

# THE FINISH LINE

Joy Xu  
Colonel By Secondary School  
Ottawa, ON

\$500 Winner

2017  
RBC  
BLACK  
HISTORY  
MONTH  
STUDENT  
ESSAY  
COMPETITION

[www.rbc.com/essay/](http://www.rbc.com/essay/)



Royal Bank

In 1995, the Parliament of Canada officially recognized February as Black History Month, a motion unanimously approved to honour the courageous accomplishments and contributions of black Canadians. Their altruistic and selfless actions, along with their tenacity, sets an example for all to follow when pursuing a worthy cause. Their unwillingness to yield on their quest to destruct the injustices that were seen in their communities is a testament to be remembered. Over the past 150 years, the torch for civil rights and equality has been passed on from generation to generation, with each person doing their part to reach the finish line.

In 1867, Mifflin Wistar Gibbs became the first black person to hold public office in British Columbia when he was elected Victoria’s city councilor. Gibbs was a crucial leader who positively influenced the history of Canada not only in the black community on Vancouver Island, but also in office, where he saw British Columbia join Canada in the Confederation. He represented the West Coast’s African Canadian community, encouraged integration and worked hard to prevent segregation in churches and theatres of Victoria. Mifflin Gibbs is only one of many black Canadians who has positively shaped Canada since the very beginning of its history.

In 1946, Viola Desmond was denied a ticket in the floor area at the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia because it was reserved for whites only. Although she purchased a balcony seat, she sat in the floor area anyways because she was nearsighted. Desmond was dragged out by the police and spent 12 hours in prison. She was never informed that she was entitled to a lawyer, and was charged and fined. Her courage sparked inspiration to all those around her, as she fought for a cause she firmly believed in, despite the consequence. On December 8, 2016, Viola Desmond made history for the second time - as the first Canadian woman to be featured on a \$10 bill.

In 1972, Rosemary Brown became the first woman of African descent elected to a Canadian provincial legislature when she became a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the New Democratic Party (NDP) of British Columbia. Twenty years ago, she moved to Canada to attend university and was shocked by the discrimination she faced due to her race. Throughout her life, she has worked tirelessly to eliminate the barriers that stood in front of equality and rights for all humans. Her determination and perseverance was particularly evident when she decided to run for elected office, despite the odds being against her due to her race. Further, Brown was instrumental in introducing legislation to prohibit sexism, such as eliminating it from education materials. Her works have resulted in an increase in the number of women represented on boards, commissions and directorates - and she continues to inspire people today.

The fight for freedom and equality is not something that is confined within the walls of one city; rather, it is a struggle seen throughout Canada from east to west. What unites Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, Viola Desmond, Rosemary Brown, and the countless other

tremendous individuals is their remarkable understanding of the difficult issues that would define their generation and their unyielding fight to take a stand that would result in meaningful change. It is with my sincerest of hearts that I thank the courageous men and women before me for their hard work and perseverance in making Canada the country it is today. Now, the torch has passed on to us, with instructions to run our portion of the race and hand it over to the future generations. In 150 years from now, my hope is that we will reach the finish line, but as for now, there is still progress to be made.



Their unwillingness to yield on their quest to destruct the injustices... seen in their communi- ties is a testament to be remembered.