

# WILL THE REAL MCCOY PLEASE STAND UP?

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No matter one's skin colour, race, creed, or whatever may divide humanity, we are all born as helpless children, thrust into a world of wonder and woe. Armed with a naive curiosity, we swim life's troubled waters in hopes of a clear path. Our first role models may be our parents, yet as the mind grows, we look to a new example to follow, an example to shine a path through life's great struggles. When exploring the African Canadian tradition, we lay on the shoulders of giants, those who were not afraid to stand against the hydra of racial discrimination, and wrestle the raving hounds of bigotry. For that reason, I will never forget the day I found myself in jaw-dropping awe at one such titan of human virtue, I'll never forget the day I heard the name: *Sir Elijah McCoy*.

It was in those awkward days of middle school that my Social Studies teacher, Ms. Simon walked into the room to tell us that we had a project to do; A biography of a famous Canadian figure. While my classmates rushed to the likes of Macdonald and Trudeau, it was February and thus, Black history month. My mother, that night after class suggested I write about someone different, that's when I first heard the name Elijah McCoy. At first, I buckled down for what I would assume to be yet another dry history project; by the end of the project, I was amazed by more than just an inventor, I had met a true role model, a man of wonder.

Born in Colchester, Ontario to the parents of two runaway American slaves, Elijah's very birth was the product of human resilience in the ever-growing struggle for black freedom. At a young age, he thrived on the primordial spark that drove human progress for millennia; a genuine, childlike curiosity, free from the corrupting dispositions of bigotry and hate. His parents were far from ignorant of his talents, and to Elijah's glee, he was sent off to Edinburgh, Scotland for a higher education in mechanical engineering.

Despite his self-evident merits and qualifications, McCoy simply could not find employment. Sir McCoy was barred from any access to the engineering world on the basis of racial barriers. Employers simply did not look fair on those whose skin was not fair. Eventually, young Elijah would have to settle with any odd jobs that came his way, from fireman to oilman at the central Michigan Railroad. Unbeknownst to society, as it conspired at every corner to crush his hopes, Elijah understood the dreadful inefficiency of the trains of his time, he found an opportunity and ran with it. To move a train, one needed a fireman and an oilman; the fireman would feed the engine coal to allow movement, whilst the oilman would lubricate the axles of the train. The problem, however, was that the train had to stop to be oiled. Without a skip in his step or a blemish to his morale, McCoy set straight to work to create of an easier alternative. Tapping into years of experience in mechanics and a long-suppressed creativity, McCoy invented the lubricator cup in 1817. It was designed to continuously drip oil on axles; McCoy eventually received a patent for the invention. The patent was finally met with great success; he received requests for the product's usage from railroads from all across North America. McCoy's skills were so distinct, so profound that opportunists rushed to steal his thunder. Yet to their dismay, not even the most persistent and morally bankrupt amongst them could steal the thunder of McCoy, none could usurp his creativity, forever marking Elijah in history as the only McCoy of his craft, the *Real McCoy*.

The life, achievements and struggles of Elijah McCoy illustrates how every adversity may be approached, not as a disaster in of itself, but a sweet blessing veiled by a sour sheet. From every possibility, every mishap and obstacle that dare cross one's path, there is a lesson to be learned and an opportunity ripe to be taken. Had Elijah met life after Edinburgh with ease, there would be nothing pushing him to innovate, nothing to strive for or strive against.

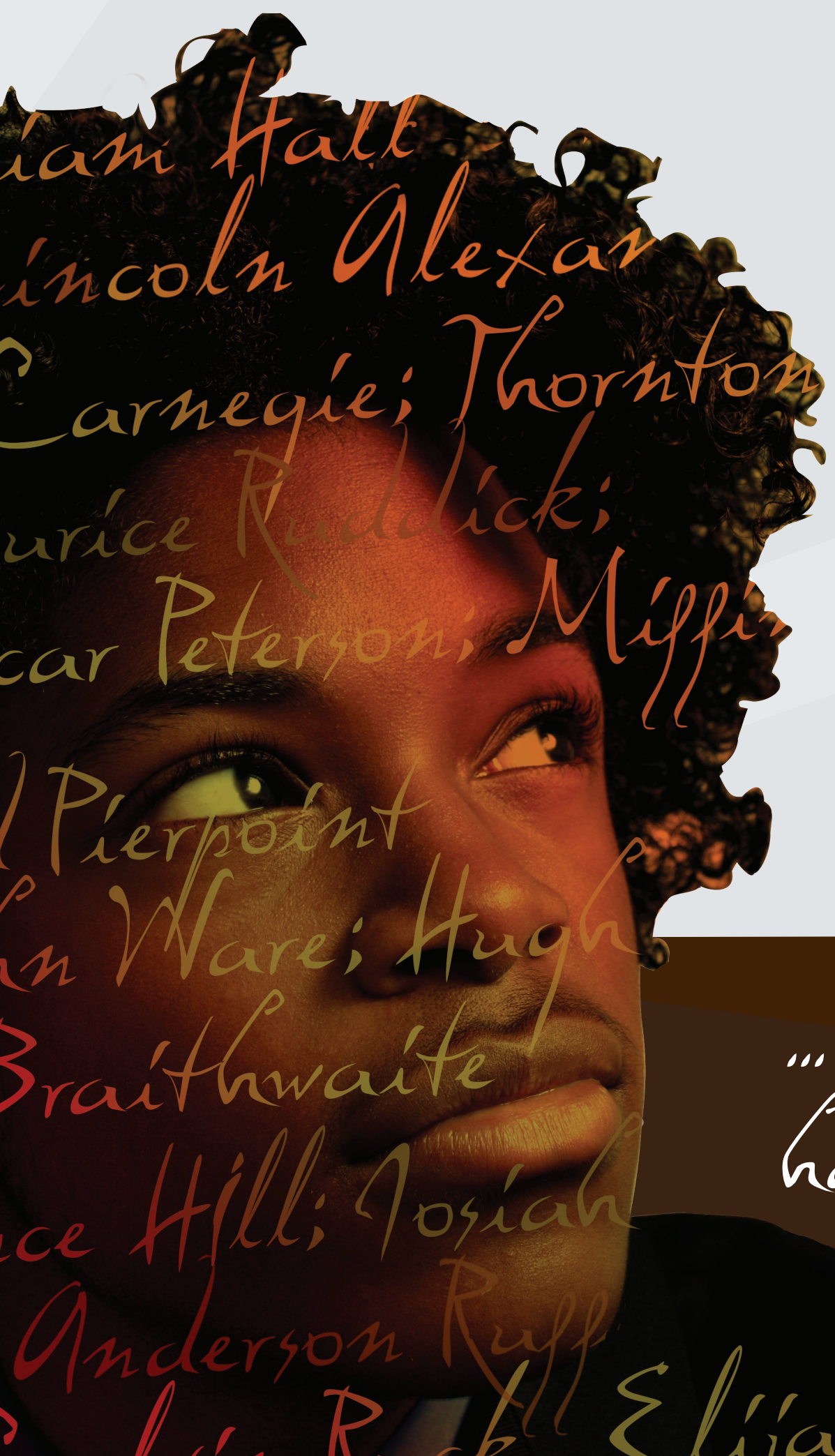
To the youth of our day, it is essential to take wisdom from those of the past. His legacy stands as a shining testament to the wonders of Eudemonia; a life well earned, a life well fought, and a life well lived.

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