

# Southfield Public Library

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## *Calling Me Home: A Novel by Julie Kibler*

*Discussion questions used at SPL September 13 & 14, 2016*

**(Questions courtesy of the author.)**

1. When Isabelle first grows close to Robert, is her interest in him genuine, or does it have more to do with disobeying her parents and her society's constraints? How does their relationship change as it grows?
2. What attracts Isabelle to Robert? What attracts Robert to Isabelle? In what ways do they complement each other?
3. Were there moments during their courtship that you, as a reader, felt that they should not continue their relationship because of the risks?
4. What is the most important thing that Isabelle's story teaches Dorrie? How does she apply Isabelle's lessons to her relationship with Teague?
5. How do you feel about Dorrie's choices in dealing with her son's troubles?
6. What makes Dorrie and Isabelle's friendship unique? How did you feel about the way they each reacted to others' assumptions about them?
7. Do you feel that *Calling Me Home* accurately portrayed today's lingering racial injustices and resentments?
8. Do you have any sympathy for Isabelle's mother? What about for Isabelle's father?
9. How did you feel when you discovered Robert's fate? Were you surprised to learn whose funeral Isabelle and Dorrie were attending?
10. Have you ever experienced a forbidden love relationship, or has anyone in your life fallen in love with someone "inappropriate" due to family or societal constraints? How did reading this story make you feel about that relationship? Did it change any of your thoughts or beliefs about how the relationship played out?
11. Did you enjoy the dual narratives in the past and present day? Were you more interested in one or the other? Why?

12. What was your reaction to learning the story was inspired by the author's own family lore (her grandmother fell in love with a black man in an era and locale that made it impossible)? Does knowing that make the story feel more "real"?
  
13. Had you heard of "sundown towns" before reading this story? What was your experience with them, if so, and what was your reaction to learning about them, if not?

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## *General discussion questions*

- For the person who chose the book – What made you want to read it? What made you pick it for the book club? Did it live up to your expectations?
- How is the book structured? First person? Third person? Flashbacks? Narrative devices? Do you think the author did a good job with it?
- How would you describe the author’s writing style? Concise? Flowery? How is language used in this book? Read aloud a passage that really struck you. How does that passage relate to the book as a whole?
- How effective is the author’s use of plot twists? Were you able to predict certain things before they happened? Did the author keep you guessing until the end?
- Did the book hold your interest?
- How important is the setting to the story? Did you feel like you were somewhere else? Did the time setting make a difference in the story? Did the author provide enough background information for you to understand the setting and time placement?
- Which is stronger in the book – the characters or the plots?
- Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why? And to whom?

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*Title: Sundown Towns by James W. Loewen*

*website address: <http://sundown.tougaloo.edu/sundowntowns.php>*

<http://sundown.tougaloo.edu/content/sundown-introduction.pdf>

Definition - Sundown Towns according to James W. Loewen

From Maine to California, thousands of communities kept out African Americans (or sometimes Chinese Americans, Jewish Americans, etc.) by force, law, or custom. These communities are sometimes called "sundown towns" because some of them posted signs at their city limits reading, typically, "Nigger, Don't Let The Sun Go Down On You In \_\_\_\_." Some towns are still all white on purpose. Their chilling stories have been joined more recently by the many elite (and some not so elite) suburbs like Grosse Pointe, MI, or Edina, MN, that have excluded nonwhites by "kinder gentler means." When I began this research, I expected to find about 10 sundown towns in Illinois (my home state) and perhaps 50 across the country. Instead, I have found about 507 in Illinois and thousands across the United States.

A **sundown** town is a town, city, or neighborhood in the United States that is purposely all-white, excluding people of other races. The term came from signs that **were** posted stating that people of color had to leave the town by **sundown**. They are also sometimes known as sunset **towns** or gray **towns**.

[Sundown town - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)