

**“Sundown Towns”:** Sundown Towns did not allow people who were considered “minorities” to remain in the town after the sun set. Some towns posted signs at their borders specifically telling people of color to not let the sun set on them while in the town. Town policies and real estate covenants supported this racism, which was enforced by local police officers. Thousands of Sundown Towns existed throughout the U.S. before the Civil Rights Act of 1968 prohibited racial discrimination in housing practices. The state of Illinois had the highest number of Sundown Towns, but they were a national phenomenon that mostly targeted anyone of African, Chinese, and Jewish heritage. If undesired people were to wander into a Sundown Town after the sun had set, they would be subject to any form of punishment, from harassment to lynching.

**Today’s “Broken Windows” Laws:** Today’s laws have their roots in the “broken-windows theory” – a policing theory which holds that one poor person in a neighborhood is like a first unrepaired broken window and if such a “window” is not immediately fixed or removed, it is a signal that no one cares, disorder will flourish and the community will go to hell in a hand basket. A direct outcome of this theory is the introduction of legislation to criminalize the presence of homeless people in public.

Current **“Quality of Life”** laws also take a certain population into account: homeless persons (who are disproportionately people of color). Using these laws, people are criminalized for simply walking, standing, begging, sleeping, and other regular human behaviors. In other words, they are penalized and harassed simply because of who they are. Just as with Black Codes, Jim Crow, Ugly Laws, Anti-Okie Laws and Operation Wetback, how people look and their very existence is the basis for charging them with criminal behaviors.

**HOMELESS UNION**  
www.homelessunion.org  
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We, the Homeless Union of Greensboro, are comprised of the homeless community and those who support our cause. We are committed to addressing issues that arise from experiences of homelessness based on the priorities of people experiencing homelessness themselves.

## Historical Uses of Anti-Vagrancy laws as a Tool of Racial and Political Oppression



*Picture: 1958 – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is arrested in Montgomery while trying to attend the arraignment of a man accused of assaulting his friend, Ralph Abernathy. King is arrested outside Montgomery’s Recorder’s Court and charged with loitering.*

**Created by The Homeless Union of Greensboro**

