

THE CANADIAN DREAM

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My hometown of Mississauga, Ontario, evinces the Canadian mosaic. The other day, I went to the movie theatre with three of my friends; one of whom emigrated from the Philippines to Canada when she was 11 years old, another of whom is a first-generation Canadian with two Indian parents, and the third of whom is half Chinese and half British. I, myself, was born in Nigeria, Africa, and came to Canada with my parents in 2005. Having spent most of my life living happily amongst such a diverse mix of people, I've come to think of it as normal. It's strange, however, to know that less than 100 years ago, I wouldn't have been able to sit in certain sections of a movie theatre because of my skin colour.

I and many young people in Canada take the reality we live in today for granted; from something as simple as being able to sit wherever we choose in a theatre, to being given a chance to succeed and aspire to greatness. The achievements and contributions of people like Viola Desmond, Herbert Henry Carnegie, and many other black Canadians that fought for the civil rights of black people have helped to create this reality because, in fact, they are the rights of all people.

In 1946, Viola Desmond, a black business woman, was arrested for sitting in a section of a theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, that was typically reserved for white patrons. Although she was formally charged with not paying the one-cent difference in tax between the balcony and ground seat, it was clear to everyone that her only real crime was the colour of her skin. Desmond took the matter to court, and in doing so, raised awareness about the reality of segregation in Canada. Her case inspired the civil rights movement in Nova Scotia, and she was granted a posthumous pardon 63 years later on April 10th, 2010.

Having learnt about Viola Desmond for the first time while participating in a past Black History Month assembly at my school, I was elated to hear that she would be the first woman featured on a Canadian bank note. By being recognized this way, more young people would be emboldened by Desmond's story of how one person taking a stance against injustice affected the future of people after her.

Another inspiring black Canadian that I learnt about because of my participation in the Black History Month assembly was Herbert Carnegie. Born in Toronto, Carnegie was a talented hockey player with dreams of competing in the National Hockey League (NHL). Despite having the skills and drive necessary, he was never able to get into the NHL because he was black. The owner of the Toronto Maple Leafs, Conn Smythe, allegedly told Carnegie that he would sign him on the team if he were white or that he would pay \$10,000 to whoever could make Carnegie white. Herbert Carnegie was never able to fulfill his hockey dreams, but went on to be a successful senior golfer and philanthropist. He was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame in 2001, and received many high awards and honours such as the Order of Canada. Carnegie's story of disappointment helped lay the groundwork for equality because it forced the society he lived in to confront the issue of certain groups of people having to limit their ambitions solely because of their race.

A 2011 census revealed that one out of every five Canadians had immigrated to Canada from a foreign country. In other words, one out of every five Canadians had left everything they knew behind to come to Canada with the hope of creating a better life for themselves and their families. Canada's history is made up of people who persevered through difficult times and fought for what they believed was right in order to create a brighter future for everyone. Viola Desmond and Herbert Carnegie are just two of many black Canadians that have left an imprint on Canada's history. It is also the everyday contributions of the millions of nameless, hard working black Canadians that continue to help write Canada's legacy. It is because of their stories of perseverance in the face of oppression that Canada will continue to be a place where anybody can sit wherever they want in a theatre with their friends from half the world over, and have the opportunity to realize their dreams, regardless of how much melanin is in their skin.

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