



NATIONAL VIOLA DESMOND

— MAKING A STAND BY TAKING A SEAT



For decades, the Queen has been the only female face on the front of Canadian bank notes. That will change next year.

THE FACES OF CANADA

In 2014 the Bank of Canada surveyed Canadians. It wanted to find out what they thought should be on the country's bank notes.

The survey showed that Canadians want to see **gender equality, multiculturalism** and Aboriginal representation. They also want images of **iconic** Canadian activities, achievements, and people.

So, on International Women's Day last March 8, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau acted. He said the government would honour a woman from Canada's past on a new bank note. He

asked Canadians to nominate women who had helped shape our history.

In just over one month, more than 26,000 nominations came in. The 461 women nominated included **suffragettes**, humanitarians, Olympic champions, writers, artists, scientists and engineers.

This long list of names was eventually narrowed down to twelve, then five. Finally, in December, the Bank of Canada announced its decision. Finance Minister Bill Morneau and Bank of Canada governor Stephen Poloz said Viola Desmond will replace Sir John A. Macdonald on the ten-dollar bill.

VIOLA DESMOND

Viola Desmond was a mixed-race businesswoman.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Canada officially recognized February as Black History Month in 1995. This month celebrates the heritage and achievements of African-Canadians like Viola Desmond. It also raises awareness of the obstacles they have faced, such as segregation.

She was born in 1914 in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

At that time, many Canadian schools, neighbourhoods and businesses were **segregated**. People of colour couldn't eat in certain restaurants or shop in certain stores. They weren't welcome in all schools. Employers could refuse to hire them.

DEFINITIONS

GENDER EQUALITY: the situation that results when there is no discrimination based on gender

ICONIC: very famous and well known, and believed to represent a particular idea

MULTICULTURALISM: the presence of (or support for having) multiple distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society

SEGREGATE: to enforce the separation of different racial groups in a country, community, or establishment

SUFFRAGETTE: a woman seeking the right to vote through organized protest



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Because of segregation, Viola Desmond couldn't attend beauty school in Nova Scotia. So what did she do? She trained in Montreal and the United States instead. Then, she returned to Halifax where she set up the successful Desmond School of Beauty Culture. She also created a line of beauty products for black women.

“ONE DOWN, PLEASE”

In 1946, Ms. Desmond was on a business trip when her car broke down in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. While she waited for it to be fixed, she went to a movie at the Roseland Theatre.

Ms. Desmond asked the cashier for a ticket to sit downstairs. However, when she took her seat, the usher told her that she was in the wrong place. She was supposed to sit in the balcony.

When Ms. Desmond tried to clear up the mistake with the cashier, she learned that there hadn't been one. She had been sold a balcony ticket on purpose. “I'm not permitted to sell downstairs tickets to you people,” the cashier told her.

HER DAY IN COURT

Outraged, Viola Desmond returned to her chosen seat. She refused to leave it. “Get the

manager,” she said. “I'm not doing anything wrong.”

The manager called the police. They removed and arrested her. The next day, they charged her with not paying the one-penny tax difference between an upstairs and a downstairs ticket.

Ms. Desmond paid a \$26 fine rather than spend 30 days in jail. Later, however, she appealed the decision. That made her the first person of colour to challenge segregation in a Canadian court.

In the end, the Nova Scotia Supreme Court ruled against her. However, her bravery inspired blacks to push for an end to legal segregation in the province. In 1954, that finally happened.

PARDONED

Viola Desmond died in 1965. In 2010, Mayann Francis, Nova Scotia's first black lieutenant-governor, **pardoned** her. As well, the premier apologized on behalf of the province. He called her resistance “an act of courage.”

After that, Viola Desmond's historic story began to spread. In 2012, Canada Post issued a stamp with her picture and last year a new Heritage Minute told her story. Now, she's going to be the face of our new ten-dollar bill.

ON THE MONEY

The Bank of Canada, established in 1935, is the country's central bank. One of its responsibilities is to design and distribute bank notes.

Bank note series are redesigned from time to time to protect our currency with the latest security features. The current series, for instance, switched from paper to hard-to-counterfeit polymer. Other updates added text in French and English, and more features for the visually impaired.

Bank note themes change, too. Queen Elizabeth was removed from several bills in the 1970s to make room for other Canadian leaders. The back has also increasingly focussed on our scenery and accomplishments.

Canada's eighth series of bank notes will be issued over the next decade. The bill featuring Viola Desmond will be designed first. Her portrait will be on the front with images of social justice on the reverse.

“Big changes can start with moments of dignity and bravery,” said Mr. Morneau. “Viola Desmond... broke down barriers, provided inspiration to Canadians on social justice issues and showed that... every one of us, individually, can make a difference.” ★

DEFINITIONS

PARDON: to officially forgive someone for a crime



ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. What does **segregation** mean?

2. Describe what it was like in Canada in the early 1900s for people of colour.

3. Where did Viola Desmond attend beauty school? Why?

4. Where did Viola Desmond establish her business?

5. In which town did Viola Desmond attend a movie in November, 1946?

6. Where did Viola Desmond wish to sit in the theatre?

7. What happened after Viola Desmond refused to move to the balcony?

8. What was the result of the charges against Viola Desmond? Explain.

9. Which organization is responsible for designing and distributing currency in Canada?

10. What did the governor of the bank and the federal finance minister announce on December 8?
