

Law Day 2013

Equal Opportunity

In March 1945, Governor Thomas E. Dewey signed the Ives-Quinn Anti-Discrimination Bill, making New York the first state to enact legislation prohibiting workplace discrimination “because of race, creed, color or national origin.” Since the era of Reconstruction, New York was the first state in the country to pass such a law and the first state to establish a permanent commission to enforce such legislation.

As written in baseball executive Branch Rickey’s biography, the law gave Rickey the opportunity he’d been seeking to break organized baseball’s unwritten rule banning black players from the game. In October 1945 Rickey signed Jackie Robinson to play for the Montreal Royals, the Brooklyn Dodgers’ farm team. In 1947, Robinson not only broke baseball’s color barrier, he also went on to win Rookie of the Year. Robinson was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962.



Jackie Robinson
Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame
and Museum

op•por•tu•ni•ty [ɒp ə
toʊn ɪ te] *noun*

1. an appropriate or favorable time
2. a situation or condition favorable for attainment of a goal
3. a good chance or prospect, as for success

While Jackie Robinson’s success gave hope to many African-Americans, it took nearly two decades for similar legislation to pass at the federal level assuring equal opportunity under the law for all Americans. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964.

New York’s Anti-Discrimination Law – renamed the Human Rights Law – has been expanded over time to protect more people under more and various circumstances. Specifically the law now prohibits discrimination in employment, housing,

credit, places of public accommodations, volunteer firefighting, and non-sectarian educational institutions, based on age, creed, race, color, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, disability, military status, domestic violence victim status, arrest record, conviction record, predisposing genetic characteristics, and familial status (in housing only).

Next installment: Dignity for All Students

Student Assessment: What questions do you still have about this topic? Where do you think you might be able to go to find answers to your questions?

Newspaper Activity: Equal Opportunity

Look through the newspaper, print or electronic, for an example of a group or individual receiving equal and fair treatment and someone being treated unfairly. Compare and contrast the two examples you selected.