A STONE OF HOPE

BLACK EXPERIENCES IN THE FOX CITIES

"Those who have no record of what their forebears have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of biography and history."
 - *Carter G. Woodson, Black historian (1875-1950)*

When Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at UW-Fox Valley in 1967, he challenged the Fox Cities to become a haven for Black families. Today, the area continues to evolve into a diverse community in line with King's vision, but the journey has been long and difficult.

Appleton's story adds complexity to the nation's racial experiences. Many of the city's residents have been unwelcoming to Blacks who visited on business or tried to make Appleton "home." Blacks have faced discrimination and segregation. But, as King said, there has always been a stone of hope. Everyday activists have kept the hope of equality alive.

Fox Cities as a Land of Slavery?

Initially, some free opportunities existed as Europeans began to shape the Atlantic World. Blacks first came to the area in the 1700s to work in the fur trade. Two free Black men operated a fur trading post near present-day Marinette. However, while some lived in freedom, many Blacks along the Fox River were enslaved by French settlers. **French slavery** also included Indians and whites.

After the American Revolution, England surrendered control of the Great Lakes to the United States, including present-day Wisconsin. The Americans organized the region under the **Northwest Ordinance of 1787**, which prohibited slavery within its boundaries. However, federal fugitive slave laws also allowed slave catchers to recapture escaped enslaved people to return them to slaveholders.

Blacks continued to face inequality in Wisconsin after it became a state. The **1848 Constitution of the State of Wisconsin** and **Black Laws** formally excluded Blacks from voting, attending public schools, serving on juries, and serving in the militia. Discrimination was apparent from the state's beginnings, weakening early hopes for equality.

Black slaves worked in small numbers at trading posts and related businesses along the Fox River.
History Museum at the Castle

Acknowledgements