

THE FATHER IN INGENUITY

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\$500 Winner

2017
RBC
BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH
STUDENT
ESSAY
COMPETITION

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Royal Bank

Rarely, the age old adage, “Necessity is the mother of invention” can be taken into a realistic context. This connotes the notion that if there is an issue that needs to be resolved, there will be an invention that will be able to tackle that particular problem. Elijah McCoy, an esteemed black Canadian engineer, can be accredited to be the paragon of such a statement. Born in 1844, McCoy was originally a fugitive slave whose family escaped from conservative Kentucky to a welcoming Canada. He is recognized in over 50 patents for his work in the field of engineering, specifically revolving around the lubrication of steam engines. This is notable because a major obstacle in the lives of North Americans was the steam engine.

Although it revolutionized the method in which North Americans travelled the continent and transported goods, every time the engine needed lubrication, the train had to stop, stalling the commute for produce and passengers. McCoy saw an opportunity and fixed the issue with his “oil-drip cup” system and altered the way that passengers and produce traveled from place to place. His machine was so popular, many counterfeits were produced, so when train managers ordered McCoy’s system, they inquired if it was “the real McCoy”. A black Canadian, McCoy contributed his life to improving the lives of others, making him a truly extraordinary individual who unfortunately passed away in 1929. Young people can learn two astonishing attributes from McCoy’s story that can help shape the future for generations to come.

The first lesson is perseverance. In his early years, McCoy took an apprenticeship and study in Scotland and left the European country as a newly-graduated mechanical engineer. Faced with adversity, he was offered jobs below his skill at the Michigan Central Railroad. McCoy utilized the skills and knowledge that he possessed and chose to become an inventor. Early on in his career, he had already invented the “oil-drip cup” system, but chose to refine it until the product matched his standard of quality. This is very significant, as rather than following the life of the average man, this young, black Canadian chose to create his own path and refined it until others respected him for his trade. In the modern era, it is uncommon to find young men and women creatively building their own road to success, so this lesson is an invaluable concept that should be instilled in every young person. If young people chose to pursue their passions to an extent where no person would dare follow, the globe would become more advanced in thought and prowess. This would help shape future generations of Canadians who will carry on the pride of Canada, as black Canadians such as McCoy have done in the past.

The second lesson is to be altruistic. McCoy had many motivating factors for creating “the real McCoy” system. Many have argued that he was selfish and created his invention to “line his pockets” per-say, but I believe this notion is far from reality. Creating this invention was in part for the finances, as all good inventors must be able to balance their books, but McCoy’s major motivation was his altruistic disposition. McCoy desired to display his talents yet aspired to be humble. He developed this system as a way to solve an enormous obstacle in the lives of average Canadians, thus, removing the adversity he faced when he first wished to work on the railroad. He puts his own needs behind him and helps his community and race avoid adversity in society and instead, be appreciated. In fact, he was mentioned in *The Story of the Negro* in 1909 for producing more patents than any other black individual. If we take a page from this concept, young people should learn to be altruistic as they can not only line their pockets, but they help advance a world where future Canadians will live in. This concept encapsulates the idea of giving back, and as Canada is a land filled with immigrants of all races, we should give back to our global, yet local, community, like Elijah McCoy and many other black Canadians who aim to aid future Canadians grow and succeed.

To conclude, Elijah McCoy was a sagacious black Canadian whose achievements and contributions have made Canadian lives better. Through understanding his perseverance and altruistic nature, the young people of Canada can preserve those from the past, provide those in the present, and progress those in the future.



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