

VIOLA DESMOND: PERSEVERANCE AT ITS FINEST

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Canada has a history of having unique black Canadians who have taken matters into hand to make a difference. Viola Desmond is a black Canadian who ranks high in this category. This inspirational, courageous black woman defied segregation and started an uproar for the black Canadians in the fight for equality amongst ethnic groups. Her accomplishments have helped shape the bright and diverse country we live in and are inspirational for the youth of our generation for she inspires us to chase our dreams, to contribute to our communities and defy the opposition.

The story of this iconic black Canadian figure starts in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1914 where Viola Desmond was one of a family of fifteen raised by parents immensely involved in the black community. She attended Bloomfield High School and later earned a business degree. Her legacy was solidified by her fight for equality amongst the blacks and whites. Desmond's courageous stand against discrimination was a crucial decision for it impeccably intensified the discussions of racial equality in Canada; making her a prestigious symbol of perseverance, strength and justice in history of Canada.

Known to many as the *Canadian Rosa Parks*, Viola Desmond quickly noted the absence of professional hair- and skin-care products for black women, and set her sights on addressing the need. Desmond returned to Halifax and started her company: a barbershop, hairdressing salon, and beauty parlour with her husband. Furthermore Desmond, established the *Desmond school of Beauty Culture* where students obtained the skills required to open their own businesses and provide jobs for other black women within their communities. This initiative gave an outstanding amount of opportunities for young black woman in her community for most who attended and graduated had previously been rejected from the white-only training program. Her willingness to succeed, her determination and her care for others are few of the many traits which make this woman such a motivational figure. Her ability to evaluate situations and find solutions to problems all while creating beneficial opportunities for others are idolized by many, improved the lives of numerous black Canadians. As a young black Canadian, I am inspired by how effectively Desmond's visionary mindset enable her to create opportunities for others in her community; showcasing her contributions to her community.

Despite her excellent work ethic and determination, Desmond was held down and kicked because of her skin colour. In fact when she bought a ticket at a theatre for the main floor, the staff told Desmond "her kind" was not allowed on the main floor section and that she had to sit on the balcony which was reserved for blacks at the time; illustrating how prolific the segregation and racial instability was at the time. Recognizing the irrational racial discrimination, she refused to move out of her spot telling the employer that she was going to stay at the spot she had paid for. This courageous stand led to the police being called to the scene and were forced to drag her out of the theatre down to jail where she spent the remainder of the night unadvised of her rights. Instead of silencing her, this embarrassing racial discriminating act sparked a flame which motivated Desmond to stand up for herself, racial equality and ensure justice was served. This initiative gave hope and confidence to the black people in her community and brought them closer together.

For me, as a young Black Canadian, Viola Desmond is clear example of what citizenship. As a commendable citizen, she improved the welfare of the members of her community by providing them with beneficial opportunities as we see with her businesses. She was also a strongly opposed to discrimination of any sort and fought to attain the equality and respect every human is entitled to. Being a teen who lives in this fast-paced world where thinking of others is secondary, it is remarkable and motivational for me to see how Desmond's accomplishments have not only benefitted herself but those in her community especially during that critical time in history. This woman is of great importance to many for she symbolizes strength, perseverance and determination and will always be remembered for the changes she sparked in the quest for racial equality in Canada.

Viola Desmond's actions raised awareness of the depth of racial discrimination around the country and showed us that no matter what we go through in life, we all have the power to achieve our goals and succeed.

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