

# "LILY WHITE APPLETON"



In 1935, Percy Jones, a noted Black chemist and hotel owner, was offered a job at the University of Puerto Rico in Appleton. Ultimately, Jones declined the offer based on the city's sundown custom. He never lived in Appleton and never worked there.

## What is a Sundown Town?

**Sundown towns were communities that required Blacks to leave by sunset.** Usually this form of racial exclusion was supported by an ordinance, but sundown also emerged as a custom reinforced by individuals who feared Blacks. Appleton did not have an official ordinance, but many people supported a **sundown custom of harassing Black visitors or potential residents.** The custom was irregularly applied.

## Investigating Sundown

During the era, the sundown custom was not enforced and was accepted by many white residents around Appleton but not enforced.

In 1957, the first Congressional Church placed a commission that would track Black members from the church. Congressmen from the city's sundown ordinance would prohibit their attendance. They requested a city investigation to research the ordinance and found no evidence of a formal law.

Perhaps the most thorough study of racial exclusion was completed in 1960 by Rosalee Keller, a white resident of Appleton. Her study of businesses revealed that many in the community were discriminatory. When companies reported that Black visitors reported that the company had a discriminatory policy, they were often harassed and denied service. Keller's research found that many businesses in Appleton were discriminatory. She found that many businesses in Appleton were discriminatory. She found that many businesses in Appleton were discriminatory.



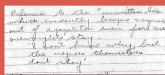
At the Hotel Keller, Rosalee Keller found that Blacks could get service, but they had to leave before sunset. The hotel had a sign that said 'Hotel Keller' and 'Sundown Town'.

Civil Rights activist Jim Zwerg described his hometown as "lily white Appleton." He recalled the period of civil unrest in the city during his childhood. The lack of racial diversity was not a concern. Many whites saw Blacks as an inherent problem. Leaders worried about the "Negro Problem" and encouraged whites to keep Blacks out of Appleton.

Many longstanding residents remember Appleton as a sundown town.

## Job Discrimination

Factory owners also cited the city's sundown custom as an excuse not to hire Blacks. In 1957, the Wisconsin Equal Rights Division investigated discrimination in local businesses. Victor Hovnanian, who was president of Appleton Machine Company, refused to hire Blacks because of an "unwritten law" which required they report the list of Appleton even for an overnight stay. "Other factory owners reported that Blacks had applied for jobs but were refused based on the unwritten law that they were not to report their activities to the factory."



Victor Hovnanian, president of Appleton Machine Company, cited Appleton's sundown custom as his reason to not hire Black employees. (Source: Wisconsin DNR)



The Conway Hotel shows how the city's sundown custom was enforced. The hotel was a popular destination for Blacks and whites, but it was not a sundown town.

