



Viola Desmond

Businesswoman, civil rights activist

Born July 6, 1914 in Halifax, NS

Died February 7, 1965 in New York, NY

Viola Desmond built a career and business as a beautician and was a mentor to young Black women in Nova Scotia through her Desmond School of Beauty Culture. In 1946, Viola Desmond challenged racial discrimination when she refused to leave the segregated Whites-only section of the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia.

Viola was arrested, jailed overnight and convicted without legal representation for an obscure tax offence as a result. Despite the efforts of the Nova Scotian Black community to assist her appeal, Viola Desmond was unable to remove the charges against her and went unpardoned in her lifetime.

Viola's courageous refusal to accept an act of racial discrimination provided inspiration to later generations of Black persons in Nova Scotia and in the rest of Canada. In 2010, Lieutenant-Governor Mayann Francis issued Desmond a free pardon.

In December 2016, the Bank of Canada announced that Viola Desmond would be the first Canadian woman to be featured by herself on the face of the \$10 note released on November 19, 2018. Viola was named a National Historic Person by the Canadian government in 2018.

Black History Month

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