with local and state organizations to promote Racial Justice in Corbin and beyond. Accessed from: <https://sunupcorbin.com/>



*Video Interview:* Home & Hell: Sundown Towns & the Great Migration in Appalachia History Hangout: Conversation with Matthew O’Neal. Hagley Museum and Library. Accessed from: [Home & Hell: Sundown Towns & the Great Migration in Appalachia](#).

*Documentary:* Black in Appalachia, “The Corbin Expulsion of 1919.” PBS. Accessed from: <https://www.blackinappalachia.org/corbin-expulsion>.

Compelling Question: **How did racism shape Kentucky communities?**

## Supporting Question 3: **How did Black communities respond?**

Responses to oppression

### Supporting Question and Task

In the third supporting question—How did Black communities respond?—students consider the many different ways Black communities responded to Jim Crow oppression, specifically considering migration patterns, the construction of safe spaces (e.g., Black townships), and growth of safe institutions (e.g., HBCUs). The purpose of this section is to give voice and agency to the Black community, while complicating what might otherwise be a simplistic characterization of the state’s race relations. The formative task has students construct a chart or infographic that communicates the many different ways in which Black communities responded to sundown towns and Jim Crow oppression.

To complete this section, teachers should select which sources to use. Teachers can sequence source analysis (e.g., oral histories → Black townships → migration → coal towns) or select individual sources on which to anchor analysis. See source and task options below.

#### Task Product

Written summary about different ways in which Black communities responded

*Alternative Products:* diagram, bulleted list, cause-effect chart

#### Learning Objectives

*Students will be able to...*

- **summarize** the diverse ways Black communities responded to oppression.
- **contextualize** sources.

### Instructional Guidance

*Teachers may enact this section using the following procedures.*



#### 1. **SOURCE ANALYSIS:** *Contextualization of Oral Histories*

- As a class, listen to one or more **oral histories**.
- Identify themes in people’s testimonies.
  - What do they tell you about the people’s *context*?
    - Sundown Towns
    - Segregation
    - Discrimination/persecution
  - What do they tell you about how Black communities responded?
  - What do they *NOT* tell you?



## 2. SOURCE ANALYSIS: *Contextualization of Movement*

- Source reading can be completed in a *jigsaw* (assigning students in a group to each read a different source), *group* reading (assigning one or more sources to each group), or *individually* (each student reads all selected sources).
- Using selected articles on migration and/or coal towns (**Black Townships** and examples, **Harlan Renaissance**, **“Gone Home,”** and **Warmth of Other Suns**), consider how Black populations moved and/or created safe spaces for themselves in response to persecution.
  - *Note:* Kentucky’s story is complicated to tell because it shows many different diverse experiences and behaviors—reflecting characteristics of sundown towns, the Great Migration, and a form of controlled integration/segregation in certain company towns.

**SOURCING QUESTIONS** Use these questions to help scaffold students’ analysis of sources.

- What is the context of the source (who, where, when)?
- What does the source tell you about:
  - How people moved.
  - How Black communities organized space(s).
  - How these actions were in response to their communities’ context.

## Sources

The listed sources were selected to help students [add text]. Teachers should annotate, modify, excerpt, or add/subtract sources based on student interests, needs, and local relevance. [Other considerations].

### [Source 3.1](#)

(--- words)

**Black People in Kentucky Oral History Project** This collection of oral histories recount how individuals and communities responded to Jim Crow era oppression. Users can access video recordings and transcripts of select interviews.

### [Source 3.2](#)

(153 words)

**Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown Towns, “Black Townships”*** In this excerpt from Loewen’s book, he describes the development of “townships” in response to racial violence. Below the excerpt are a collection of articles that speak to specific Black townships in Kentucky.

### [Source 3.3](#)

(519 words)

**Turner, W. H. (2021). *The Harlan Renaissance*** In this excerpt, from historian William Turner, he discusses how company coal towns controlled the communities and, thus, addressed issues of race. Students should consider how this reflects (or is in conflict with) how Loewen frames sundown towns.

### [Source 3.4](#)

(399 words)

**Wilkerson, I. (2020). *The Warmth of Other Suns*** Though not specifically about Kentucky, this excerpt from journalist Isabel Wilkerson’s Pulitzer Prize winning book describes the “Great Migration,” referring to the mass exodus of Black Americans

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from the South to northern and western communities, taking place over several decades. While the Deep South had less sundown towns than other regions, it did experience this huge population shift.

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Compelling Question: **How did racism shape Kentucky communities?**



## Supporting Question 4: **What is my town's racial past?**

Conducting place-based research

### Supporting Question and Task

Now that students have explored the complexities of sundown towns, the final supporting question—*What is my town's racial past?*—has them research their own town or region, using the criteria identified by scholar James Loewen (and team). While some resources are provided, including robust county-level census data, students may need to conduct their own research to fully explore this question. The formative task has students construct evidence-based claim statements about their town/region's past.

#### Task Product

Create a series of evidence-based claims about your town/region's racist past.

*Alternative Products:* A report; multimedia presentation

#### Learning Objectives

*Students will be able to...*

- **research** their town's past.
- **evaluate** local historical resources according to criteria.

### Instructional Guidance

*Teachers may enact this section using the following procedures.*



1. **DISCUSSION:** *What do I know about my town's past?*
  - To open this section, students brainstorm and discuss what they associate with their town's history.
  - This task could be a general brainstorm (e.g., *what ideas, events, or people do you associate with our town or state's history?*) or may be more specific to the supporting question (e.g., *what do you know about our town's racial past already?*)

**LOCAL CONNECTION** It's important that teachers do not condemn or criticize students if they know little or nothing about their town's history. In fact, it is quite common for local histories to be ignored in formal schooling—particularly when that local history has an unsightly racial past.

If students have limited knowledge, let that be central in the conversation.

- Where (or when) have you learned about our past?
- Why do you think that is?

- What organizations in our town should be telling our history?
- Why might sundown town (or other Jim Crow persecutions) be a lesser known history? Or, rather, why might people be less inclined to focus on this history?
- What do you WANT to know about race in our community?



## 2. READING: *Sundown town data*

- Read the source, **How to Confirm Sundown Towns**, to identify how different data sources can indicate (or suggest) that a town is a sundown town.
- **Optional:** list the value and drawbacks of different source types.
  - Census data
  - Local historical organizations
  - Oral history research
  - Local newspapers
  - Redlining Resources (see **Additional Resources**).



## 3. RESEARCH: *Finding and making inferences about my community's history*

- Using applicable sources in the source collection—and student-propelled research—collect evidence about your town, region, or state's racial past.
- Teachers may organize instruction in different ways, including by: curating local sources ahead of time, organizing students by source type, etc.
- **Note:** while information on their local community (i.e., town) is preferable, not all communities will have data sources to help identify and describe their racial past. In this case, students can consider the region and/or state.

### HISTORIANS FILLING IN THE GAPS *What information is missing?*

Just like the scholars featured throughout this inquiry, students will need to evaluate and weigh different sources in order to make evidence-based claims concerning their town's racial past.

Such a task requires them to *make inferences* and *acknowledge gaps* in their sources. Students may be frustrated with gaps—particularly if they are used to sources easily answering all of their questions!

Consider *inference-based claim stems* to frame their responses:

- Sources *suggest* that my town *may have (not) been* a sundown town, because...
- Sources *suggest* that my town violently discriminated against the Black community, because...
- Sources *show* that..., *suggesting* that...
  - Sources *show* that there were Black enclaves near my town, *suggesting* that the Black community was pushed out or not allowed to live in the central areas of town.



## 4. GENERATE QUESTIONS: *What else do we want to know?*

- Have students share some initial findings and claims from their research.

- Generate questions based upon the following: *What else do you want to know that the sources didn't answer?*



5. **CLAIM-MAKING:** *Collaboratively build a collection of evidence-based claims*
- Using appropriate sources from across the inquiry module, create multiple inference- and evidence-based claim statements about your town/region/state's racial past.
  - After creating a collection of claims, individually or in groups, prioritize the claims by ranking the claims (or selecting their top 3-4 claims) according to how strong they believe the claim and evidence are.
    - For the top three claims, write why they think it is a strong claim and evidence pairing.
    - This justification should connect directly back to the claim/evidence, but also allows students to express a subjective opinion.

## Sources

The listed sources aid students' research by providing guidance about types of data and interpretation, as well as an initial data set to jump start the process. Teachers should annotate, modify, excerpt, or add/subtract sources based on student interests, needs, and local relevance.

[Source 4.1](#)  
(624 words)

**Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown Towns*, ““Why identifying a Sundown Town is challenging”** Though widespread, the scholarship of sundown towns is limited (and relatively new—Loewen's book surfacing this history was published in 2005). Here, he describes what makes this research so challenging.

[Source 4.2](#)  
(1279 words)

**How to Confirm Sundown Towns (2024)** The work of surfacing the histories (and identifying) sundown towns is ongoing. For this source, we combined information from the History and Social Justice Website with suggestions from the book *Sundown Towns*, as well as context information for our Kentucky data sets specifically.

[Source 4.3](#)  
(---words)

**US Census Department, *Census Data for Kentucky Counties, (1870-1940)*** This county-level population data was compiled using several decades of US Census reports.

## Additional Resources

*Alternative framing article:* Loewen, J. (2008). Does my town have a racist past? *Learning for Justice*. Accessed from: [Does My Town Have a Racist Past? | Learning for Justice](#)

*Research Guide:* Documenting Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1880 and 1950: Census. University of Kentucky Libraries. Accessed from: [Documenting Racial Violence in Kentucky](#).

*Redlining Information:* Gross, T. (2017, May 3). A 'Forgotten History' Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America. *Fresh Air*. NPR. Accessed from: [A 'Forgotten History'](#).

*Redlining Mapping Resources:*

Nelson, R. K., Winling, L, et al. (2023). *Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America*. Digital Scholarship Lab. Accessed from: <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining>.

National Geographic: Mapmaker: Redlining (n.d.). Esri, University of Richmond's Digital Scholarship Lab. Accessed from: [Atlas](#)



# Compelling Question: **How did racism shape Kentucky communities?**



Construct an Evidence-based Argument

## Compelling Question and Task

Throughout the inquiry, students examined sundown towns as one example of racial control and oppression, considered how Black community members responded, then investigated their own communities.

In the Summative Task, students communicate their knowledge, apply disciplinary skills, and construct evidence-based claims using multiple sources to create an argument responding to the compelling question: *How did racism shape Kentucky communities?*

## Task Product

Students construct an evidence-based argumentative essay.

**ALTERNATIVE PRODUCTS** Students' arguments could take a variety of forms, including a multimedia presentation, data report, or other structure that authentically communicates their informed perspective. The Civic Action task may also be a substitute.

## Student Outcomes

Students' arguments should reflect a range of possible responses, including one or more of the following:

- *Enforced racial boundaries led to the creation of segregated neighborhoods, which became centers of Black culture and solidarity.*
- *The establishment of sundown towns and other exclusionary practices contributed to a racially divided state landscape.*
- *Racial boundaries influenced the development of a distinct sense of identity among Black Kentuckians, tied to both place and community.*
- *Resistance to racial boundaries manifested in various forms, from legal challenges to the creation of integrated spaces, shaping Kentucky's path toward equality.*

# Civic Action: **How should my community address its past?**

Apply Learning to a New Context through Informed Civic Action

Students have the opportunity to take informed action by considering the ways in which communities can atone for their past (or how to celebrate local inclusivity). An important element of learning from, and about, the past is the importance of acknowledging and making amends for wrongdoing.

Students can use what they learned in this inquiry module to consider what their community or region should do to respond to its past, whether positive or negative. These two pathways are framed by the following questions:

- (1) How do we make amends for the past?; and
- (2) How can we celebrate our community's uplift of diverse peoples?

## Civic Theme: *Fairness-Building*

This module's Civic Action task theme is *fairness-building*. When students engage in fairness-building, they are ensuring equity and justice for all. In the inquiry, students explored the ways in which communities actively drove out or otherwise imparted racialized oppression upon Black community members. By considering how communities atone for their past, students take action to repair historical wrongs and build more free and fair spaces for all community members.

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### Option 1: ***If their town is likely a sundown town (or has other problematic history): How do we make amends for the past?***

#### Understand

In addition to the research on your own community completed in the inquiry, review how other states/towns have acknowledged or made reparations for their past, including Corbin's SunUp initiative.

- [Memories From the South: Growing Up in a 'Sundown Town'](#)
- [Former Kentucky 'sundown' town shadowed by racist past](#)
- [City of Corbin issued a Proclamation condemning the race riot of 1919.](#)

#### Assess

Evaluate different responses and consider ways in which your community could atone for their past. Be sure to have any acknowledgement or reparations be connected to the particulars of your community. For example, if a particularly violent event happened, would it be appropriate to have an historical marker or similar?

- Consider Loewen's (2018) framework for atonement: How to address a Sundown Town Past

- *Admit it:* “We did this.”
- *Apologize:* “It was wrong and we apologize.”
- *Renounce:* “And we don’t do it anymore”

**REPARATIONS** Though the term reparations is often associated with financial payments, the term actually has more broad meanings. Reparations refer to measures taken to compensate or make amends for past injustices, harms, or wrongs inflicted upon a group or individuals. These measures can take various forms, including financial compensation, public apologies, policy changes, and initiatives aimed at addressing the long-term impacts of the injustices.

- The concept of reparations is often discussed in the context of historical injustices such as slavery, colonialism, and systemic discrimination.

## Take Action

Propose to a stakeholder (e.g., mayor, local historical society, etc.) what actions they should take. Use the inquiry and summative task product as evidence for your proposal.

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**Option 2: *If their town is NOT likely a sundown town—or if the community has intentionally sought policies and programs with racial uplift: How can we celebrate our community’s uplift of diverse peoples?***

## Understand

In addition to the research on your own community completed in the inquiry, explore ways in which your community has actively tried to be open or welcoming to diverse people.

- Are there official policies or programs to support community engagement?

## Assess

Evaluate if there are additional ways the community can be more inclusive or evaluate what makes current efforts beneficial to the community.

## Take Action

Share your perspective with a stakeholder and/or write a review for social media or a local news source to share your findings and informed perspective.

## Supporting Question 1 Sources

### Source 1.1

#### **Serving Spoon (1902). Kentucky Historical Society.**

*Description according to the Kentucky Historical Society: This is a silver plated dessert spoon that is engraved with a lynching scene. The engraving shows the Jessamine County, Kentucky, courthouse with a tree in front of it. From the tree is hanging the body of an African-American man. On the top of the spoon bowl is engraved "Nicholasville, KY" and on the bottom of the bowl is "Feb. 6, 1902".*

Available at: [Kentucky Historical Society Archives](#)



## Source 1.2

**Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. Academic book.**

*While persecution and violence against Black Americans is often associated with the Deep South. Likewise, the nadir (worst point) of race relations is generally considered to be from approximately 1890-1920. However, this analysis of sundown towns demonstrates a broader, more complicated picture of racial persecution across different states, beyond the South. In this excerpt, scholar James Loewen describes sundown towns, including their different characteristics, methods of creating/enforcing sundown towns, and the consequences of such actions.*

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A sundown town is any organized jurisdiction 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. Thus, an all-white town may include nonblack minorities and even a tiny number of African Americans. [...]

Outside the traditional South—states historically dominated by slavery, where sundown towns are rare—probably a majority of all incorporated places kept out African Americans. If that sentence startles, please suspend disbelief...Illinois, for example, had 671 towns and cities with more than 1,000 people in 1970, of which 475—71%—were all white in census after census. [...]

Even though sundown towns were everywhere, almost no literature exists on the topic. ....Most Americans have no idea such towns or counties exist, or they think such things happened mainly in the Deep South. Ironically, the traditional South has almost no sundown towns. Mississippi, for instance, has no more than 6, mostly mere hamlets, while Illinois has no fewer than 456....

### The Role of Violence

Whenever a town had African American residents and no longer does, we should seek to learn how and why they left. Explosions 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 teenage granddaughter.[...] 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 city council and commissioners] “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 1 African American.

Violence also lay beneath the surface of towns that showed no sudden decline in black residents[....] 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. Many other sundown towns and suburbs used violence to keep out blacks or, sometimes, other minorities.

### Creating Sundown Towns by Freeze-Outs

Sometimes no specific act of violence or formal policy was required to turn a town or county all-white. As the Nadir deepened, white churches, schools, and even stores across the North often made African Americans unwelcome. In 1887 in Grundy County, Missouri, for example, a white school that previously had admitted black children now barred them. Their parents sued under the Fourteenth Amendment, but in 1890 the Missouri Supreme Court denied their appeal. Yet fifteen black children were required before a county had to have a “colored” high school. So African American children in Grundy County simply had no high school. It comes as no surprise that the black population of Grundy County fell from 254 in 1890 to just 85 by 1930, 35 in 1950, and 18 by 1960. [...]

In some towns, whites who still wanted to befriend their black neighbors now felt compelled to do so surreptitiously, lest they too be ostracized by the larger white community. [...]

Communities that froze out their African Americans might seem at first glance to be “kinder” than those that forced them out violently or as a matter of law. But as Wyandotte historian Edwina DeWindt points out, for such a crusade to succeed requires “a general unity of action of all Wyandotte citizens in not renting or selling property to Negroes, refusing to serve them in stores and restaurants, and not hiring Negroes in places of employment.” Such unanimity over time might require more widespread anti-black feeling...and more systematic discrimination than is manifested in a town where a mob suddenly erupts to force out African Americans overnight.

### Sundown Suburbs

[The growth of suburbs coincided, and indeed, perpetuated the creation of all-white areas.] Families moved to the suburbs for two principal reasons: first, it seemed the proper way to bring up children, and second, it both showed and secured social status. [...]

African Americans’ low prestige has long posed a danger to white status. Andrew Hacker, author of *Two Nations*, identified the status threat in 1961: If there is one sword which hangs over the heads of untold millions of white—and Northern—Americans it is that they cannot afford to live in close proximity to Negroes. The single social fact which can destroy the whole image of middle class respectability is to be known to reside in a neighborhood which has Negroes nearby.

In the early 1970s, among many items inquiring about relationships with African Americans, “Having a Negro family as next door neighbors’ was one of the most objected to,” reported social psychologist Thomas Pettigrew. Writing in 2000, historian Stephen Meyer pointed out that race still plays the key role: “Many whites remain reluctant to accept African Americans as social equals. They refuse to accept African Americans as neighbors.”

In addition to their status concerns, white suburbanites also worry that African Americans are less intelligent, more prone to crime, and a threat to property values. That last concern—property values—rephrases the status issues as a very real pocketbook problem: whites feel an African American next door may make their own home less desirable when they go to sell it. The solution to this familiar blacks-as-problem thinking proves the same in the suburban as in independent towns: keep them out. [...]

The Federal Housing Administration, set up during the Depression to make it easier for Americans to buy homes, was a large part of the problem. [...] In 1938, the FHA held, “If a neighborhood is to retain stability, it is necessary that its properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes.” The

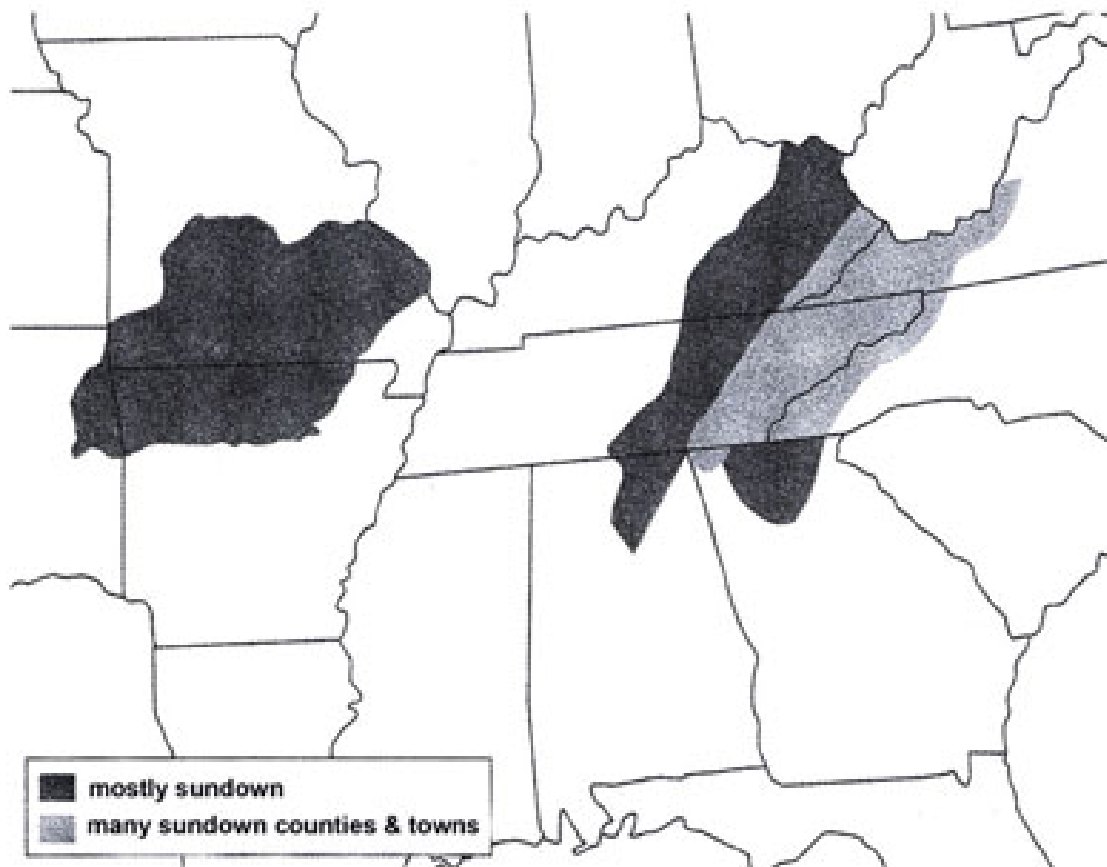
FHA advocated for restrictive covenants, “since these provide the surest protection against undesirable encroachment,” and its Manual contained a model restrictive covenant until 1948. In that year, assistant FHA commissioner W.J. Lockwood boasted, “The FHA has never insured a housing project of mixed occupancy.”

Source 1.3

Map of Sundown Towns in Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*.

From the author: Around 1890, whites began to expel African Americans from nearly the entire Cumberland Plateau, a swath fifty miles wide, extending from the Ohio River near Huntington, West Virginia, southwest through Corbin, Kentucky, across Tennessee (where it marks the division between East and Middle Tennessee), and into northern Alabama. Map of sundown areas in parts of Appalachia, north Georgia, the Cumberlands and the Ozarks.

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## Source 1.4

**O'Connell, H.A. (2019). Historical Shadows: The Links between Sundown Towns and Contemporary Black-White Inequality. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 5(3), p.311-325. Academic Journal Article.**

*This history of sundown towns continues to be reflected in contemporary patterns of black-white economic inequality. In this article, sociologist Heather O'Connell presents findings on her study that considers the echoing effects of sundown towns into the present. In this excerpt, she describes how her research and others' demonstrate that (1) the existence of sundown towns—and all-white communities—can perpetuate, and even foster, prejudicial attitudes; (2) isolation and exclusion of certain groups can result in "opportunity hoarding" by white communities; and (3) social closure, where resources are concentrated in white areas.*

*Note: In-text citations were removed for ease of reading; and excerpts were formatted to include bolded elements, headers, and other organizational features to support in reading.*

Reprinted within fair use. Available at: [Historical Shadows](#).

In addition to affecting individual attitudes, historically sundown places may continue to contribute to large-scale segregation through the protection of all-white spaces. Sundown towns represent an extreme case of racial segregation, namely segregation that manifests at a large scale (e.g., exclusion from entire towns, cities, or counties). Sundown towns helped establish a specific pattern of segregation, whereby blacks are completely separated from white towns. The segregation associated with sundown towns is closely related to antiblack and prowhite attitudes....

#### **Linking Sundown Towns to Contemporary Black-White Economic Inequality**

[S]undown towns may provide the foundation for and/or support contemporary racially biased attitudes. The discriminatory roots of the sundown movement, and Loewen's (2005) assertion that places that were previously sundown towns promote antiblack attitudes, suggest that counties with a sundown history would have higher contemporary levels of black economic disadvantage (i.e., higher black poverty rates) relative to otherwise similar counties. Local antiblack attitudes could affect the economic opportunities of residents through decisions regarding economic development, which could disadvantage local blacks through the availability of different types of jobs. [...]

Second, sundown towns may indirectly affect economic opportunities through their effects on the spatial [geographic] distribution of the black and white populations. [...] The segregation associated with sundown towns suggests that whites were—and may continue to be—concentrated within sundown towns, whereas blacks would be relegated to the outskirts of towns, or even neighboring counties.

The presence of sundown towns [may] contribute to the concentration of black disadvantage within counties that neighbor sundown counties. Alternatively, this large-scale segregation may promote white economic advantage by providing the ideal context for opportunity hoarding. The separation of whites and blacks could ease the concentration of resources among local whites, including resources tied to schools, the housing market, and the labor market.

#### **Study Discussion**

High proportions of neighboring counties with a historical sundown town are associated with higher than average black-white poverty inequality in the focal county. This association with inequality is driven by both higher black poverty and lower white poverty. There may also be some economic benefit to living in counties with direct ties to a sundown history, but that benefit is exclusive to whites. The local black population fares no worse or better in terms of poverty regardless of whether the county had a historical

sundown town. [...]

...I advance two explanations for the lingering impact of sundown history. In addition to the preexisting suggestion that antiblack, but also prowhite, attitudes [have an impact], I posit that large-scale segregation is also involved. [...]

1. **Prowhite attitudes** may explain the link between local sundown status and lower white poverty [because] prowhite attitudes result in **preferential treatment** of, and therefore better economic outcomes for, whites. The...spread of such attitudes could also explain why white poverty is related to the sundown history of surrounding counties. [...]
2. The concentration of sundown towns in neighboring counties **could restrict black geographic mobility and in turn limit the economic opportunities** of local blacks. In this way, it is possible that sundown towns have their biggest impact on the blacks who are not allowed to live there.... Simultaneously, this large-scale segregation within and across counties could directly benefit whites through the protection or hoarding of resources....

## Supporting Question 2 Sources

### Source 2.1

**Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. Academic book.**

*In Sundown Towns, author James Loewen considers the different events or contexts that serve as a "catalyst" or triggering event and/or justification for expelling Black populations from a town. Switchmen refer to railroad workers in charge of operating signals or switches.*

*For Corbin, Kentucky, Loewen notes that there are competing stories about the catalyst for their violent expulsion. As you read, consider what can and cannot be inferred from the sources of information discussed.*

*Note: this book was originally written in 2005 (2018 is the second editions' publication date) and does not include more modern reconciliations by the Corbin community to atone for this racial past. More information about Corbin's "SunUp Initiative" can be found in the Additional Sources section.*

- Excerpts were formatted to include bolded elements, headers, and other organizational features to support in reading. Reprinted within fair use.

On Halloween night, 1919, whites in Corbin, Kentucky, a railroad town of about 3,400, forced their African Americans out of town after two white switchmen lost all their money in a poker game with black track layers. To cover their losses, the switchmen said African Americans had robbed them. A mob formed "and searched the city for Negroes," according to the account in the *Lexington Herald*.

*The Negroes who felt the fury of the mob in the greatest degree were a gang of about 200 Negroes working on the Louisville and Nashville grade for ten months at South Corbin, where the railroad company is making big improvements. Crowds went to restaurants and other public places, caught all the Negro employees they could, and drove them singly or in gangs at the point of guns to the depot. Many Negroes were beaten, and 200 were driven out of town.*

At gunpoint whites then forced almost the entire African American population onto railroad cars and shipped them to Knoxville, Tennessee. But residents of Corbin haven't found this origin story satisfying over the years, so they make up new ones. One woman volunteered that four black men were lynched for attacking a white woman. One man, interviewed for Robby Heason 's gripping 1990 documentary about Corbin as a sundown town [*Trouble Behind*], said that he really didn't know what to believe for sure, because "I have heard that story a hundred times since I've been in Corbin, and it's been told to me about a hundred different ways."

Usually even such vague or conflicting accounts still suffice as catalyst stories, because they make reference to black misbehavior. Implicitly, most African Americans are thought to share this characteristic, which is why "we" must exclude them. However, residents of some sundown towns have completely forgotten why they ever expelled African Americans.

### Chamber of Commerce

Chambers of Commerce still spread disinformation about their towns' sundown policies. A Chamber official in Corbin, Kentucky, a town that drove out its black population in 1919, pretended to be mystified by Corbin's whiteness in the 1991 documentary *Trouble Behind*: "The [African Americans] have chosen to live in either Barbourville, Williamsburg, or north of Clarenton-Corbin ... but their reasons for that decision-I have no knowledge of that." Certainly Corbin cannot be at fault: "I don't feel there is any more prejudice in Corbin, Kentucky, than you'll find in any other community in the country." This man is intelligent enough to

know that other Corbin residents will tell the filmmaker that no African American should move into Corbin, thus exposing the falseness of his statement; in fact, some young white males did just that in other footage in the film. Nevertheless, he thinks it best to dissimulate about Corbin's racism, undoubtedly because it's not good for Corbin's image.

### **Historical Societies**

[In attempting to learn more about sundown towns, Lowen found that] writing historical societies proved particularly useless for most towns. Since I could hardly visit all the probable sundown towns and counties in the United States, I wrote or e-mailed the historical societies in many of them. Unfortunately, like the Chamber of Commerce in Corbin, historical societies don't like to say anything bad about their towns or counties.

### **Trends in Appalachia**

Many counties and towns in Appalachia, Arkansas, Texas, and the Midwest show a slowly diminishing number of African Americans between 1890 and 1930 because they did not allow new blacks in, and [the formerly enslaved people who remained] gradually died or left. [...]

Even though they lived independently, ex-slaves who remained in sundown towns typically had white protectors—often their ex-owners. Protection was important. When whites in Corbin, Kentucky, drove out their African Americans in 1919, they missed "Nigger Dennis," "the Mershons' 'man,'" according to historian Hank Everman, referring to one of the wealthier families in town. During the 1919 riot, "the Mershons...hid him for several days while other blacks fled Corbin." Dennis stayed on, and so did "the beloved 'Aunt Emma' Woods," in Everman's phrase, "a fine cook, laundress, and cleaning lady," and possibly Dennis's mother.

### **Racist Symbols in Sundown Towns**

This book is a history of exclusion, yet the excluded are ever-present. They persist in the form of stereotypes and constructions in the minds of those who keep them out. From the Nadir until very recently, sundown town residents have been even more likely than other whites to impersonate African Americans in theatrical productions and revues. After whites in Corbin, Kentucky, drove out all African Americans on Halloween in 1919, May Minstrel Festival with "black-faced comedians" became perhaps its most popular annual event during the 1920s. [...] Even today, residents of sundown towns are much more likely than in interracial towns to display such atavisms as black "coach boys" or Confederate flags in front of their houses. 10 Students in all-white towns in several states have caused disruptions by wearing Confederate flags, T-shirts, and jackets to school. Such incidents also take place in interracial schools, of course, but much less often, because there they will not go unopposed by other students.

[Sports] fans in sundown towns commonly use racial slurs. Across America, coaches and principals from interracial high schools caution their players and fans not to react. They know that racial slurs have often led to more serious altercations. In the 1960s, all-white Cedar Cliff High School in Lemoyne, Pennsylvania, across the river from Harrisburg, played football against Harrisburg's majority-black John Harris High School. According to a high school teacher in the area, "riots occurred every time the game was on the 'White Shore.'" Clearly, more than good-natured rivalries are involved. Fans in some sundown towns seem affronted that African Americans dare to play in their town. Kaye Collins attended Rabun Gap Nacoochee High School, in the northeast corner of Georgia, in 1972-73. "We had a black basketball player on our team, and threats were made against him when we played in Towns County. That was the first time I

heard that black people shouldn't be in Towns County after dark." The death threats were made days before the game, but according to Collins, "nothing happened. Our team trounced

them!" In the 1990s, whites burned crosses in Dale, Indiana, when a majority black team from Evansville played there, a high school teacher from the area reported. An African American member of the Danville, Kentucky, football team remembered repeated outrageous fan behavior at Corbin, Kentucky, in the early 1970s. "They would cut the bus tires and the car tires, especially if we were winning." Corbin is the scene of the only film ever made about a sundown town, Robby Heason's documentary *Trouble Behind*. In it, an African American former football player in a nearby town says in 1990,

We went in there to play; we were scared to death .... When we'd come out we'd get "rocked"-they'd throw rocks at your buses, they'd throw big cinderblocks. We had a couple of times where they would throw through the complete windshield .... And we had to drive back one night, this is when I was a sophomore, and this is a basketball game, and they crashed the whole front window and we had to drive home without it.

### **Lingering Hostilities**

Corbin, a sundown town in the Kentucky Cumberlands, had not relented as of 1990. In his 1991 movie on the community, *Trouble Behind*, Robby Heason asked a young white man if it would be a good thing for blacks to move into Corbin. "Black people should not live here," he replied. "They never have, and they shouldn't." He did not know that African Americans had lived in Corbin until whites drove them out at gunpoint in 1919, and his attitude surely boded ill should a black family try to move in. As of 2000, almost none had; Corbin's 7,742 people included just 6 African Americans; adjacent North Corbin had just 1 African American among 1,662 inhabitants. Around 1990, McDonald's brought in an African American to manage a new restaurant, but he and his family left before it even opened, reportedly after a cross was burned in his yard.

Source Collection 2.2

**Newspaper Article Collection on the Corbin Expulsion of its Black Community, (1919).**

*This collection of newspaper articles document some of the violence that occurred in Corbin. Be sure to read these alongside the Loewen source in order to corroborate the stories they tell.*

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**Article 1: "Mob Drives 200 Negroes out of Corbin." *The Courier Journal*. November 1, 1919.**

**MOB DRIVES 200  
NEGROES OUT OF  
CITY OF CORBIN**

**500 Shots Fired; No Deaths;  
Stabbing of Switchman  
Starts Trouble.**

Special to The Courier-Journal.

Corbin, Ky., Oct. 31.—A race riot of serious proportions broke out here last night, shortly after it was reported that an L. & N. watchman had been attacked by a band of negro laborers and his throat cut.

Many negroes were beaten and 200 were driven out of town.

Large numbers of negroes were assembled in the passenger station last night and guarded until trains arrived, when they were compelled to leave.

Nearly all these negroes were from the South, and have been employed for several months upon construction work in the new L. & N. yards at South Corbin, where the railroad company is making big improvements.

Much lawlessness has occurred since the construction camp was established, and county and city authorities have been powerless to stop assaults, robberies, bootlegging and other crime.

The town has been terrorized, but has not resorted to violence in retaliation until a switchman named Thompson was stabbed and robbed by negro laborers, it is said, two or three days ago. As soon as the report spread armed men swarmed upon the streets and the shooting began. Crowds went to restaurants and other public places, caught all negro employes they could find and drove them singly or in gangs at the point of guns to the depot.

Many native negroes, fearing for their lives in the excitement, have left Corbin or are in hiding.

Corbin is located in the three counties of Whitley, Laurel and Knox, and is a railroad center of about 3,000 persons. No race trouble before the present one has ever occurred there.

**MOB DRIVES 200 NEGROES OUT OF CITY OF CORBIN**

*500 Shots Fired; No Deaths; Stabbing of Switchman Starts Trouble.*

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Article 2: "The Mob and What People Think About It." *Time Tribune* November 1919.



The Mob and What People Think About It

In the matter of news there is nothing that The Times can add [sic] to what has already been said about the terrible calamity that [sic] befell Corbin last Thursday night in the way of that mob; enough has been said to inform everybody, but as to condemning or upholding this condition of affairs The Times is free to say that it is deplorable, and condemn it to the very last. In so doing no one condemns any right-thinking man in Corbin, for none of such participated in the crime. The mob consisted of characters of "Diamond Dick," readers of dime novels, and whose ambitions reach no higher than the glory of heroes and trashy fiction. We have received a number of letters this week, and they will be published from time to time, and any person desiring to express his or her views on this matter may feel at liberty to do so. Our name has gone out over the nation with a black spot that can never be removed. We are glad that the minister and other good people are openly expressing their condemnation of the mob spirit.

Note the following which appeared in *The Louisville Times* on last Monday, also the other letters written here this week. We have one that is not permissible to put in type, but to some great extent true in its nature. It is written from Pittsburg, Pa.

"There is no remedy for the mob spirit so effective as an enlightened public opinion. There is nothing that awes a mob—by the very nature of its composition cowardly; hanging together by the sanction of numbers alone; secure in the alibi of disguise; hurling reason from its pedestal; defiant of decent orderliness; contemptuous of the slower process of justice—there is nothing that awes it, nothing that holds it in check as does the cool and sturdy opposition of a strong man, one who respects himself as he does his oath, one who would scorn to consult his own safety when those whose protection is in his manhood and his chivalry—not in barriers of iron or stone—are endangered."

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[beginning of question cut off] good business, good streets,

good schools, and good churches do we wish our only claim to the public's notice to be our lawlessness, our ignorance of the meaning of Civic Pride, our inactivity along all progressive , commendable lines?

Lest our children and our children's children rise up to mock us, to shame us individually as we are now shamed before the world collectively, let us wake to the realization of the danger of the position we now occupy, of the fact that we, not the "man next door" are responsible for existing conditions; and, having awakened, let us so conduct ourselves as to preclude, for all time to come, the possibility of such another outrage as was perpetrated last Thursday night against the black, but nevertheless respectable citizens of our town, who were here for the purpose of making easier the path we have to tread.

Mrs. William B. Matthews

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Another Pleasant Little Manuscript Received Tuesday Night.

Corbin, KY, Nov. 2, 1919

Mr. Editor.—

Are you one of the yellow dogs or will you let the good people print theis [sic] views in the Corbin paper? There are some law abiding people here who would like to express themselves publicly and see if there can't be something done to suppress the mob spirit and bring to justice the guilty parties that invaded Corbin on last Thursday night.

A Law Abiding Citizen



Article 3: “Kentucky Mob Banishes Virtually All Blacks-One Is Reported Killed.” *The New York Times*. November 1, 1919.

## DRIVE NEGROES FROM TOWN.

### Kentucky Mob Banishes Virtually All Blacks—One Is Reported Killed.

CORBIN, Ky., Oct. 31.—Angered by a series of robberies and attacks on white men, a mob here last night rounded up virtually all the negroes in Corbin, except the older residents, placed more than 200 on departing trains, and forced the remainder to leave on foot.

During the demonstration a large number of shots were fired. One negro was killed, according to reports, and two others wounded. The town is quiet today.

**The New York Times**

Published: November 1, 1919  
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**Source 2.3****Interview with Lillian Butner, January 30, 1987. Interview by G. C. Wright. Black People in Kentucky Oral History Project.**

*Interview Summary (per the University of Kentucky Library): Lillian Butner was a child during the 1919 race riot in Corbin, Kentucky. In this interview she discusses the riot, and why her family was unaffected by it. She talks about her grandfather, who owned several businesses and a large amount of property in the area. She talks about race relations in Corbin, London, and Laurel County, Kentucky, including her experiences as a teacher during integration, her family's work for the railroad, and the current acceptance of interracial marriages by the community, as well as the lynchings and other incidents of violence and racism against African Americans in the area.*

Access video of interview here: [Interview with Lillian Butner, January 30, 1987 · SPOKEdb](#)

## Supporting Question 3 Sources

### Source 3.1

**Black People in Kentucky Oral History Project, Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History. University of Kentucky Libraries.**

*This collection of oral histories recount how individuals and communities responded to Jim Crow era oppression. Users can access video recordings and transcripts of select interviews. See full collection here: [Black People in Kentucky Oral History Project · SPOKEdb](#)*

[Interview with Mary Brown Ashford](#)

Stories about moving into an all white neighborhood

[Interview with John L. Crawford, January 30, 1987](#)

Reflects on modern-day Corbin for African Americans

[Interview with Corinne Jefferson, April 23, 1990](#)

Describes living in an all-black community in Bourbon County

[Interview with F. D. Talbert, April 11, 1991](#)

Discusses an all-black community on the outskirts of Lexington (Cadentown)

## Source 3.2

**Loewen, J. (2005). Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism. “Black Townships.”**

*In this excerpt from Loewen’s book, he describes the development of “townships” in response to racial violence. Below the excerpt are a collection of articles that speak to specific Black townships in Kentucky.*

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Sprinkled about the United States, often located at the edge of sundown towns or a few miles away, are other, smaller black communities, most of which never incorporated, many with dirt roads, off the beaten path. They are the flip side of sundown towns—places to which the excluded have retreated to live, yet close enough to nearby white towns to work. I call them “townships” because some of them resemble South Africa’s black townships, those gatherings of shacks built by squatters that supply maids for Johannesburg’s white households and janitors for its industries. Like Thokoza and Soweto, in America often these were haphazard gatherings of ramshackle houses, many of which were not, until recently, served by amenities such as city water. Some still are not. [...] To some degree, these communities resemble reservations—places to which whites restricted African Americans, whose labor they desired but whose presence they did not want. Their residents knew it.

**Select Articles\***

Scott County: [Scott County \[Kentucky\] African American Villages](#)

Lexington/Fayette County:

- [Remembering and celebrating the History of Fayette County's Rural Black Hamlets](#)
- [Maddoxtown | ExploreKYHistory](#)

Christian County: [After enslavement: Christian County stories of survival](#)

Jonesville (Bowling Green): [Jonesville | Western Kentucky University](#)

*\*What are we missing? Share with ATBHK additional resources on Black townships.*

## Source 3.3

**Turner, W. H. (2021). *The Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns*. Academic book.**

*In this excerpt, from historian William Turner, he discusses how company coal towns controlled the communities and, thus, addressed issues of race. As you read, consider how this reflects (or is in conflict with) how Loewen frames sundown towns.*

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Jim Crow-like segregation, and the discriminatory laws that underpinned it, prevailed in the coalfields of central Appalachia up to the mid-1960s with no more, or less, effect than was the case throughout the American South. [...] But certain special conditions prevailed in some of the company towns, which may explain why Blacks were eager to take work in the region and why they were considered valuable assets by the companies that employed them. In the highly capitalized coal towns in eastern Kentucky—like Lynch, Benham, Jenkins, and Wheelwright, Black miners were paid the same as Whites; they lived in the same standard, company-owned houses; and their schools and health care and burial grounds were on par, for the most part, with the Whites'. [...]

Segregation in coal towns, therefore, was a relative issue. .... The all-powerful company treated the Blacks and the Whites pretty much the same. .... It didn't matter if his name was John Vicini, who had arrived in 1920 via Ellis Island from Italy, or Johnny Jones, who came to Lynch in that same year having been born and raised in Ensley, Alabama, which is in the city limits of Birmingham, then a company town virtually owned by US Steel. [...]

For the most part, except at meetings of the United Mine Workers of America, there were no integrated practices or customs or rituals—outside the mines—that brought Blacks into any regular contact with White people. Black and White miners worked alongside each other, but the bathhouses were partitioned off, Blacks on one side and Whites on the other. We lived in our parts of the coal towns, and the Whites lived in theirs. [...] Harassment and beatings and crude racial incidents and the ultimate dread of Southern Blacks, lynching, were not as much a part of the culture in Appalachian coal towns as was the case in the Black Belt South, specifically Alabama and Mississippi.

That noted, 3,500 White people showed up to witness the hanging of Floyd Frazier, Black, on May 19, 1910 in Whitesburg, in neighboring Letcher County, Kentucky. [...]

...[T]he population of Lynch represented a racial and ethnic diversity that contrasted widely from the population profiles of most of the coal towns in the same general area of eastern Kentucky. For example, Blacks were notably absent in parts of Harlan County, such as in the towns of Bledsoe, Hulen, and Wallins Creek and in nearby Leslie County, in coal-town settlements like Hyden. Lily, a town near Corbin and London in Laurel County, is still 99 percent White. Black people stayed away from “lily-white Lily,” as we called it.

Black men—and those coming of age—knew the “sundown towns,” and they also knew how to code-switch in order to avoid, or to redirect the direction of, “nigger moments” in a nanosecond when survival required it. In our day, White people's spaces—and Black people's spaces—were clearly marked off. It was less perilous for a “strange” White person to enter a Black space than vice versa. The dangers faced by a Black person, especially a Black man—a teenager or a grown Black man—crossing over into a White space were tangible.

## Source 3.4

**Wilkerson, I. (2020). *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. Academic book.**

*Though not specifically about Kentucky, this excerpt from journalist Isabel Wilkerson's Pulitzer Prize winning book describes the "Great Migration," referring to the mass exodus of Black Americans from the South to northern and western communities, taking place over several decades. While the Deep South had less sundown towns than other regions, it did experience this huge population shift.*

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From the early years of the twentieth century to well past its middle age, nearly every black family in the American South, which meant nearly every black family in America, had a decision to make. There were sharecroppers losing at settlement. [...]

It was during the First World War that a silent pilgrimage took its first steps within the borders of this country. The fever rose without warning or notice or much in the way of understanding by those outside its reach. It would not end until the 1970s and would set into motion changes in the North and South that no one, not even the people doing the leaving, could have imagined at the start of it or dreamed would take nearly a lifetime to play out.

Historians would come to call it the Great Migration. It would become the biggest underreported story of the twentieth century. It was vast. It was leaderless. It crept along so many thousands of currents over so long a stretch of time as to be difficult for the press truly to capture while it was under way.

Over the course of six decades, some six million black southerners left the land of their forefathers and fanned out across the country for an uncertain existence in nearly every other corner of America. The Great Migration would become a turning point in history. It would transform urban America and recast the social and political order of every city it touched. It would force the South to search its soul and finally to lay aside a feudal caste system. It grew out of the unmet promises made after the Civil War and, through the sheer weight of it, helped push the country toward the civil rights revolutions of the 1960s.

During this time, a good portion of all black Americans alive picked up and left the tobacco farms of Virginia, the rice plantations of South Carolina, cotton fields in east Texas and Mississippi, and the villages and backwoods of the remaining southern states—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, and by some measures, Oklahoma. They set out for cities they had whispered of among themselves or had seen in a mail-order catalogue. Some came straight from the field with their King James Bibles and old twelve-string guitars. Still more were townspeople looking to be their fuller selves, tradesmen following their customers, pastors trailing their flocks.

## Source 3.5

**Brown, K. L. (2018). *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia*. Academic book.**

*In this book excerpt, sociologist Karida L. Brown describes how many Black Alabamans migrated north to Kentucky coal towns in search of work that was open to them. Note: a newspaper article from the Corbin riots identifies the switchman who was "attacked" as working for the L&N Railroad*

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They came from Alabama. They took the train; some got a ticket, most just hoboed. Some of the firstcomers even worked for the L&N Railroad Company—laying track from Bessemer, Alabama, up through the hills of southeastern Kentucky—and, after months or years of transitory toil, decided to take root in the burgeoning coal camps in Harlan County.

That these men came from Alabama is no coincidence. While there were healthy sources of able-bodied laborers in Kentucky, as well as in neighboring Tennessee and Virginia, the black men from Alabama possessed something that was invaluable to the coal companies: experience. The state of Alabama is resource rich in anthracite coal, iron, and ore, and it was the largest producer of coal and fossil fuel in the American South up until the early decades of the twentieth century. Blacks were used as free labor in those mines both before and after emancipation: as enslaved labor in the antebellum era, and through the convict leasing system from the close of the Civil War up until the 1920s. Corporations operating in eastern Kentucky knew to target their recruitment efforts in Alabama, because they owned those mines too. [...]

Coal mining companies historically practiced a recruiting strategy called "judicious mixture," designed to construct their workforce along ethnic and racial lines. Under this policy, companies targeted a fixed percentage of "native" white, immigrant white, and black workers to live and work in the company-owned towns that were under their purview. The purpose of creating these artificial multiethnic communities was to thwart unionization efforts through ethnoracial differentiation. Each group came to the coal town with its own set of languages, cultures, motivations, and political conditions of exit, making it less likely for workers and families to effectively organize around similar issues. [...] In this way, these isolated coal towns, nestled in the Appalachian mountainscape, were quite cosmopolitan, similar to urban hubs in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia at the time. [...]

The black "Bamas" choice to migrate to certain counties in eastern Kentucky was determined by labor. They migrated to Harlan County because they were recruited and because the coal mining industry in eastern Kentucky presented a labor market that was open to black workers. Without the latter condition, it would not have mattered whether or not jobs were plentiful, as "Whites Only" signs were not only reserved for bathrooms.

## Supporting Question 4 Sources

### Source 4.1

**Loewen, J. (2005). *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, “Why identifying a Sundown Town is challenging.”**

*Though widespread, the scholarship of sundown towns is limited (and relatively new—Loewen’s book surfacing this history was published in 2005). Here, he describes what makes this research so challenging.*

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Our culture teaches us to locate overt racism long ago (in the nineteenth century) or far away (in the South) or to marginalize it as the work of a few crazed deviants who carried out their violent works under cover of darkness. Most high school American history textbooks downplay slavery in the North, so from the start race relations seems to be a sectional rather than national problem. [...]

The lack of concern our society pays to racism in the North can also be seen in our culture’s stress on lynching as a topic of study, rather than sundown towns, and its particular attention to Southern lynchings. Most studies of lynchings focus solely on the South.

#### **Local Newspapers Don’t Say a Thing and Vanish if They Do**

Like centennial histories and historical markers, small-town and suburban newspapers like to present only the sunny side of their community to outsiders. Early in the sundown town movement, many communities were so racist that their newspapers happily published full accounts of the action their white citizens were taking against their African American neighbors, sometimes even including editorial exhortations before the events. Later, after civic leaders realized that these acts might strike outsiders as reprehensible, the accounts sometimes vanished. [...]

Sometimes coverage was stifled from the start. [In Springfield, Illinois], newspapers downplayed the riot in anticipation of the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of Lincoln’s birthday the next year.

#### **Chambers of Congress Stifle Coverage**

Chambers of Congress still spread disinformation about their towns’ sundown policies. A Chamber official in Corbin, Kentucky, a town that drove out its Black population in 1919, pretended to be mystified by Corbin’s whiteness in the 1991 documentary *Trouble Behind*: “The [African Americans] have chosen to live in either Barbourville, Williamsburg, or north of Clarenton-Corbin...but their reasons for that decision—I have no knowledge of that.” Certainly Corbin cannot be at fault: “I don’t feel there is any more prejudice in Corbin, Kentucky, than you’ll find in any other community in the country.” This man is intelligent enough to know that other Corbin residents will tell the filmmaker that no African American should move into Corbin, thus exposing the falseness of his statement; in fact, some young white males did just that in other footage in the film. Nevertheless, he thinks it best to dissimulate about Corbin’s racism, undoubtedly because it’s not good for Corbin’s image.

#### **Historical Societies May Suppress the Truth**

[In his research experience, Loewen found most local historical societies to not be forthcoming about their community’s past.] The usual response I got when I asked at local libraries, historical societies, and museums if they saved the sundown town from their community or a photo of it was “Why would we do that?” while they laughed out loud.



**Absent from History Books**

Academic historians have long put down what they call “local history,” deploring its shallow boosterism. But silence about sundown towns is hardly confined to local historians; professional historians and social scientists have also failed to notice them. Most Americans—historians and social scientists included—like to dwell on good things. [Take Indiana for example, which emphasizes its free state status and role in the Underground Railroad]. Indiana had many more sundown towns after 1890 than it had towns that helped escaping slaves before 1860. Furthermore, Indiana’s sundown towns kept out African Americans throughout most of the twentieth century, some of them to this day, while its towns that aided slaves did so for ten years a century and a half ago. Nevertheless, historians, popular writers, and local historical societies in Indiana have spent far more time researching and writing about the Underground Railroad sites than sundown towns. The Underground Railroad shows us at our best. SSundown towns show us at our worst.

## Source 4.2

### **How to Confirm Sundown Towns (2024).** adapted from: **History and Social Justice Website, hosted by Tougaloo College.**

*The work of surfacing the histories (and identifying) sundown towns is ongoing. For this source, we combined information from the History and Social Justice Website with suggestions from the book Sundown Towns, as well as context information for our Kentucky data sets specifically. Italicized or bracketed information below has been added by the Association for Teaching Black History in Kentucky.*

**Adapted from:**

History and Social Justice Website, Tougaloo College. Accessed from: <https://justice.tougaloo.edu/map/>.

What we seek is information confirming that a given town did keep blacks out [if it did!], either through the use of restrictive covenants throughout the town, violence or threats of same, bad behavior by white individuals, an ordinance, realtor steering, bank redlining, or other formal or informal policies.

While we are only interested in exclusion, such exclusion need not be total. The book, Sundown Towns, has a chapter telling how a town may have driven out its blacks, even posted the traditional sundown town sign, yet allowed one family to remain. Larger cities have even allowed more than one, in a way. Cicero, IL, for example, when burning out a would-be black apartment renter, had some 40 blacks in town — probably as servants in white households, in such institutions as jails, hospitals, colleges, etc., or as renters in large apartment houses not really located in residential neighborhoods and hence below the radar of whites. Since Cicero defined itself as all-white and took steps to keep out the next black would-be household, it certainly qualifies. Therefore, while doing census research, take care to notice non-household blacks. Their existence does not take a town off the roll of suspected sundown communities.

Also, although in the past many sundown towns kept out other groups, such as Mexicans, Asian Americans, Jews, etc., today most sundown towns have accepted all but blacks. However, we are still interested in them because they kept out (and may still keep out) blacks. Finally, some towns have given up being sundown, usually between 1970 and today, yet we are still interested in them owing to their past.

### **Census Research**

Census data is the best starting point. While the census can be misleading when identifying Sundown towns—for example, it will often include incarcerated people and domestic workers. When using census data, look for sharp drops in Black populations. Low populations decade after decade is also notable, particularly if Black populations of nearby areas are increasing.

[The site provides information about finding census data, including information about counties with less than 2,500 people. See website for more information].

You may find sharp drops in black population, which are of course suspicious. If you only find low numbers of blacks, decade after decade, that too is suspicious, especially if blacks are hardly absent from nearby towns and counties or if the town's total population is increasing.

### **Local histories, newspapers**

Many newspapers are digitized and allow for searching the archives. Unfortunately, many of these archives have a paywall; however, some libraries have subscriptions that allow free access. Some national newspapers, including the New York Times archives are also searchable. Several sources from the New

York Times are included as resources.

Then go to the local libraries (in person) and read (skim) any local history books, such as centennial histories and county histories. Usually the local library has a local history room (or local history shelf, in small libraries). Probably you will find NOTHING about blacks, but sometimes there are surprises. If there are notes on file from the WPA Federal Writers Project (c.1935-40), skim those. Also, see if there are vertical files (newspaper clippings) on “blacks,” “Negroes,” “segregation,” “Ku Klux Klan,” or other related topics.

Then you can scan local newspapers for the decade between two adjacent censuses that show a sharp decline in black population, to see if it describes any actions whites took to cause the decline. Sometimes the nearest newspaper outside the town in question will be more forthcoming.

### **Oral history**

Though oral histories aren't always the most reliable, Loewen has identified them as being incredibly helpful in surfacing this history—particularly as a lot of forms of enforcement for Sundown Towns aren't always in the written record. Consider the following questions if conducting an oral history project.

Then ask the librarian in charge of the local history collection if s/he knows anything about the absence of blacks. Has s/he ever heard it might have been on purpose? Does s/he know of any stories (oral history) about anything bad that happened to a black family that tried to move into the town in the 1920s, 1970s, or any other decade?

Follow up by asking the librarian, “Who knows the most about the history of the town?” Every town has an expert. Then interview (in person) that person or persons. Ask, “who else should I talk with?” Is there a genealogical society? If so, attend its next meeting, after talking with its leader. Begin softly, maybe by asking what the town's major employers used to be. Eventually ask, “Have you ever heard that [name of town] used to keep out blacks?” Maybe mention that some nearby towns (by name) used to keep out blacks, and follow by asking if this community had the same policy. If folks say yes, then ask how they heard it, from whom, about when (year), etc.

Oral history is fine, so long as it is solid. Thus, if a person says “Blacks were not allowed...” then s/he should be asked, “How do you know that?” Also, seek details: “Did you ever hear of any family that moved in, then left?” etc. Do also seek written sources, such as some ordinance about keeping out blacks (or another group). The “ordinance,” however, may be nothing more than a motion voted on in a city council meeting on a Tuesday evening in 1911, perhaps not even noted in the minutes of that meeting, and certainly almost impossible to find now.

Repeat this process with the City Clerk and the head of the local historical society. Bear in mind, however, particularly with a local history society, that this usually does not work UNLESS you are there in person. Usually these folks just don't want to say anything bad about their town if they can help it. In person, however, they don't want to lie. And of course, you flatter them by telling them (correctly) that they are the expert on the town's history. Another good idea: go to the local nursing home, or to places where seniors live or hang out (community center, SRO hotel). Interview elderly people. Take good notes, including “quote notes” (with “”) when you actually capture the phrase verbatim. Old folks love to hold forth on the long-ago past. Also talk with long-time realtors, minority group members in nearby towns, and other likely sources. In general, email folks does not work, not on a ticklish subject. It only sets off respondents' alarms

and they reply carefully if at all. Leaving phone messages is only slightly better. You need to talk with people, face to face if possible, on the phone if face-to-face is not possible.

Always we must recall that a community's overwhelming whiteness might be an accident, that perhaps no African Americans ever happened to go there. We cannot classify an "all-white town" as a "sundown town" unless we have evidence about its racial policies. Moreover, one must use common sense and historical and sociological knowledge in this work. Lemhi County, in northern Idaho, all-white in 1930, appears less suspicious than Garrett County, in western Maryland, which had 24 African Americans in that year, because 13 other Idaho counties also had no African Americans, while other Maryland counties all had more than 1,000. But then, a historian whose parents were born and raised in Lemhi County wrote that according to her relatives, "Black people were 'run off' in some distant past." Meanwhile, several sources, including Henry Louis Gates Jr., confirmed that Garrett was a sundown county. So, suspicion is appropriate in both cases, and additional sources have solidly confirmed Garrett. [emphasis added]

Happy hunting; we await your results!

## Source 4.3

### US Census Department, Census Data for Kentucky Counties, (1870-1940).

This GSheet compiles population data for Kentucky's counties from 1870-1940. The "Introduction" sheet also provides links to the raw census data.

Access data here: [Census Data\\_KY Counties 1890-1940](#)

### Screenshot of Data Set:

Year	1870			1890			1900		
Population	Total	Black	White	Total	Black	White	Total	Black	White
STATE	1,321,011	222,210	1,098,692	1,858,635	268,071	1,590,462	2,147,174	284,706	1,862,309
County Name									
Adair	11,065	1,836	9,229	13,721	1,828	11,893	14,888	1,594	13,294
Allen	10,296	1,104	9,192	13,692	1,042	12,650	14,657	1,098	13,559
Anderson	5,440	698	4,751	10,610	1,063	9,547	10,051	994	9,057
Ballard	12,576	1,477	11,099	8,390	1,412	6,978	10,761	1,502	9,259
Barren	17,780	3,623	14,157	21,490	3,724	17,765	23,197	3,787	19,410
Bath	10,145	1,702	8,443	12,813	1,578	11,235	14,734	1,692	13,042
Bell	3,731	111	3,620	10,312	740	9,570	15,701	1,754	13,947
Boone	10,696	1,012	9,684	12,246	1,112	11,134	11,170	810	10,360
Bourbon	14,863	6,677	8,186	16,976	6,797	10,179	18,069	6,792	11,278
Boyd	8,573	291	8,282	14,033	705	13,328	18,834	771	18,051
Boyle	9,515	3,679	5,836	12,948	4,809	8,139	13,817	4,781	9,036
Bracken	11,409	636	10,773	12,369	646	11,723	12,137	572	11,565
Breathitt	5,672	181	5,491	17,540	169	8,536	14,322	299	14,023
Breckinridge	13,440	1,682	11,758	18,976	2,080	16,896	20,534	2,096	18,438
Bullitt	7,781	1,194	6,587	8,291	1,048	7,243	9,602	1,094	8,508
Butler	9,404	643	8,701	13,956	775	13,183	15,896	725	15,171
Caldwell	10,826	2,078	8,748	13,186	2,736	10,450	14,510	2,775	11,735
Calloway	9,410	812	8,598	14,675	1,092	13,583	17,633	1,258	16,375
Campbell	27,406	282	27,123	44,208	686	43,522	54,223	580	53,643
Carlisle	Not listed			7,612	389	7,223	10,195	638	9,557
Carroll	6,189	540	5,649	9,266	757	8,509	9,825	804	9,021

## Supplemental Source

### Supplemental Source 1

**Klotter, J. C., & Friend, C. T. (2018). *A New History of Kentucky*. Academic book/textbook.**

*This excerpt provides background information on the Jim Crow era in Kentucky, as well as the Corbin violence and other race-based discrimination, intimidation, and involvement of the Ku Klux Klan.*

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By the mid-1920s, then, Kentucky had segregated racing, transportation, parks, hotels, theaters, library systems, orphans' homes, restaurants, funeral parlors, and more. Louisville's police force, fire fighters, and jail employees had become segregated by 1890. In other areas, such as juries, blacks were excluded altogether. Black activists such as Albert Ernest Meyzeek and I. Willis Cole spoke out but to no avail. Segregation had planted deep roots in Kentucky soil, and African Americans reasonably wondered whether their rights would wither away further in the future.

In some places, increased segregation was not enough. Night Riders earlier had forced African Americans out of parts of western Kentucky, such as Birmingham in 1908, and by 1919 the actions had shifted eastward. In October an armed mob of some 150 whites in Corbin, angered by erroneous rumors of an attack by blacks on a white man, seized itinerant railroad workers in the dark of night, placed them in a barricaded area ("like cattle," one recalled), then forced them to board a train and leave town. Between two and three hundred black residents left; only a few elderly African Americans remained. Less spectacularly but just as effectively, through various means, other towns did the same over time and proudly boasted of their whiteness.

The victories won by blacks proved even more significant, given the climate in which they occurred. Weak attempts by whites to take away the vote all failed, for instance, although violence and gerrymandered districts sometimes gave the desired effect. In 1914 Louisville and other Kentucky cities passed segregation

ordinances that forbade both blacks and whites from buying homes in areas where the other race predominated. A Kentuckian by birth, the wealthy William English Walling had, more than perhaps anyone, been responsible for founding the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1910. Now a branch opened in Louisville, and C. H. Buchanan, a white man, and William Warley, a black man, tested the segregation ordinance. Eventually heard by the US Supreme Court as *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917), the case resulted in the rejection of the Louisville ordinance, in a rare national victory in that era for black rights. Warley's action cost him his job at the post office. Victories took their toll.

Such successes were few for African Americans, but despite that and despite the relatively small numbers of immigrants, Jews, and Catholics in Kentucky, the newly formed KKK spoke out about the supposed threat to the United States from such groups. But the Klan never found Kentucky a very comfortable home. Indiana to the north was a center of Ku Klux activity, and the Klavens were strong to the south, but the Klan philosophy never took hold in the Bluegrass State as strongly as in those areas. The KKK did have strength and influence: a contemporary estimate placed membership at fifty thousand to two hundred thousand, very likely an overestimate. More recently a historian suggested that thirty thousand

Kentuckians joined the Klan's ranks. The Klan did gain support, as rallies drawing crowds of five thousand or more took place in communities as diverse as Paintsville in the east and Owensboro in the west. The message came through clearly in a document issued by the Warren County Klan: "We believe in the Protestant Christian Religion; White Supremacy; Separation of Church and State." It portrayed Jews and Catholics— "these representatives of the Pope"—as controlling Bowling Green's government and called for "pure blooded 100% American" rule.

As in the anti-evolution fight [re: the Scopes trial], however, Kentucky leaders spoke out against the Klan, often at some political risk. In Lexington, Owensboro, Louisville, Pulaski County, Hopkins County, Laurel County, and elsewhere, judges, mayors, and city council members either publicly attacked the KKK or refused to allow its members to meet on public property. A similar stance by Paducah mayor Wynn Tulley showed the dangers inherent in such a position: he alone on the Democratic ticket did not win reelection in 1923. Still, when the minister who had authored *The Kall of the Klan in Kentucky* (1924) spoke, he found little official sympathy. Owensboro arrested him on conspiracy charges (later dropped), and similar harassing activities dogged him as he spoke across the state, blaming the ills of the United States on blacks and aliens. By the last half of the 1920s, inept and corrupt national leadership, violent actions, and an unresponsive citizenry in Kentuckyn had brought the Invisible Empire to its knees. It would have lingering influence for a time in some places, but the Second Klan's effect on the state, though significant, had been brief.

## Appendix

Directions: Copy and paste select sources into the scaffold of choice.

### Scaffold 1

*Use this scaffold if you intend on substantively modifying the text. By including the original and modified side-by-side, students are able to digest information in a more student-friendly way, but also compare it to the original. This approach maintains the rigor and authenticity of the source analysis, as well as help students comprehend difficult text.*

ORIGINAL	MODIFIED
[text]	[text]

### Scaffold 2

Use this scaffold if you want students to conduct a close reading and/or want to analyze particular portions of the text.

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