

THE POWER OF COURAGE

Nada Yakubu

Bramalea Secondary School,
Brampton, ON

\$500 Winner

2016
RBC
BLACK
HISTORY
MONTH
STUDENT
ESSAY
COMPETITION

www.rbc.com/essay/



RBC Royal Bank

“Racism springs from the lie that certain human beings are less than fully human” (King, Alveda). A lie. It’s as simple as that. Racism is a dehumanizing mentality people often use to justify fear or hatred towards a certain group of people. Growing up in a society that tells you that you are not good enough simply because of the color of your skin, cannot be solved by a simple: “get over it”. However, getting past this type of systemic racism takes nothing less than a great deal of courage. Throughout Canadian history, many black Canadians have proven that they possess this type of courage through their many achievements and contributions to society. Their success also reflects Canada’s diverse heritage and identity. Some of these remarkable heroes include: Elijah McCoy, Portia White and The Honorable Lincoln M. Alexander.

Elijah McCoy, also known as “The Real McCoy” was born in Colchester, Ontario in 1843. Unable to be trained in Canada, McCoy traveled to Scotland to study engineering. When he returned, racial tensions increased his struggle to find a job and he settled as a railway fireman; shoveling coal to fuel the trains and lubricating the moving parts. Elijah eventually noticed that there had to be an easier way of lubricating the train’s parts. Like my father always tells me: “Take initiative and think for yourself”; McCoy created a lubricating cup that was designed to frequently drip oil onto the moving parts of the train as it was moving. Striving against the odds of racism, Elijah McCoy’s devotion towards his craft of invention was driven by determination and defines Canada’s identity of racial equality for all of its citizens.

Internationally successful musician Portia White, was born in Truro, Nova Scotia in 1911. White sang in her church choir as a child. She later taught rural black schools before moving to Toronto to pursue a professional singing career. In her fifty-seven short years, Portia sang in over one-hundred concerts. Portia proved to many that she would not let her race define who she was. She was able to open many doors, not only for herself, but for many other young black Canadians who came after her. Being a young black Canadian myself, Portia White’s courage to pursue her career heedless of racial tensions, motivates and inspires me towards achieving my career goals as well. As a singer, she not only represented the minority black community, but also Canada’s known heritage of multiculturalism.

Another exceptional black Canadian hero is The Honorable Lincoln M. Alexander born in Toronto, 1922. During the Second World War, Alexander served with the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was later appointed as the first black Member of Parliament in 1968 and served for 12 years. Lincoln then went on to become a Lieutenant Governor of Ontario for 6 years, targeting education and youth. Alexander once said: “Anyone can become a great part of the Canadian way of life and make a difference economically, politically and socially” (Toronto Sun). Growing up in the small town of Hamilton and being a part of the visible minority, Lincoln’s many achievements help to break down the racial barriers standing before many black Canadians. The “Canadian way of life” which Lincoln is referring to, is one filled with opportunity and acceptance. Reading his memoir entitled: “Go to school, you’re a little black boy”(2006), I felt his passion for racial equality and dedication towards empowering youth. His strive towards racial equality reflects Canada’s acceptance for the excellence of any given individual regardless of their ethnicity.

All of these great Canadians are gone, but will certainly never be forgotten. Their great achievements have paved the way for many other black Canadians, including myself. Another one of Lincoln M. Alexander’s famous quotes is as follows: “Don’t get sucked in by saying you can’t because there’s always a future in this great country of ours if you work hard and stay in school”. These courageous Canadians have taught us all that no matter what circumstances we face in life, we should never forget how blessed we are to live in a country as culturally diverse as Canada and that there is always a future for those who strive towards one.



By fighting adversity and learning to find her own voice...where her odds weren't favoured, she left her imprint on Canadian heritage.