

Summary of Legislative Changes in Toronto and Ontario

Between 1944 and 1954, racial discrimination and legislation was a central political issue in Toronto, as it was at the provincial (Ontario) and federal levels. The four provincial legislative changes that occurred in this time period were: the *Racial Discrimination Act* (1944), the *Conveyancing and Law of Property Act* (1950), the *Fair Employment Practices Act* (1951) and the *Fair Accommodation Practices Act* (1954). Below are descriptions of what they legislated:

1944. The *Racial Discrimination Act* “prohibits the publication or display,

on lands, premises, by newspaper or radio, of any notice, sign, symbol, emblem or other representation indicating racial or religious discrimination.”

1950. *Conveyancing and Law of Property Act* was amended to end real estate provisions that required someone buying a house to agree that their property “shall never be sold, assigned, transferred, leased to, and shall never have been occupied by any person of Jewish, Hebrew, Semitic, Negro or coloured race or blood.”

1951. Ontario’s pioneering *Fair Employment Practices Act* of 1951 prohibited discriminatory employment practices based on “race, creed, color, nationality or ancestry.”

1954. The *Fair Accommodation Practices Act* was enacted to prevent “discrimination in services, facilities and accommodations in public spaces.”

1962. The province continued their push towards equity in legislation through the *Ontario Human Rights Code*¹. Then premier John Robarts said upon the occasion:

While we deplore and condemn violations of human rights elsewhere in the world and stand aghast before such ugly manifestations as the Berlin Wall, we must never cease to concern ourselves with those walls of prejudice which still exist in our own community — and sometimes in our own minds — and which deny our fellow citizens that justice and equality of opportunity which is their inalienable right. Justice, like charity, should begin at home.

Nearly two decades separate the *Racial Discrimination Act* (RDA) and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. While the RDA forbade the display of anything discriminatory, it did not make discrimination itself illegal. Even if a business took down its “No Jews Allowed” sign, no law punished a restaurant owner from denying a Jewish person access to their establishment, or refusing to employ them. To further complicate the situation, legislation was a top-down process that could not promise changed personal opinions.