

ROLE MODELS THROUGH MEDIA

Jade Li

Lillian Osborne High School,
Edmonton, AB

\$500 Winner

The pride in being Canadian often stems from our value of diversity, yet there is little acknowledgement to the black Canadians that have played integral roles in shaping our country's history. Not only did the black members of our community embody resilience and tenacity through centuries of relentless oppression, they guide the rest of us to embrace our own identity in the face of prejudice. Of the many prevalent black figures in Canada, the ones which resonated with me the most were the black Canadian women. Despite fighting both racism and sexism, the black women of Canada broke unassailable boundaries—contributing to both the confidence and identity of today's youth.

One of the most significant black woman in the 20th century was Rosemary Brown. Against all odds, she became the first black female MLA of the NDP party in British Columbia. Brown challenged the traditional roles of race and gender in Canadian politics, and during the fourteen years of her political career, she was also the first black woman to run for leadership of a federal political party, with the slogan "Brown is Beautiful". Not only did she inspire females of every race, she broke colour barriers for the countless minorities in Canada. Brown was able to empower others through embracing her own heritage and identity, demonstrating the extent to which one could achieve both personally and socially, despite societal oppression.

Although Brown's accomplishments are substantially appreciated, black figures of her time have become difficult to relate to in today's society. With the passing of time and advancement of technology, the same battle for equality now requires a different strategy to fight. The major influencers that are shaping our generation and the ones to come, are the black Canadians in this very generation. While attending a particularly diverse high school, I have made numerous black friends who are aware of both the existing and impending stereotypes against them. However, through media, we discovered black social media figures who utilize their platform to spread messages of positivity and self-confidence. In contemporary society, self-expression has become both prevalent and amplified through social media; these role models have taught minorities like me to feel confident in my own skin, no matter the colour.

Yaa Priscilla Birago, a prominent black female figure, has been able to expand the scope of her influence through TED talks and Instagram. She is the co-founder and President of the Hands of a Hero Foundation, a non-profit organization in Canada and Ghana to transform the lives of the less fortunate. She displays that the qualities of a leader transcend beyond race or gender, perpetually inspiring youth around the world. Like Birago, Sandy Hudson is a black Canadian woman who substantially changed the landscape of which black women are defined. After co-founding the movement in the Toronto chapter of Black Lives Matter, she mobilized the first Canadian faction of this initiative and continues to fight against discrimination through social media outlets, such as Twitter. Hudson's strong will shown through peaceful protests has brought minorities and other racialized groups together— all inspired to fight for dignity and justice, free of discrimination.

Contributions of black Canadians have evolved society to promote equality and even welcome diversity. The achievements of black Canadian females, such as Birago and Hudson, have demonstrated that societal stereotypes do not define an individual's success. They have encouraged others experiencing similar challenges and transformed their story into a message that continues to motivate and inspire others. The difficulty and history of this fight against oppression is ultimately able to create change that is both memorable and meaningful. These Black Canadian figures have built platforms for the youth of today to achieve even greater accomplishments for future generations to come. Black Canadian women have not only inspired black youth and girls, but all people. They ignite hope for youth in similar struggles to prevail. They exemplify the fact that all people are deserving of equality. And they inspire others to embrace and love their unique identities. Ultimately, it is imperative to realize that one does not have to be black to understand that black lives matter, or even a minority to oppose discrimination. In fact, it does not simply take black people to fight for justice, but everyone, to uproot the core of discrimination and enjoy equality, once and for all.

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