



## [Equal Opportunity](#)

Equal Opportunity and Equality are the roots and soil of America. *The Institutional Equality Office of University of Oklahoma* defines Equal Opportunity as “The right of all persons to enter study and advance, in academic programs on the basis of merit, ability and potential without regard to race, color national origin, sex, etc.”(IEO). Although it applies to education it can also apply to jobs and the workforce. In America you can chose to be who and whatever you want. Only you can decide the path you will take and America gives every opportunity for you to do so. People travel from all over the world to have this chance at a better life. They travel for a better life not only for themselves but also for their next generations. America is the land of new beginnings and greater chances. But it has not always been this way. In the past people of different races, religions, and genders have seen hard times trying to achieve their dreams and goals. In the past many people of different backgrounds didn’t have much of a chance in greater opportunities and weren’t granted this gift of equal opportunity. It may seem like all this was back then but it wasn’t as long ago as we think.

In *X: A Novel* by Ilyasah Shabazz daughter of Malcolm X, Malcolm has to face the challenges of the real world. Malcolm grew up in Lansing Michigan with his siblings and his single mother. His mother and father always told him and his siblings that they could be whoever they wanted to be and that all they needed to do is chase their goals and get an education. They would tell them that education is power and power is education. Malcolm’s father was lynched when Malcolm was only six years old. Malcolm believed everything that his father told him and worked hard in school. He knew that he wanted to go far in life and told his English teacher that he wanted to be a lawyer. His teacher told him that his goal is very unrealistic and that he should go for a carpenter because that’s what a black man would do. “I’d always been colored, but now I saw the walls that came along with it. Thick and white and holding me in place.” he goes on to say, “I thought about Mom, passing as white at all those jobs, burying her blackness beneath the way she looked. Trying to get us the things we needed. Things we couldn’t rightfully have.” (Shabazz 53). Malcolm realizes that education is not the path that he wants to take. He recognizes that there is no equal opportunity for him to achieve his dreams and that everything his father had told him was a lie. With this thought in his mind he decides that it’s best to save up his money and head to Boston.

America back in 1940 wasn’t the best place to be as an African American male. Although you were

free, you couldn't be able to be what you wanted. Many African Americans couldn't get an education because of the color of their skin and were denied in society. Many were employed and jobs were given to whites instead. They weren't able to pursue what they wanted and were limited to jobs that whites thought would best fit them. In the article "*Black Workers Remember*" the author Jacqueline Jones discusses the hardships and discrimination that black workers had to go through. "Unlike their white counterparts, who often began working menial tasks and then progressed to different departments and better paying jobs, blacks remained in "black" departments regardless of their age, skills, or experience." (Jones). Many struggled to find jobs in large cities and many were unemployed until WWII. During WWII lots of white males had to enter the draft leaving jobs open for blacks. "While black workers continued to face discrimination in employment in World War II, substantial numbers worked in war related industries, often in jobs previously closed to blacks." (New York Times). This gave them the chance in earning money for themselves and finally getting the opportunity to make a living. In *X: A Novel* Malcolm makes his way to Boston and decides that he wants to get a job because getting an education isn't an option anymore. He gets his first job at a club and polishes people's shoes in the bathrooms. Malcolm starts to see the world around him and he thinks back to his father's teachings. He thinks back to all the things that his father would tell him about pursuing his dreams and getting an education. Now he believes that none of that is important to him and that everything his father had ever told him were lies. He turns to the streets and starts to develop terrible characteristics and thinks that he is on top of the world. He meets a white girl one night out dancing and they go out into inner Boston. She knows that it's not safe because of Malcolm being a black male and she is afraid that they could get caught together. Three white males see Malcolm with her and get into a fight with Malcolm because of his skin color. Because of this Malcolm realizes that no matter what he does or where he goes he will still get discriminated against.

Even though there were jobs open for black people during WWII many workplaces would still hire white people before they would hire blacks. Although this was a major step towards progress many black people had lost their jobs after the war. Many had to go back to low paying jobs and didn't have as much privilege of getting an education as whites did. America has progressed a lot since those times and we have accomplished to learn from each other and to love one another. Even though we aren't perfect still, everyday we progress and our different values and cultures make up our great country. We have learned to accept each other for who we are in a very short time and I think that that is a very great thing. People from all over the globe and people with different ethnicity have made America such a thriving country. This ability of equal opportunity and ensuring an education for yourself and the next generation is an amazing thing and a great gift. Despite all the hardships that have come with the past it is certain that our future as a country will be bright and filled with people of different races, religions, and cultures with one common goal of success together as one.

#### Work Cited:

Ilyasah Shabazz and Kekla Magoon (2016) *X: A Novel*, Candlewick Press

Author Unknown (2018) *Black Workers Played Role on the Home Front*

Posted by Zaggam on October 29, 2018 <https://www.youthvoices.live/2018/10/29/equal-opportunity/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/25/opinion/l-black-workers-played-role-on-the-home-front-796992.html>

David L. Boren (2017) What is Equal Opportunity? <http://www.ou.edu/eoo/about>

Jacqueline Jones (2000) Black Workers Remember  
<http://prospect.org/article/black-workers-remember>