

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY: THE LESSONS IMPACTING GENERATIONS

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The fight for equality is a fight that has been prominent within Canadian Society all throughout history, thus touching the lives of countless individuals. Black Canadians, along with their numerous supporters fought tirelessly to ensure Canada would grow into the culturally diverse and prosperous nation it is today. These average yet honorable individuals originated from different paths of life, nonetheless their determination, perseverance and sacrifice led them to great accomplishments. An important lesson to be learned from their achievements is, in the face of adversity, one should not surrender or conform out of fear, but instead be powerful and steadfast in order to overcome any obstacles. Two individuals in particular, whose achievements have conveyed them as role models for present and future generations, are my mother and the Honorable Lincoln Alexander.

My mother immigrated to Canada as a child from Trinidad in the early 70s, and to this day, I am still amazed and inspired by what she has accomplished. It is because of her that I have been blessed with many of the opportunities that I have today. My mother is the first in her family to attend both university and college; by no means was this simple task. Coming from a family who could not afford to pay university tuition, my mother worked relentlessly and applied for loans and grants to safeguard her education fees. While attending elementary and high school she faced social stigma from fellow students and teachers. Even though she did well in school, she was never encouraged to pursue a post-secondary education. She worked in the hospital after school and on weekends whereby colleagues and patients presumed she was a high school dropout.. Throughout her youth, it was often acknowledged that a young black girl's life achievement was to become a single mother. However, instead of letting this define her, she became even more motivated; she applied to university and was accepted. During university, my mother, along with a couple of friends started the African Canadian Association as a means to empower the voice of minorities and promote African/Caribbean Culture within her school community. She felt it was important to be diligent and persistent in order to overcome adversity. As a result, her contributions to Canadian Society has helped shape the future by empowering individuals within her own generation and mine with the values necessary to accomplish their goals and make a difference in the community.

The Honorable Lincoln MacCauley Alexander is a well-known figure who made numerous contributions to the Canadian and international society. Mr. Alexander was raised during a time where blacks made up a small portion of the population and racial prejudice abounded. The blatant racism in his community could have easily been a barrier resulting in oppression; however, instead of conforming to racial humiliation, he strived to gain the respect of his peers. He was dedicated to his studies, thus earning him a BA from McMaster followed by a degree from Osgoode Hall Law School. Due to his hard work and effort, Mr. Alexander accomplished many things throughout his lifetime such as becoming the first Black Canadian Member of Parliament to sit in the House of Commons, a Federal Cabinet Minister, the 24th Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, and the first person to serve an unprecedented five terms as Chancellor of the University of Guelph. He is an admirable and influential iconic figure in Canadian history that was known for his sound judgment, compassion and humanity; he truly is a role model to all races.

As a young and resolute black female in Canada today, the above individuals have had a great impact on my life. Their journeys are not only an inspiration to me, but to many, instilling the importance of fearlessness and determination, when pursuing one's goals. The values of influential Black Canadians raise awareness to the importance of being a trailblazer making a difference in society. Personally, I have learned that fighting inequality is not only for me, but it ensures a better future for those who follow. I aspire to become a woman of dignity and bravery, who inspires young black girls to cultivate their talents, as I have been inspired by influential Black Canadians. As once stated by Upper Canada History, "History explores the past, informs the present and enhances the future," and with regards to the impact of the accomplishments of Black Canadians over time, this statement could not be more accurate.



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