

**Sundown on the Prairie:  
The Extralegal Campaigns and Efforts  
from 1889 to 1967 to Exclude African  
Americans from Norman, Oklahoma**



*By Michael S. Givel\**

Much has been written about the 1889 Land Run in the Territory of Oklahoma. During the US Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act of 1862, which allocated to settlers 160 acres of public land. The settlers were required to farm the land for five years, after which they received legal title. Under the 1889 Springer Amendment to the Indian Appropriations Act, President Benjamin Harrison designated a two-million-acre area of formerly Native American lands in what would become Oklahoma accessible for settlement and colonization subject to the terms of the Homestead Act of 1862. A number of tribally owned lands of the Iowa, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Cheyenne and Arapaho, and Chickasaw Nations soon disappeared and were ceded to numerous, mostly white, land-hungry settlers. Norman, Oklahoma, lies just to the north of the southern boundary of the area, which was the Canadian River.<sup>1</sup>

## SUNDOWN TOWN

On April 22, 1889, thousands of settlers gathered, but, very few African Americans were among them.<sup>2</sup> At noon, the land rush commenced. New towns and settlements sprang up almost overnight including the town of Norman. Prior to Norman being developed, the Southern Kansas Railroad, a subsidiary of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, sent engineers to survey the area.<sup>3</sup> In the very beginning, conditions were hard by modern standards with housing in Norman including tents and basic wood-construction buildings and dwellings. Early businesses in Norman included hotels, a pharmacy, lumber mills, a hardware store, grocery stores, dry goods stores, banks, tobacco outlets, clothing stores, a dairy, newspapers with a variety of political perspectives, a tin shop, and a cotton gin. Additionally, there were professionals who settled there such as doctors, lawyers, and building contractors.<sup>4</sup> These Oklahoma towns like Norman were subsequently instrumental in the creation of Oklahoma as a state in 1907.

In the case of Norman, the history of African Americans who wanted to settle there during and after the 1889 Land Run, events took a decidedly disturbing and sinister turn, as a few very brief accounts have mentioned differing time periods when Norman was a sundown town.<sup>5</sup> In Professor James W. Loewen's groundbreaking book *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, he writes 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."<sup>6</sup> Since Reconstruction thousands of American cities were sundown towns.<sup>7</sup> What is the full and detailed historical account of Norman as a sundown town? In particular, what was Norman's official sundown town period and how and why did Norman become a sundown town? Was enforcement of sundown practices in Norman done through extralegal or legal means, or both? Were there any exceptions to sundown enforcement, and quite importantly, who might have resisted sundown policies in Norman to forward the cause of civil rights and human dignity?

The first known US census that divided Norman's population by African Americans and whites was conducted at the time of statehood in 1907 by the US Census Bureau in an Oklahoma Special Census.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent US census counts from 1910 to 2015 also have divided Norman's population by African Americans and whites.<sup>9</sup> From 1907 to around 1940 there were no African Americans in Norman. In 1950 there were nine, only after the University of Oklahoma (OU) Board of Regents in September 1949 ordered OU to provide segregated African American student housing on campus.<sup>10</sup> This number grew in 1960 to 99. Norman's African American population began to rise from 1970 to

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the present, but still remains relatively low compared to white Normans.<sup>11</sup> The question arises was this a natural occurrence or was this done on purpose?

Two key sources document and crosscheck early racial cleansing and terror in Norman by white terrorist gangs and hoodlums that ran African Americans out of Norman between 1896 and 1899. These include a *Daily Oklahoma State Capital* newspaper article of January 5, 1897, entitled “War on Negroes: Many of Them Whipped and Ordered to Leave Oklahoma Territory,” and the 1900 Oklahoma Territorial Supreme Court case of *J. J. Wallace v. Town of Norman* and accompanying newspaper articles.<sup>12</sup> Quoting the *Daily Oklahoma State Capital* article, which speaks at length of the organized vigilante campaign of terror and violence against African Americans in Cleveland County and Norman:

This whipping of colored men has been going on in the southeastern part of Oklahoma for several months, and hundreds of negroes have been ordered to leave the territory, and given to understand if they did not go severe punishment would be their lot. Many colored men have been whipped because they refused to go, some nigh until death. During the season for gathering cotton last fall these masked men made visits nearly every night to the home of some colored man, and he and possibly several members of his family were whipped if they refused to obey orders of the band. It is the object of these gangs, so it is alleged, to run the negroes out of the country so that they will not be rivals on the farm and in the workshops in Cleveland and Pottawatomie counties where most of these outrages are going on. Cotton is the principal product, and negroes are experts in cotton fields, and get the best of white labor. The towns of Tecumseh and Norman, containing 2,000 inhabitants each, have not a colored inhabitant. All of them have been run out by secret hands.<sup>13</sup>

No one was ever convicted for these vigilante criminal acts in Cleveland County.<sup>14</sup>

J. J. Wallace who was a wealthy white roofing tinner, or in modern terms roofing contractor, based in Oklahoma City and his African American employee, Frank Rogan, were doing a tin roofing job in the town of Norman on July 10, 1898, as reported by several newspapers.<sup>15</sup> Due to the presence of Frank Rogan, a mob of about twenty-five white men soon gathered and viciously assaulted Wallace.<sup>16</sup> This assault caused the permanent loss of sight in his left eye. In Wallace’s liti-



*View of the 100 Block of West Main Street in Norman looking east, c. 1900 (3644, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).*

gation that was decided by the Oklahoma Territorial Supreme Court in 1900, the lawsuit stated that for the past three years conspirators in the town of Norman had “openly and notoriously threatened, assaulted, and beaten from said town law-abiding colored citizens of the United States.”<sup>17</sup> The lawsuit also stated that “at no time since the inception of said conspiracy, as foresaid, has any colored person ever labored, lived, or lodged in said town or been permitted to do so.”<sup>18</sup> No one was ever brought to justice or convicted of any crime in relation to this violent mob attack.<sup>19</sup>

Extralegal vigilante incidents and exclusion of African Americans from employment and residence in Norman continued from 1899 to the early 1920s.<sup>20</sup> This includes one of the two known lynchings that occurred in Cleveland County.<sup>21</sup> In 1914 Dr. B. E. Ward, an African American, was abducted from the Cleveland County jail in Norman. His abductors were unknown white men. The lynching occurred at a bridge crossing at modern-day Bishop Creek close to Noble and Norman. Once again, no one was ever prosecuted for this violent criminal act.<sup>22</sup>

According to local historian John Womack in *Norman: An Early History, 1820–1900*, African Americans were not permitted in Norman after dark, were not served meals in restaurants but they could eat in back alleys, and could not be employed in the city.<sup>23</sup> African Americans could shop in Norman as long as the merchant made a profit. This

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early history of white settler and early pioneer violence, ethno-white separatism, and competition for agricultural jobs, primarily picking cotton, established the long-term basis of Norman as a sundown town. Over the decades until around 1967, this sundown and ethno-white separatist policy would be enforced in differing, extralegal ways.

The second phase in the extralegal enforcement of Norman as a sundown town began in the 1920s and was a direct result of the rise in 1915 of the second era of the Ku Klux Klan. Many historians link the beginning of the second era of the Klan with the national showing of the movie *The Birth of a Nation*.<sup>24</sup> The movie's director and producer, D. W. Griffith, portrayed racist and Jim Crow stereotypes of African American men. The movie also depicted the Ku Klux Klan as a heroic force that countered carpetbaggers during post-Civil War Reconstruction that were said to be oppressing white southerners and southern heritage. From this perspective, the Civil War was supposedly fought in the name of state's rights rather than slavery. Slavery is what almost all historians have concluded was the basis for the conflict.<sup>25</sup> On November 25, 1915, around ten months after the first showing of *The Birth of a Nation*, the first Klan cross burning occurred at Stone Mountain, Georgia.<sup>26</sup> Nationally, and in Oklahoma, while the Klan conducted some charity work, the organization engaged in brutal vigilante terror against African Americans and their white allies, opponents of prohibition, "immoral" individuals, immigrants, labor leaders, socialists, communists, Catholics, and Jews.<sup>27</sup>

It was not until 1920 that the Ku Klux Klan emerged as a major political and cultural force in Oklahoma.<sup>28</sup> By 1921, there were around seventy thousand members in Oklahoma. At its greatest membership strength in the mid-1920s, about 10 percent of eligible males in Oklahoma were members, including many prominent members of society. The Oklahoma Klan was reportedly one of the most brutal among all US states. According to Carter Blue Clark in his 1976 University of Oklahoma doctoral dissertation, there were more than two hundred documented Oklahoma Klan terrorist acts from 1921 to 1924.<sup>29</sup> The mayhem included night whipping parties, brutal assaults, torture and mutilations including tar-and-feathering, and at least nine homicides.<sup>30</sup> There were numerous other incidents in which buildings were torched.

In Norman in the early 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan was a major presence on the University of Oklahoma campus as well as the city of Norman. In 1920 the OU *Sooner* student yearbook in the "Organization" section had an entire page dedicated to a student chapter of the Klan. The picture contained an ominous vigilante-style black torch, a mask depicting the invisible and hooded empire of the Klan, and a high-



toned Latin phrase: *Nemo Nos Impune Lacessit*. The phrase in Latin was a threatening warning—"No one attacks me with impunity." Also in the early 1920s, Dr. Edwin C. DeBarr was vice president of OU as well as the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan of Oklahoma. In June 1923 the OU Board of Regents removed Vice President DeBarr from the university for pro-Klan political activities.<sup>31</sup>

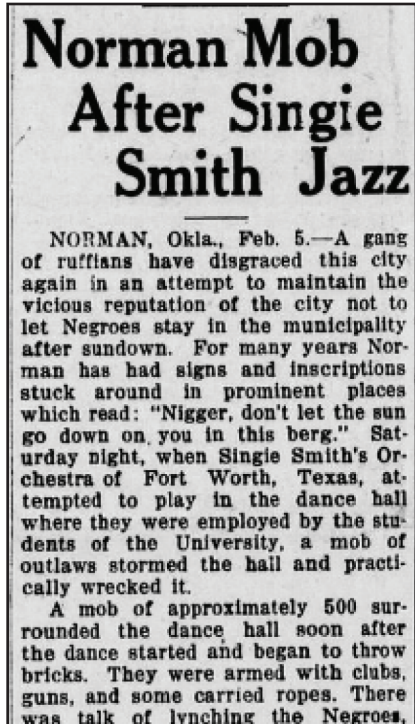
Meanwhile in the city of Norman from November 20, 1921, to March 16, 1922, the *Norman Transcript* ran a series of prominent articles on the newspaper's front page about the activities and public policy positions of a Norman Ku Klux Klan Klavern.<sup>32</sup> Klaverns were local units of the Klan. In the November 20, 1921, edition of the *Norman Transcript*, readers learned that the Norman Ku Klux Klan, Klavern No. 10, had formed and was supported by "more than 100 influential [Norman] men as sponsors."<sup>33</sup> Not stated in the story were the actual identities of these prominent citizen members of the Norman Klan or how the newspaper learned of this information.

On December 11, 1921, the *Norman Transcript* reported that unknown members of Norman's Ku Klux Klan, Klavern No. 10, had interrogated a local taxi driver regarding the whereabouts and alleged evil doings of local bootleggers in the Norman area.<sup>34</sup> The story sent a clear and chilling warning to local bootleggers that the Norman Klan was watching them.

On Christmas Day, December 25, 1921, another front page story appeared regarding a donation made by the Norman Klan to the Red Cross.<sup>35</sup> Again, there was no indication in the story of the source or sources who provided the *Norman Transcript* with the details of the story. The donation was made to C. H. Bessent, who was president of the Security National Bank in Norman. When asked by the reporter "Who gave you the money? Did you know the man?" Bessent replied, "I refuse [*sic*] to tell."

On February 7, 1922, several newspapers reported that a white mob had formed in Norman with a crowd size estimated between two hundred to five hundred.<sup>36</sup> The menacing and violent white mob had formed due to the presence of an African American jazz orchestra that was playing in Norman after dark.<sup>37</sup> For a number of years Norman had prominent signs that read, "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you in this berg."<sup>38</sup> The violent mob, including prominent businessmen, wielded clubs, guns, and ropes, and commenced to throw bricks and storm the dance hall. Some of their number spoke of a mass lynching in a local park. Fortunately, Sheriff W. H. Newblock deputized around one hundred OU students to protect the jazz band. The students protectively circled the band and escorted them to safety at an interurban

Article from the Black Dispatch on Thursday, February 9, 1922, in response to the confrontation after the jazz concert in Norman (image from *The Gateway to Oklahoma History*, gateway.okhistory.org).



station. The band later left town unharmed.<sup>39</sup> Two days later on February 9, in a front-page letter to the *Norman Transcript* printed in its entirety, the local Ku Klux Klan responded to the violent incident. The letter claimed to condemn the violence while also noting, "The Ku Klux Klan believes in white supremacy, and from now on no negroes will be permitted to reside, work, or entertain in the city of Norman and no negroes will be permitted to remain in Norman after the sun goes down."<sup>40</sup>

The next month, two *Norman Transcript* articles appeared on March 12 and 14, 1922, announcing and prominently advertising a large Ku Klux Klan parade to be held in Norman on March 15, 1922.<sup>41</sup> The upcoming parade route and time was provided by a Norman Klan secretary who was not identified in the stories. The stories informed readers that "Klansmen will meet at the city park, according to the report, and from there march on Santa Fe avenue to Main street, from Main to Porter, from Porter to Gray, from Gray to Peters, from Peters to Duffy, from Duffy to Asp, from Asp to Boyd, from Boyd to the Boulevard, from the Boulevard to Main, from Main to Santa Fe, from Santa Fe back to the city park."<sup>42</sup> This route was directly through downtown Norman

**KU KLUX KLAN  
TAKES A HAND**

**Is Opposed to Mob Violence—Believes in White Supremacy  
Will Uphold the Laws**

The Ku Klux Klan of Norman writes the Transcript a letter requesting the publication of the following article which deals with mob violence, race, negro problems, and law enforcement. The Transcript publishes the letter in full as follows:

**Opposed to Mobs.**

On account of the action of some 200 men who participated in what might have been a riot last Saturday night in front of Parker's confectionery, the Norman Ku Klux Klan in a recent meeting condemned the action of the men who participated in this affair.

The Ku Klux Klan has investigated the circumstances that led up to the near-riot last Saturday night and found that the trouble arose over the fact that W. C. Parker, manager of Davis hall, had secured the service of "Single" Smith, negro orchestra, to play for the high school dance.

*Article from the Norman Transcript on Thursday, February 9, 1922, in response to the confrontation after the jazz concert in Norman (image from The Gateway to Oklahoma History, gateway.okhistory.org).*

and just north of the University of Oklahoma campus. On March 16, 1922, the *Norman Transcript* reported that a very large crowd of seven thousand people were on both sides of Norman streets as they watched seven hooded Klan horsemen followed by "members on foot bearing the fiery cross" as they paraded through Norman streets.<sup>43</sup> Signs in this Klan parade read "We are 100% American," "We Placed Bibles in the Schools," "Law Breakers Better Go," "You Can't Fool Us," "We Are in Every Walk of Life," "America for Americans," "We are 70,000 Strong in Oklahoma," "The Stars and Stripes Forever," and "Don't Bite the Hand That's Feeding You."<sup>44</sup> After the March 16 story, suddenly and for unexplained reasons, stories on the Norman Klan ceased to appear. Later that year, and in continuance of Norman's extralegal sundown practices, on October 9, 1922, a *Norman Transcript* article featured an



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unusual story reporting that the first African American had spent the night in Norman in years—albeit in jail and then he soon left town.<sup>45</sup> Providing context for this story was the first paragraph that stated, “E. L. Sutton, negro, didn’t pay any attention to the University City’s silent warning ‘Negro don’t let the sun go down on you here.’”<sup>46</sup> By 1928 the membership of the Ku Klux Klan, nationally and in Oklahoma, had significantly dwindled.<sup>47</sup> However, during the early 1920s, what is certain is the Norman Ku Klux Klan, Klavern No. 10, had engaged in extralegal practices to maintain Norman as a sundown town that included open threats and direct hostility toward African Americans.

From the 1930s to World War II, a variety of newspaper articles as well as *The Negro Motorist Green-Book* of 1940 continued to document Norman’s unwritten and extralegal code that African Americans were not allowed in Norman after dark or allowed to work in Norman.<sup>48</sup> On September 23, 1938, a front page article in the student paper of the University of Oklahoma, the *Oklahoma Daily*, reported that a group of African Americans were employed at a local automobile dealership to break up concrete on a driveway.<sup>49</sup> Suddenly, a group of ten Norman white men approached them to leave town to “avoid trouble.” The African Americans quickly left and the identity of the white men was never determined. The story continued with this public comment from Norman Mayor Richard Cloyd confirming that “he did not believe there is a city ordinance preventing negroes from working or remaining in Norman overnight. It is an unwritten law that has grown up for 30 or 40 years around here, and is merely a means to protect student domestic employment.”<sup>50</sup> This reference regarding students, of course, was designed to appeal to the student readers of the *Oklahoma Daily*. Later in the same article, this was expanded to the entire city of Norman and beyond: “Old timers in Norman said negroes have not been allowed to remain overnight in Norman, Lexington, Moore and Noble since territorial days.”<sup>51</sup>

In 1940 *Oklahoma Daily* articles continued to report “on Norman’s unwritten law excluding Negroes in Norman.”<sup>52</sup> On December 11, 1940, a university official confirmed Norman’s extralegal practices prohibiting African Americans from being employed in Norman. As reported in an *Oklahoma Daily* article, “The [University of Oklahoma] administrative official to whom the matter was presented said that he ‘suggested’ that the fraternity not hire the Negroes in order to avoid a lot of unnecessary friction. There is a prejudice in Norman against Negroes and if the fraternity carried out its plan it would cause a lot of trouble.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, the 1940 edition of *The Negro Motorist Green-Book* was published to provide African Americans who traveled across Jim Crow

America information on safe and friendly places to dine, shop, and obtain other services.<sup>54</sup> There were no places listed in Norman for African Americans to obtain restaurant, hotel or motel, bar, auto repair, taxi, night club, liquor store, golf club, gas station, tailor, drug store, barber and beauty salon, or any other services.<sup>55</sup>

It was also from 1938 to 1940 that the first organized challenge to Norman's sundown practices occurred. After the African American workers at a local auto dealership were ordered out of Norman by the group of unknown white men, a coalition of some OU students and local church leaders organized to repeal Norman's unwritten law prohibiting African Americans from working in Norman.<sup>56</sup> The coalition first brought the incident to the national secretaries of the YWCA and YMCA for their consideration.<sup>57</sup> By 1940 an interfaith coalition of sixty-four Norman residents led by Esther Comfort passed a resolution at World Day of Prayer services denouncing the job ban as "anti-Christian and undemocratic."<sup>58</sup> Esther Comfort was the wife of E. Nicholas Comfort who led the Social Gospel movement in Oklahoma at the time that promoted economic justice and civil rights based on Christian religious teachings.<sup>59</sup> Norman churches that were actively involved in the resolution included the First Presbyterian Church, McFarlin Memorial United Methodist Church, and First Baptist Church. The following day after the resolution, Nicholas Comfort, who was dean of the Oklahoma School of Religion in Norman, was summoned into OU President William Bizzell's office to explain the resolution.<sup>60</sup> Comfort informed Bizzell that he had just given his consent to the resolution, to which Bizzell replied, "You can't tell that to the men on Main Street." This, of course, was a blatant effort by prominent leaders in Norman to politically pressure Esther and Nicholas Comfort to terminate the campaign to end the ban on African Americans working in Norman.

It was not until the Second World War that the second challenge occurred. During World War II a naval training base was built on the north side of Norman.<sup>61</sup> The base provided temporary naval housing for some African Americans, but only on the base. In preparing the white citizens of Norman, the editorial board of the *Norman Transcript* on July 10, 1942, penned the following editorial:

Many changes are taking place in the community life of Norman by reason of the naval construction activities now under way here and more will develop as the navy men come in greater numbers. One of these developments may change a situation that has prevailed ever since the day Norman was first settled in the land run of 1889, that of having no negroes here.<sup>62</sup>

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*The North Oval, now known as Parrington Oval, at the University of Oklahoma in Norman (18827.063, Albertype Collection, OHS).*

However, once the naval training base closed after the Second World War, housing on the base for African Americans ended as well.<sup>63</sup>

The next major challenge came in the mid- to late 1940s with the advent of the civil rights struggle to integrate the previously all-white OU campus.<sup>64</sup> The beginning of the struggle that ultimately would help to change American history and Norman's sundown practices began in 1946 when Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher applied for admission to the University of Oklahoma College of Law. In 1946 Norman remained a sundown town.<sup>65</sup> Fisher was an honors student having graduated from Oklahoma's all-African American Langston University. When Fisher applied for admission, she was surrounded by a group of Norman citizens and OU faculty and students. Because no restaurant in Norman would provide service to African Americans, there was a bagged lunch provided to all from the Norman YMCA and YWCA's Race Relations Committee. The Oklahoma State Board of Regents denied her application.<sup>66</sup> With this action, a lawsuit was filed on April 6, 1946, by attorneys for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Cleveland County District Court for a writ of mandamus to order Fisher's admission. Defendants in the case included the OU Board of Regents; President George L. Cross; Maurice Merrill, dean of the OU College of Law; George Wadsack, registrar; and Roy Gittinger,

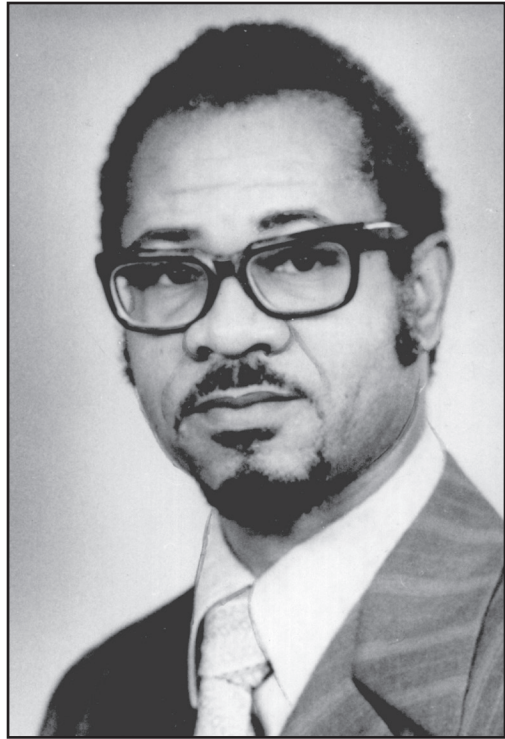
dean of admissions.<sup>67</sup> The primary cause of action in the petition was that Fisher had been denied admission solely due to race, and this was a direct violation of the US Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment requirements of equal protection under the law. After the case had been heard and lost in the Oklahoma state court system, including the Oklahoma Supreme Court, Fisher appealed her case to the US Supreme Court on September 24, 1947.<sup>68</sup> Oral arguments were heard January 8, 1948, and just four days later the US Supreme Court issued a decision based on the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause ordering the University of Oklahoma Board of Regents to provide legal education to Fisher.<sup>69</sup>

But that was not the end. On January 26, 1948, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education rapidly created a new law school at Langston University. Meanwhile, Fisher attempted to enter the OU College of Law and was denied with the claim that "equal" law school facilities were available at Langston University. A new legal battle ensued. Meanwhile, George McLaurin, one of six African Americans admitted to OU in 1948 and who was admitted to a doctoral program in educational administration, filed a lawsuit regarding Jim Crow practices on the campus. In this Jim Crow atmosphere, African American students were required to use separate facilities on the campus, including segregated seating in classrooms such as sitting in special sections in the back of the room designated "colored."<sup>70</sup> On June 17, 1949, President Cross admitted Fisher to the OU College of Law, thus ending her lawsuit and making a legal admission that the two separate law schools were not equal.<sup>71</sup>

As McLaurin's legal challenge continued, a Tulsa, Oklahoma, resident and African American, Julius Caesar Hill, applied for housing on OU's campus.<sup>72</sup> On his housing application in the section marked race, he wrote, "American." Hill's \$10 housing application fee was accepted. When he arrived on campus to enter student housing, minor pandemonium broke loose and he was quickly provided permanent segregated student housing on the campus.<sup>73</sup> On September 14, 1949, the OU Board of Regents ordered the construction of separate African American student housing. That was the beginning of the end of sundown practices in Norman, as African Americans legally and permanently were allowed to live in Norman overnight, albeit only on the OU campus.<sup>74</sup> In 1950 the US Supreme Court decided in favor of George McLaurin that separate facilities at the campus were not equal under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The court ordered the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to immediately integrate all facilities on the campus.<sup>75</sup>

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*Dr. George Henderson, 1972  
(2012.201.B0392.0579, Oklahoma  
Publishing Company Photography  
Collection, OHS).*



For the next seventeen years while the sundown practices on the OU campus had ended, they continued to persist outside of the campus in the city of Norman. The 1954 edition of *The Negro Travelers' Green Book* continued to recommend no services or facilities in Norman that could be used by African American travelers.<sup>76</sup> In 1956 Etta and Don Johnson were some of the first African Americans to attend Norman High School.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, within the city limits and outside of the OU campus, Norman remained a sundown town.<sup>78</sup> The Johnson family lived east of Norman city limits.<sup>79</sup> As the civil rights movement engaged in civil disobedience and other political tactics in the early 1960s, the Norman City Commission in 1963 considered the creation of a Human Rights Commission that included provisions for enforcing nondiscrimination and open housing practices in Norman.<sup>80</sup> The motion was tabled.

In 1967 George and Barbara Henderson became the first African American homeowners in Norman. George Henderson had been hired that year as a University of Oklahoma faculty member in sociology and education.<sup>81</sup> Up to 1967, within the city proper, Norman was still



a sundown town.<sup>82</sup> As Dr. Henderson recalled, “The realtors had a legally unenforceable covenant that none of them would sell a house to a black family—to a person of African descent was how it reads.”<sup>83</sup> What happened next reflected Norman’s sundown town atmosphere. The Hendersons were subjected to garbage thrown on their lawn, their car being vandalized, being cussed at, and police harassment.<sup>84</sup> It took immense bravery and determination by the Henderson family to overcome Norman’s long sundown history. Dr. Henderson also attributes the beginning of the end of the unwritten sundown practices in Norman to his white realtors, Sam and Sally Mathews and Mokie Webb, who cracked the real estate code not to sell to African Americans.<sup>85</sup> For the first time since 1889, Norman was no longer a sundown town either on the University of Oklahoma campus or within the city limits.

It should be noted that there were a few a minor exceptions to sundown practices, including nighttime athletic events, as reported in two *Norman Transcript* newspaper articles in the 1920s and one in the late 1930s.<sup>86</sup> African American glee groups that sang Christian religious spirituals also were allowed into Norman after dark, but had to leave after the performance concluded, as they were not permitted to stay overnight.

In answering the original questions of this article, quantitative trends reflected in US census reports that showed there were no African Americans throughout the beginning of Norman’s early history and relatively few later on are confirmed by numerous, authoritative qualitative and scholarly sources of sundown practices. The primary reasons that Norman’s sundown policy first occurred was due to African American job competition in cotton picking with whites, as well as white supremacy and racism. The sundown period for Norman lasted approximately from 1889 to 1967, around seventy-eight years.

A review of the city ordinances from the beginning of Norman in 1889 to 1967 by the author of this article revealed no explicit sundown ordinances. Most decidedly, enforcement of exclusion of African Americans from living or working in Norman was accomplished through several extralegal schemes. The implementation of sundown practices depended on the particular periods of history in Norman. In the early period from 1896 to 1898, there was a campaign by organized white gangs and hoodlums to racially cleanse Norman through terror and violence. From 1898 to the early 1920s, incidents of terror, threats, and violence continued. The Ku Klux Klan of Norman then followed this in the early 1920s issuing a public statement and warning that Norman would remain a sundown town. From the early 1920s to 1967, enforcement of sundown practices included freezing African Americans out of

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services such as being served at restaurants or motels or hotels. Real estate agents also contributed to the sundown atmosphere by refusing to sell homes to African Americans. Throughout the entire sundown period Norman had a reputation as a highly hostile place for African Americans. At least in the early part of the twentieth century sundown signs in strategic places in the city also provided a poignant and terror-filled warning to African Americans not to venture into Norman after dark. And, of course, there were threats and periodic violence.

In the end, sundown town is a descriptive phrase of intentionally excluding African Americans. This practice is also indicative of ethno-white nationalist and racist ideology of white supremacy and to separate races where the focus is on the supposed inferiority of nonwhites. While not all Normanites supported this policy and some courageously and openly opposed it, this was a dominant practice in Norman for seventy-eight years. It certainly was not opposed during this period by Norman city government. Mainstream versions of Norman history, which focus on the white settlers of Norman and those that came after them, need to incorporate this history. And while many historical accounts of Norman contain inspiring stories and history, it is worth noting that the same is true of Norman's sundown history. From African American Frank Rogan as well as J. J. Wallace, who sued the town of Norman in 1889, to the student and interfaith coalition in the late 1930s to 1940, to the remarkable courage of those who struggled for civil rights at the University of Oklahoma beginning in the mid- to late 1940s, to George and Barbara Henderson, there are a number of heroes in Norman history who fought for civil rights and human dignity. They, along with the victims of racial cleansing and later different sundown approaches, have an important place in Norman history that needs to be commemorated and memorialized.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Stan Hoig, "Land Run of 1889," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, [www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LA014](http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=LA014); Brad Agnew, "Voices from the Land Run of 1889," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 67, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 4–29; Kathryn Baldwin, *The 89ers: Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889* (Oklahoma City: Western Heritage Books, 1981); Stan Hoig, *The Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1984); John Womack, *Norman: An Early History, 1820–1900* (Norman, OK: John Womack, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Hoig, *The Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889*.

<sup>3</sup> Womack, *Norman: An Early History*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: Touchstone Publishing, 2006), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Oklahoma Special Census* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1907).

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