



February 16, 2021

Submitted via email: ccpubliccomment@southpasadenaca.gov

Re: Public Comment, Open Session, Agenda Item 11, Sundown Town Resolution

Dear City Council:

We are encouraged that the City Council is working toward a more racially equitable and inclusive community here in South Pasadena. Over generations, South Pasadena has become more racially diverse and, today, our city is majority non-white (59%).¹ Like you, we believe the city should step up during this time of racial reckoning. To do so, the city must tell the truth about its past and present. **That is why we do not support the Resolution Condemning the City's History as a Sundown Town and Past Practices of Institutionalized Racism in its current draft for the February 17 meeting.** Although the proposed Resolution is a step in the right direction, it tells an inaccurate story of the city's past and remains silent on the city's *continuing* practices of institutionalized racism.

We recommend that the City Council continue a vote on the Resolution to allow time for amendments. The City Council should direct city staff to provide more historical context for the Resolution. City staff should seek input from community members, consult with experts in various disciplines, and conduct thorough research of local public archives. To start, the Anti-Racism Committee of South Pasadena² and local student journalist, Noah Kuhn,³ have published accounts of the influence of white supremacy and racism in the city.

We also urge the City Council to include, as part of the Resolution, an order requiring the city to address the vestiges of its sundown past: **"The City of South Pasadena will review and revise its policies, procedures, ordinances, programs, values, goals, and missions through an anti-racism lens to foster an unbiased and inclusive environment that is free from discrimination and harassment toward any person or group."**⁴

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Quick Facts: South Pasadena, California*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/southpasadenacitycalifornia> (population estimates, 2019).

² *Racist History of South Pasadena*, Anti-Racism Committee (ARC) of South Pasadena, <https://arcsouthpasadena.org/racist-history-of-south-pasadena>.

³ Kuhn, Noah. *South Pasadena's History of Racism*, Tiger (Aug. 18, 2020), <https://tigernewspaper.com/south-pasadenas-history-of-racism/>

⁴ See Glendale Resolution No. __, available at https://glendaleca.primegov.com/meeting/attachment/1468.pdf?name=CC_09152020_Resolution_8b2 ("The City of Glendale will review and revise its policies, procedures, ordinances, values, goals, and missions through an anti-racism lens to foster an unbiased and inclusive environment that is free of discrimination and harassment toward any person or group.").

Institutionalized Racism Started in the Past, and Permeates South Pasadena's Laws and Policies Today

One of the main markers of a sundown town is its “all-white” population.⁵ The persisting reputation of South Pasadena as an “all-white town,” despite demographics that show otherwise, is reflected in the city’s moniker as a “Mayberry town” and city leaders’ oft stated desires to maintain the city’s “small town charm.” Demographics and reputation happen by design, not by chance.

Today, South Pasadena consists of 3.6% Black people and 18.5% Latinx people, rates that are significantly lower than those of Los Angeles County which consists of 9.5% Black people and 48.6% Latinx people.⁶ While Asian Americans have moved into the city at higher rates than their representation in the county’s overall population, Black and Latinx people have been much less represented.

Racism in Land Acquisition

South Pasadena was founded on the stolen land of the Gabrielino and Tongva tribes, the original inhabitants of the land. In 1940, the city started construction of the Arroyo Seco Parkway on the land of another tribe, the Kawies.⁷ The taking of tribal land for the construction of this major road came at a time of growth for the city as its white residents sought to create an all-white suburb. The Resolution does not acknowledge the violent, racist beginnings of the city and the exclusion of indigenous peoples.

Racism in Housing Policies

Black and Latinx people have long been excluded from living in South Pasadena. This exclusion occurred through both formal policies of the city and the political campaigns of its white residents. In 1940, South Pasadena had about 14,000 white residents (98.4%) and 234 residents

⁵ Loewen, James W. *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, p. 4 (Kindle version), The New Press (2005) (“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.”).

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *Quick Facts: South Pasadena, California*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/southpasadenacitycalifornia> (population estimates, 2019); U.S. Census Bureau, *Quick Facts: Los Angeles County, California*, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/losangelescountycalifornia,CA/PST045219> (population estimates, 2019).

⁷ Kuhn, Noah. *South Pasadena's History of Racism*, Tiger (Aug. 18, 2020), <https://tigernewspaper.com/south-pasadenas-history-of-racism/>.

of other races (1.6%).⁸ During the 1940s, South Pasadena began including racially restrictive covenants into its property deeds, which prevented non-white people from purchasing homes in the city.

These racially restrictive covenants were popularly supported by the city's white residents, and city officials sanctioned and enforced them. The *Pacific Citizen*, a Japanese American-led newspaper, reported in 1946 that restrictive covenants covered about 80% of property within the city. The covenants were challenged in litigation by civil rights groups.⁹ Similarly, the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a Black-led newspaper, reported in 1947 that "[t]he city of South Pasadena has long followed the practice of inserting race restrictions in tax deeded lands."

South Pasadena officials are offering the small-boy excuse that other cities have been doing the same thing. . . . Meanwhile excited residents of the city have formed an organization and are on record with loud announcements that they will fight to the bitter end to keep their city lily white.¹⁰

The restrictive covenants between the 1940s and 1960s had an immediate impact of excluding Black and other non-white residents and increasing the proportion of white residents. As the city's population grew by 1950, white people also grew to a larger proportion, making up 99.2% of South Pasadena. However, the number of Black and non-white people decreased from the decade before to 130 residents—30 Black people and 100 people of other races.¹¹

Racially restrictive covenants were struck down in 1948 as unenforceable by the U.S. Supreme Court, but private parties were still allowed to adhere to these covenants. Homeowners and city officials in South Pasadena upheld these covenants through the 1950s and 1960s. By 1960, the proportion of white residents in South Pasadena grew again to 99.4%. The number of Black residents dropped to 7 people total.¹²

⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1950 United States Census of Population*, p. 45, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/population-volume-3/41557421v3p2ch07.pdf> (Tracts 473, 474 & 475).

⁹ Article is attached. Kido, Saburo, *Nisei Problems Go to Court: A Resume of Important Test Cases*, *Pacific Citizen*, p. 2, 5 (Dec. 28, 1946), available at https://pacificcitizen.org/wp-content/uploads/archives-menu/Vol.022_%2301_Jan_05_1946.pdf ("The viciousness of the restrictive covenants is becoming more and more apparent. In South Pasadena, about 80 percent of the property within the city limits is covered with the restrictive covenants. Thus American citizens will be unable to live in certain communities because of their race or ancestry.").

¹⁰ Article is attached. *Silly South Pasadena*, *Los Angeles Sentinel* (Oct. 23, 1947), available via ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Los Angeles Sentinel*.

¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1950 United States Census of Population*, p. 45, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/population-volume-3/41557421v3p2ch07.pdf> (Tracts 473, 474 & 475).

¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Censuses of Population and Housing: 1960, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif.*, p. 19, 120, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1960/population-and-housing-phc-1/41953654v5ch04.pdf> (Tracts 4805, 4806 & 4807).

Restrictive covenants were finally outlawed with the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Not by coincidence, the demographics of South Pasadena took a significant turn by 1970, tracking the passage of fair housing laws and other gains of the civil rights movement. Still, in 1970, whites made up 96% of the city and Blacks and other races just 4%—117 Black people and 810 people of other races.¹³ From 1970 to 1980, the city continued to diversify significantly, with Black people reaching 2% of the city population and non-white races 22.8%.¹⁴ Asian and Latinx residents increased in proportion by double digits until the present day.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Black residents grew only by about 1.6%, reaching just 3.6% today.

Instead of restrictive covenants, South Pasadena today excludes Black and Latinx people from the city by preventing the development of affordable housing and maintaining the city's property tax structure. White families have gained significant advantage with homeownership, first with the assistance of federally-backed mortgages from which people of color were excluded for three decades, from the 1940s to the 1960s. The real estate transfer tax, set since the 1950s, is fixed at a mere 27.5 cents per \$500 of property value or 55 cents per \$1,000.¹⁶ This, along with Proposition 13 which passed in 1978, has kept home ownership primarily in the hands of white families who are able to pass down their homes to heirs, benefit from increasing home values, and maintain their properties with very minimal costs. In contrast, new or aspiring homeowners in South Pasadena, many who are now people of color, are unable to afford homes in the city or pay a larger share of property taxes.

Despite these racial disparities in homeownership and wealth here in South Pasadena, which have been cemented with housing and tax policies, the city continues to actively fight and stall the development of affordable housing. As far back as 1992, South Pasadena has continuously

¹³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1970 Census of Population and Housing, Los Angeles-Long Beach, Calif. Part I*, p. XI, 112,
<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1970/phc-1/39204513p11ch05.pdf>
(Tracts 4805, 4806, 4807.01 & 4807.02).

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1980 Census of Population, General Social and Economic Characteristics, Part 6, California*, p. 77,
https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1980/volume-1/california/1980a_cacs1-01.pdf.

¹⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census of Population, General Population Characteristics, California, Section 1 of 3*, p. 106,
<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1990/cp-1/cp-1-6-1.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, *County and City Data Book: 2000*, p. 787,
<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2001/compendia/ccdb00/2000ccdb.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau, *Quick Facts: South Pasadena, California*,
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/southpasadenacitycalifornia> (population estimates, 2019); Census Viewer, *South Pasadena Population: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts*, <http://censusviewer.com/city/CA/South%20Pasadena>.

¹⁶ South Pasadena City Code, § 26A.2.

skirted its legal obligations to build affordable housing.¹⁷ This year, the city attempted but failed to appeal its Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) to build 2,062 units of affordable housing over the next eight years.¹⁸ The city has delayed enactment of an inclusionary housing ordinance for at least three years, during which time the city has approved multiple developments of luxury condominiums with no affordable units.

Racism in Policing

Just as South Pasadena once policed non-whites from living here and visiting, the city continues to police people who are deemed undesirable by the city's dominant groups. The city funds the South Pasadena Police Department at an outsized amount—one-third of the city budget—far above any spending it dedicates to social services. In Los Angeles County, Black people make up a vastly disproportionate number of people experiencing homelessness. Knowing this, the city continues to authorize the police to administer and steer its homeless services, tasking the police with monitoring unhoused individuals and removing their property from public spaces. The city could, instead, fund social services and housing programs to help people exit homelessness.

Other policing practices in the city are more overtly racist. The city sanctions explicit displays of white supremacy within the South Pasadena Police Department. During the Black Lives Matter protests in the city last year, officers wore thin blue line flag symbols while meeting with BLM protestors and while on duty around the city. This flag was prominently displayed at the Capitol Riot this year and in past white supremacist rallies such as that in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. SPPD officers also faced complaints of biased policing against BLM protestors and protestors who opposed Trump rallies. Officers went unpunished, and the city did not issue any statement specifically denouncing white supremacy. When the then-police chief invited a far right, white supremacist group for a prayer service in the city, he, too, went without discipline until there was public outcry for accountability. To date, that accountability has taken the form of the police chief's administrative leave and an early retirement, during which his pension will be covered by city taxpayers.

Talk is Cheap

There is much more history, past and present, that cannot be covered by a public comment. Decade after decade, the city has formalized policies and practices that excluded Black, Latinx, and Asian people from living safely in the city and participating fully in its institutions. As the sociologist James W. Loewen wrote in his book, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, without policy changes from the city to accompany anti-discrimination apologies and statements, "talk is cheap."¹⁹

Thank you for your consideration of this comment. We look forward to collaborating with city government going forward to engage in a fulsome approach to the anti-racist work before us.

¹⁷ Article is attached. *Cities Warned About Low-Cost Housing*, Los Angeles Sentinel, p. A-14 (Nov. 5, 1992), available via ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Los Angeles Sentinel*.

¹⁸ <https://southpasadenan.com/scag-update-south-pasadena-appeal-of-housing-allocation-denied>

¹⁹ p. 431 (Kindle version).

Sincerely,

Anti-Racism Committee (ARC) of South Pasadena
Black Lives Matter South Pasadena
Care First South Pasadena
Noah Kuhn, Junior, South Pasadena High School