



(Susan Seubert)

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For black Americans traveling by car in the era of segregation, the open road presented serious dangers. Driving interstate distances to unfamiliar locales, black motorists ran into institutionalized racism in a number of pernicious forms, from hotels and restaurants that refused to accommodate them to hostile “sundown towns,” where posted signs might warn people of color that they were banned after nightfall.

Paula Wynter, a Manhattan-based artist, recalls a frightening road trip when she was a young girl during the 1950s. In North Carolina, her family hid in their Buick after a local sheriff passed them, made a U-turn and gave chase. Wynter’s father, Richard Irby, switched off his headlights and parked under a tree. “We sat until the sun came up,” she says. “We saw his lights pass back and forth. My sister was crying; my mother was hysterical.”

“It didn’t matter if you were Lena Horne or Duke Ellington or Ralph Bunche traveling state to state, if the