

# THE HOPES AND DREAMS OF BLACK CANADIANS HAVE HELPED TO SHAPE CANADA

**Hannah Guenther-Wexler**  
Westgate Mennonite Collegiate,  
Winnipeg, MB

\$500 Winner

This country has been shaped by the ambitions and desires of black Canadians. Lessons of giving back to the community through advocacy and small steps of action can be learned by young people from the achievements and contributions of black Canadians to help shape the future.

Advocacy and pushing boundaries have defined Michaëlle Jean's life. As Canada's first black Canadian Governor General, she assisted in negotiations, advocated for youth issues, women's rights, and Aboriginal issues. Michaëlle came from humble beginnings, fleeing Haiti with her family. She gave back to her home land after the earthquake. She was a public figure for the CBC and cofounded the Michaëlle Jean Foundation to help at risk youth. As well, she built shelters for abused women and their children. The breaking of gender and race boundaries has lead the way for future Canadians pursuing leadership roles. She has portrayed the importance of equal opportunity for people of all genders and race. Her achievements can encourage young Canadians to push boundaries and stand up for the rights of all. An equal society is possible with the push in the right direction from advocates. Michaëlle Jean proved the impossible can be made possible. All actions help to share the future no matter the size.

Small or large steps of action can equally lead to long term impacts. Viola Desmond exemplified the importance of taking action to stop injustice and inequality. No step is too small in the fight for equality and justice. Viola Desmond refused to accept the segregation that was enforced at the New Glasgow Movie Theatre in 1946. Black Canadians were limited to the balcony seating that restricted the view of the screen, while the main floor was reserved for white customers only. She pushed for her rights and the rights of all black Canadians by taking a seat on the main floor. She was approached by an employee requesting her move to the balcony even though she offered to pay the extra one cent difference to sit on the main floor. Her money was declined, but Viola did not waver. She was taken out of the theatre with the use of force leaving her with a hip injury. Being fined, charged and held in jail overnight did not halt Viola's fight for justice. She took a step in the road for equality and black Canadian rights by fighting the charges with a lawyer. Her loss of the case did not silence Viola. Awareness was brought to the intolerable racism and segregation that was rampant. Many decades later, in 2010, Viola received the Free Pardon. Her strive for equality assisted in inspiring the Civil Rights Movement in Nova Scotia. Viola was a successful and prosperous businesswoman even through the struggle of racism. Lack of acceptance into any of the beautician schools in Halifax, due to the racist policies towards black Canadians, did not halt her dream. Viola overcame these obstacles and received training in New York and Montreal. Upon her return to Halifax she developed her own beautician school, beauty parlor and her own line of beauty products. Racism would not stop Viola from achieving her goals. Advocacy was a theme throughout her life. She never stopped resisting the racial discrimination she faced. Her steps paved the path for future generations. The achievements and contributions of Viola Desmond can inspire young Canadians to take steps of action to fight for equality. Viola teaches that any step, small or large, can have a positive and influential impact.

Both Michaëlle Jean and Viola Desmond's legacy of advocating continue to shape our society. Michaëlle and Viola paved the way for black Canadian friends of mine who follow in the footsteps of these inspiring individuals to encourage and promote equality in our society and push boundaries. The act of advocating and taking steps of action can be learned from black Canadians who have walked the road before to shape the future for generations to come.

2017  
RBC  
BLACK  
HISTORY  
MONTH  
STUDENT  
ESSAY  
COMPETITION

[www.rbc.com/essay/](http://www.rbc.com/essay/)



Royal Bank



*An equal society is possible with the push in the right direction from advocates.*