

# PERSEVERANCE EMBODIED

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\$500 Winner

2017  
RBC  
BLACK  
HISTORY  
MONTH  
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ESSAY  
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It goes without saying that much can be learned from history. But when history books are page after page of predominantly white men, celebrations like Black History Month are especially important. Through the recognition of black history in Canada, it has become undeniable that black women have always been innovators and the catalysts for social change. By their resistance, achievements and fight for the rights of other, young people can learn from their history.

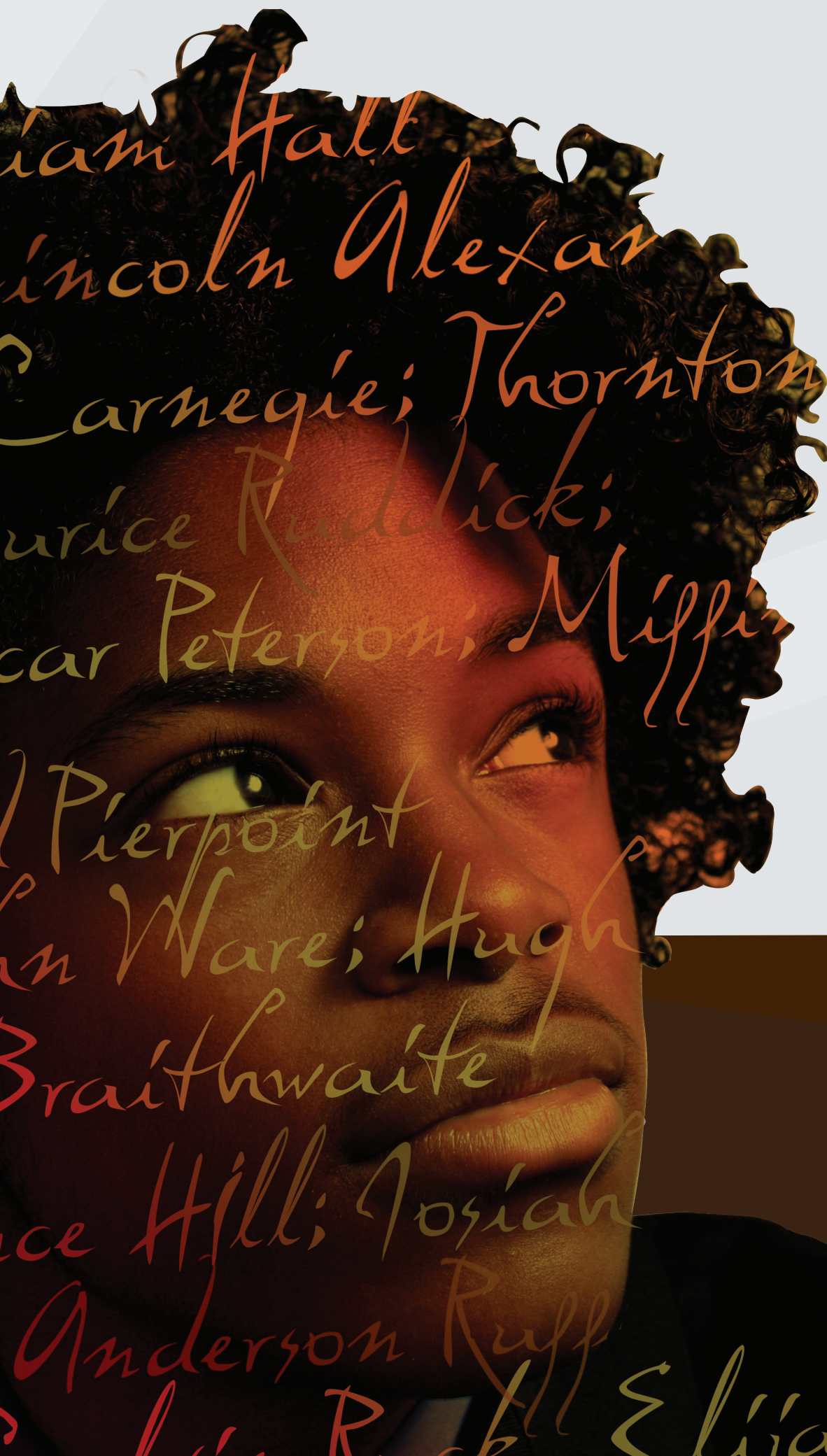
By simply acknowledging the oppression in the past, the resilience of black women is quite apparent. In a racist society that practiced sexism as well, there weren't many rights that the African-Canadian woman had. Still, in face of misogynoir, these women demanded their rights, slowly opening the eyes of many Canadians. One of the most notable examples was that of Viola Desmond, dubbed the "Rosa Parks of Canada". Upon going to the Roseland Film Theatre in 1946, Desmond was told to stay in the black-designated area. When she refused to submit to segregation, she was forcibly removed and arrested for tax evasion. She sat in prison injured, with no mentions of her rights to a lawyer or bail; an injustice many black Americans still face today. Her determination and contribution to the civil rights movement continue to be honoured and to inspire. Yet another example is the story of Marie-Joseph Angélique, a slave in XVIIth century Montreal. In the afternoon of April 10th 1734, a fire broke out in town, destroying almost 50 houses. As Angélique made the perfect scapegoat for the assumed arson, rumours quickly spread. With little evidence and no eyewitnesses, she was victim of torture and a hanging that followed. While some historians believe she was innocent, and others believes she was an abolitionist with a fiery passion, she undoubtedly became a symbol of freedom and was immortalized in poetry and theatre. Ultimately, the history of women of colour teaches us to persevere in the face of injustice, a message that can be especially relevant in a society in which discrimination still exists.

Furthermore, through their achievements alone, black women have shown nothing but innovation. Their accomplishments are particularly impressive in face of their oppression.

Viola Desmond, for instance, was a successful beautician. Upon noticing the lack of products for women of her colour, she not only created a line of her own, she founded The Desmond School of Beauty Culture which gave women like her the chance to get an education and start their own businesses. As black businesses continue to live in the shadows, her success can inspire when eurocentrism continues to exist. Not to be forgotten is Mary-Ann Shadd, the first black female publisher in North America, and Canada's first woman to publish. She came to Canada where she successfully founded a racially inclusive and accessible school, campaigning for racial integration country-wide. To put it briefly, black women's' feats are undeniable, and appreciating this history is important to further the empowerment of minorities.

Perhaps the most outstanding is the fact that black women have contributed to nearly all human right movements. The way in which they have always stood in for other minorities exemplifies perfectly how we should be empowering one another. Likewise, Carrie Best was well known for her activism and journalism about not only civil rights and feminism, but indigenous rights. Best adamantly supported Native Americans in their fight for better reserve conditions despite being an outsider, which is an attitude we should see more often. Another example is the work of Rosemary Brown, the first black woman to be elected on a provincial level. She aimed to remove sexism from educational curriculum and improve representation of women and other minorities. On top of that, she was the CEO of MATCH international, a feminist agency striving for social change across the globe. It is without a doubt that black women have been adamant social activists in nearly all movements.

To answer the question, black women can teach us resilience. The minorities of minorities, they fought against a system that oppressed many. Although it sounds simple, this attitude is very much lacking in today's society, where discrimination exists blatantly in the eyes of too many bystanders. Black women have always embodied perseverance, and their success as business women, writers, politicians and just about any other career needs to be recognized. When take a moment to hear the stories of black Canadians, we all heal from the wounds of a history rooted in pain.



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