

# Viola Irene Desmond (born July 6, 1914, in Halifax and died February 1965, in New York)

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Viola Davis Desmond, known as an entrepreneur, beautician, activist and mentor, challenged the racial discrimination of the day by refusing to sit in the balcony of a theater. Instead choosing to sit on the main floor of the Roseland Theatre, reserved exclusively for white people (Bingham, 2013). Ms. Desmond was subsequently arrested and jailed without legal representation, and eventually charged for an obscure tax offence (Bingham, 2013, para 1). “Ms. Desmond’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” and would go throughout her life unpardoned for this act despite appeals (Bingham, 2013, para 1).

Ms. Desmond was inspired by her parent’s work ethic and community engagement, following in their footsteps she pursued education as a beautician and opened her own studio in Halifax once her training was complete. She ended up creating her own line of products and school that supported Black women in the Halifax community. “In 1954, segregation was legally ended in Nova Scotia thanks in large part to the courageous determination of Viola Desmond and others like her who fought to be treated as equal human beings” (Bingham, 2013, para. 19). In 2010, she was given a pardon posthumously, and in 2018 she became the first Canadian woman to be featured by herself on the face of a banknote, the \$10 bill (Bingham, 2013).

Reference:

Bingham, R. (2013). Viola Desmond. In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.  
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/viola-desmond>

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