

# *Equal Access: More Seats at the Table*

Blatant Ethnic Prejudice Used in Advertising, 1886  
Image: Library of Congress



Not so long ago, a commentator on one of the Sunday morning news shows suggested there ought to be “a museum of the 1950s,” and it should be a lot like his old neighborhood in a Maryland suburb of Washington, D.C. It was a sweet story delivered by someone who obviously had a wonderful childhood in a lovely neighborhood.

Sounds harmless enough, but let’s think this one through before we get too nostalgic for old Chevys, sock hops, and drive-ins.

The Pittsburgh Crawfords, Negro National League Champions, 1935  
Image: National Baseball Hall of Fame Library

COLORED  
WAITING ROOM

PRIVATE PROPERTY  
NO PARKING  
Living through or Turning Around



The “good old days” weren’t that good for everyone. Black Americans were denied the full rights of citizenship. Ethnic prejudice and anti-Semitism were common and widely accepted. Women routinely experienced discrimination at work and in the courts. Gay and lesbian Americans were subject to arrest. Persons with disabilities had to depend on the whims of others.

True, we are still a long way from utopia, but as a society we’ve made significant progress toward addressing injustice and inequality. Much of that progress has come as a result of government action:

**1948:** President Harry Truman issues Executive Order 9981 to end segregation in the armed forces.

**1954:** A U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* declares segregation in public schools unconstitutional.

**1956:** U.S. Supreme Court upholds a lower court ruling that segregation on public buses in Montgomery, Alabama is unconstitutional.

**1964:** The Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires equal access to public places, facilities, and accommodations, and outlaws discrimination in employment.

**1964/1965:** Legislation ends immigration quotas based on race, national origin, and ancestry.

Segregated Bus Station, Durham, NC, 1940  
Image: Library of Congress

**1965:** The Voting Rights Act of 1965 outlaws discriminatory practices that prevented citizens from exercising their constitutional right to vote.

**1972:** Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972 provides that “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

**1990:** The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities.

**2003/2004:** A ruling by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court clears the way for Massachusetts to become the first state to allow same-sex marriage.

**2010/2011:** President Barack Obama signs the Don't Ask Don't Tell Repeal Act which leads to ending the ban on openly gay people serving in the U.S. armed forces.



Wheelchair Racers, Boston Marathon  
Image: Wikimedia Commons



Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall Riots  
Image: Wikimedia Commons

