Viola Desmond’s Canada

Teacher’s Guide

By Graham Reynolds
Viola Desmond’s Canada: A History of Blacks and Racial Segregation in Canada
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About this Book

*Viola Desmond’s Canada* is part of an initiative to develop more culturally inclusive approaches to the teaching and learning of Canadian history (Reynolds 2000; Reynolds and MacKinnon 2001). Traditionally, most Canadian history texts present a limited historical narrative that does not fully integrate the Black experience or, until recently, even First Nations’ culture and history. In most provinces, very little attention is given to Black history as part of the year-long curriculum and it is generally regarded as a distinct area of study independent from the mainstream of Canadian history.

The story of Blacks in Canada is an important aspect of our larger national history and, like the history of First Nations, it should be taught to all students in Canadian history courses. *Viola Desmond’s Canada* documents the central role of the Black experience in Canadian history and it highlights the enduring tension in Canada between the aspirations and ideals of freedom and equality together with the stark realities of race relations that, all too often over the course of our history, have involved oppression, segregation and other forms of discrimination. The book traces the history of the Black experience in Canada from the practice of slavery under French and British rule in the eighteenth century, to the decline of slavery and the development of the Underground Railroad in the nineteenth century, to the widespread practice of racial segregation and the struggle for racial equality in the twentieth century.

*Viola Desmond’s Canada* is intended as both a main resource in African Canadian Studies and as a supplemental text for high school and university-level Canadian history courses. The format of the book is similar to those used in many university-level courses. Part I provides a narrative history and overview and Part II presents a more detailed discussion of key aspects of the larger history through an examination of important primary sources. Much of the information presented to readers in this book is little known or previously unpublished and it is hoped that the content and format of the book will inform readers and help stimulate new lines of research into Black history in Canada.

Over the past number of years, there has been a growing body of literature illustrating the effectiveness of documents-centered inquiry in teaching history and social studies (Friesen and Scott 2013; Sandwell 2003; Stearns, Seixas and Wineburg 2000). *Viola Desmond’s Canada* incorporates this approach within a disciplined-based learning pedagogy that, as research shows, promotes critical thinking and deep learning among students (Bradford, Brown and Cocking 2000; Barron and Darling-Hammond 2008; Sawyer 2006). The book introduces students to a variety of primary sources and, with the aid of classroom instruction and activities, students can examine these sources in detail and engage in the authentic intellectual process of doing history and discovering for themselves how historians construct knowledge of the past.
Using *Viola Desmond’s Canada* in the Canadian History and Social Studies Curriculum

*Viola Desmond’s Canada* is written for students of Canadian history at the university and high school levels. The content of the book meets the provincial curriculum outcomes in the following courses on the intermediate and secondary school levels:

**Alberta**
Grade 8 (Canadian History)
Grade 9 (Canada: Opportunities and Challenges)
Grade 10 Social Studies (Canada and the Modern World)

**British Columbia and Yukon**
Grade 8 (Society and Culture)
Grade 11 Social Studies (Canadian Identity)
Grade 12 (History)

**Manitoba**
Senior 1 Social Studies (Canada Today)

**New Brunswick**
Grade 8 (Canada and the Global Community)
Grade 9 Social Studies (Canadian Identity)
Grade 12 Social Studies (Canadian History 122)

**Newfoundland and Labrador**
Grade 9 Social Studies (Atlantic Canada and the Global Community)
Grade 12 Canadian Issues

**Nova Scotia**
Grade 7 and 9 Social Studies (Atlantic Canada and the Global Community)
Grade 11 Canadian History
Grade 11 African Canadian Studies
Nunavut & NWT
Grade 8 (Canadian History)
Grade 9 Social Studies (The Growth of Canada)
Grade 10 (Canada and the Modern World)

Ontario
Grade 8 History and Geography
Grade 10 Civics
Grade 10 Canadian History
Grade 11 History (Canadian History since WW II)
Grade 12 History (Canada: History, Identity and Culture)

Prince Edward Island
Grade 9 History
Grade 10 Canadian Studies

Quebec
Secondary 3 and 4 (History of Quebec and Canada)

Saskatchewan
Grade 8 and 9 Social Studies
Grade 12 Canadian Studies
Documentary History Guide for Chapters 3–8:

Chapter 3
My Early Memories of Race, My Sister Viola and My Journey of Self-Discovery
by Wanda Robson

In this personal account, Wanda Robson, the youngest sister of Viola Desmond, relates her childhood memories about her family and growing up in Halifax. Wanda focuses in particular on her experiences involving racial prejudice as well as her reaction to her older sister’s arrest for refusing to give up her seat at the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow. Racial prejudice left a lasting influence on Wanda and, as she explains, it was not until much later in her life that she gained a fuller understanding of these incidents in the context of the larger struggle for racial equality in Canada. Wanda’s early childhood encounters with racial prejudice are similar to those of other Black children who grew up under the shadow of racial segregation and discrimination. Readers should compare Wanda’s personal account with those of Sylvia Hamilton and Virginia Travis that are provided in the appendix to the book. All these accounts should help students to gain a better understanding of the effects of racial prejudice as well all other forms of prejudice. This chapter offers an excellent opportunity for teachers to begin a dialogue with their students about the nature and effects of all forms of prejudice including bullying, homophobia, anti-Semitism and racism.

Selected Questions and Activities (Grades 9–12):
What is prejudice and what are the various forms of prejudice?

- Bullying Quiz (tolerance.org/activity/bullying-quiz)
- Anti-Bullying Contract (stopabully.ca/uploads/2/7/6/7/27672675/6623570_orig.png)
- 3Rs: Recognize, Refuse, Report (stopabully.ca/3-rs-to-reduce-bullying.html)
- PINK Wrist Campaign (pinkwrist.ca)
- Claim it! Creating a Climate of Inclusion Lesson Plan (racebridgesstudio.com/wp-content/uploads/Claim_It_LESSON_PLAN.pub-Claim_It_LESSON_PLAN_FINAL.pdf)
- Racial Disparities Jigsaw Mini-Unit (tolerance.org/activity/racial-disparities-jigsaw-mini-unit)
- Racism and the Box (learningtogive.org/units/challenging-social-boundaries/racism-and-box)

Teacher Online Resources

- Teacher & School Anti-Bullying Resources (stopabully.ca/teacher-resources.html)
- Lesson Plans and Tool Kits (safeatschool.ca/resources/resources-on-equity-and-inclusion/racism/tools-kits-and-activities)
- Museum of Tolerance Teacher Resources (museumoftolerance.com/site/c.ml6KfNVLtH/b.5052463/k.AE91/Teacher Resources.htm)
- Resources on Racism and Oppression (OSSTF Anti-Oppression compilation(/sites/default/files/osstf compilation.pdf))
- Canadian Bullying Resources Online (osstf.on.ca/en-CA/publications/research-studies/bullying/canadian-bullying-resources-online)
Chapter 4
Marie Marguerite Rose: What Her Inventory of Material Possessions Tells Us About Slavery and Freedom in Eighteenth Century New France

This chapter reproduces the inventory of the material possessions of Marie Marguerite Rose, a freed slave, innkeeper and businesswoman in eighteenth century Ill Royale. This is the only document of its kind involving a freed female slave in Canada and it offers a unique glimpse into the life of a remarkable woman. The document also offers insights into slavery and society as well as the status of women in eighteenth-century French colonial life.

The chapter commentary argues that slavery in New France varied according to region and individual circumstances and, overall, it was very different than the practice of slavery under British rule and in the southern United States. Students might want to explore these differences in more detail. They should also compare the similarities and differences between the life of Marie Marguerite Rose and that of Angelique, who is the subject of Afua Cooper’s book, The Hanging of Angelique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montreal.

In examining Marie’s inventory, students can construct a picture of her life as an innkeeper and woman of business in eighteenth-century Louisbourg. Certain items in her inventory raise important questions of historical interest. Marie, for example, was not able to read or write yet her inventory includes a writing case and tobacco box. Is it reasonable to assume that these items were for the convenience of her patrons and perhaps for the conduct of her own business affairs? Other items in her inventory such as her jewelry, clothing and clothing dye suggest she might have retained an aspect of her African identity. Although there is no evidence of a slave community in eighteenth-century Louisbourg, there were over two hundred slaves of African descent living in or nearby the fortified city. How well, we might ask, did these enslaved Africans know each other and to what extent did they have the opportunities for social interaction? Marie also distinguished herself as a respected businesswoman. Did she develop a self-identity as a free woman of status in eighteenth-century Louisbourg and, if so, what does this tell us about the attitudes toward race and the changing roles of women in French colonial society?

Marie’s inventory includes many items of interest; however, some of the most fascinating aspects of her death relate to what is not included in this official document. There is no mention of the presence, for example, of her husband, Jean Baptiste Laurent, a Mi’kmaw hunter and trader. He is conspicuously absent from all official records and his whereabouts at the time of Marie's death as well as his future life are unknown. His life and his role as Marie’s husband and business partner are subjects for interesting speculation and future historical research.

Selected Questions and Activities:
• Write a short story or historical fiction account of the life of Marie Marguerite Rose and or Jean Baptiste Laurent.
• Compare the provisions of the Code Noir (1685) with those of the Slave Code of South Carolina (1740). What do these codes tell us about the attitudes and treatment of slaves under French and British rule? Document sources: (directory.vancouver.wsu.edu/sites/directory.vancouver.wsu.edu/files/inserted_files/webintern02/code%20noir.pdf); (teachingushistory.org/tTrove/1740slavecode.htm)
• Using Marie’s Inventory of Material Possessions, create an accurate visual picture of her Inn with furniture and other material items.
• Describe what a typical patron at Marie’s Inn might have for dinner.
• Compare the similarities and differences between the lives of Marie and Angelique (activehistory.ca/2012/09/marie-joseph-angelique-remembering-the-arsonist-slave-of-montreal)
• What do the lives of Marie and Angelique tell us about the practice of slavery under French rule in Canada during the eighteenth century?

• What does Angelique’s trial tell us about the French judicial system during the eighteenth century? (canadianmysteries.ca/sites/angelique/accueil/indexen.html)

Teacher Online Resources

• Black History in Canada Resources (blackhistorycanada.ca/teachers.php?id=141)
• The Torture and Trial of Angelique (canadianmysteries.ca/sites/angelique/accueil/indexen.html)
• Slavery in Canada (archives.gov.on.ca/en/explore/online/alvin_mccurdy/settlement.aspx)
• African Nova Scotians in the Age of Slavery and Abolition (novascotia.ca/archives/africanns/)
• Slavery in New France (historymuseum.ca/virtual-museum-of-new-france/population/slavery)
• The Book of Negroes: a TV mini-series adapted from Lawrence Hills’ award-winning book of the same title (cbc.ca/bookofnegroes/episodes/season1)

Chapter 5

West Indian Immigration to Canada, 1900–1920: What the Census Figures Don’t Tell Us

The first part of the twentieth century has been regarded as a low point and a period of decline for the Black population in Canada. The documents and commentary in this chapter revise this view and suggest that although this period witnessed an increase in racial prejudice against Blacks, it was also a period in which large numbers of West Indians immigrated to Canada. The first two decades of the twentieth century also witnessed the development of a new sense of racial awareness and pride among Blacks in Canada as well as a more visible presence in many urban centers of the country. Perhaps the strongest evidence for this is the growth of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which by the 1930s reached a total membership of five thousand with thirty-two separate divisions across Canada.

Selected Questions and Activities

• Create a profile of the current Caribbean community in Canada. (statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-621-x/2007007/4123247-eng.htm)

• From the documents provided in this chapter, identify Superintendent of Immigration D.W. Scott’s reasons for restricting West Indian immigration to Canada and consider the extent to which the report he requested from J. B. Williams in 1909 contradicted this rationale.

• After reading Marcus Garvey’s speech in Sydney (1937) consider why his message continues to resonate among the Black community in Canada and elsewhere.

• Read the accounts of immigrants on the Pier 2 website and write your own immigration letter from a refugee seeking a new life in Canada. (virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Pier21/eng/discussion-activities-eng.html)

• In light of recent humanitarian crises in the world and the current refugee crisis in the Middle East, debate the merits of a more or less restrictive immigration policy in Canada. (cbc.ca/radio/checkup/should-canada-accept-more-of-the-migrants-escaping-across-the-mediterranean-to-europe-1.3130197); (theglobeandmail.com/news/national/time-to-lead/why-canada-needs-a-flood-of-immigrants/article4105032/?page=all)

• Discuss Canada’s policy of refusal to admit Jewish refugees at the beginning WWII (news.nationalpost.com/news/none-is-too-many-memorial-for-jews-turned-away-from-canada) and consider how the events of the Holocaust changed our immigration policy (virtualmuseum.ca/virtual-exhibits/exhibit/open-hearts-closed-doors-the-war-orphans-project/).
Teacher Online Resources

- Canadian Immigration Resources (virtuemuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Pier21/eng/ressources-resources-eng.html)
- Canada: A History of Refuge (cic.gc.ca/english/games/teachers-corner/refugee/refuge.asp)
- Black Nova Scotian Holdings at the Beaton Institute (beatoninstitute.com/black-nova-scotian-holdings)
- Black History in Canada for Teachers (blackhistorycanada.ca/teachers.php?id=141)
- Teaching African Canadian History (the UNIA in Canada) (teachingafricancanadianhistory.weebly.com/blog/category/unia)
- The West Indians In Canada: online copy of a book by the historian, James St. G. Walker (collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/008004/f2/E-6_en.pdf)
- Myths and Misconceptions about Refugees and Immigrants to Canada (ccrweb.ca/sites/CCRweb.ca/files/static-files/documents/FFacts.htm)
- The New Canadians Centre: Educational Resources (nccpeterborough.ca/?page_id=2521)
- Too Close to Home: Anti-Semitism and Fascism in Canada during the 1930s and 1940s (vhec.org/images/pdfs/TCTH%20Teachers%20Guide.pdf)
- Canada and the Holocaust (cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/holocaust.asp)
- Open Hearts Closed Doors: The War Orphans Project (virtuemuseum.ca/sgc-cms/expositions-exhibitions/orphelins-orphans/english/)
- Passages to Canada (passagetocanada.com)

Chapter 6
The Culture of Racism in Canada:
Burning Crosses, Blackened-Faced Actors and Minstrel Shows

Canadian culture during the twentieth century was shaped by a number of racial attitudes and stereotypes that led to efforts to restrict Black immigration to Canada as well as reinforcing existing patterns of racial segregation and discrimination. This chapter illustrates the seminal influence in Canada of racial stereotypes that were disseminated through the new medium of cinema and other forms of popular culture as well as through organizations like the Ku Klux Klan that gained widespread support in Canada during the 1920s.

Selected Questions and Activities

- Understanding stereotypes: a lesson plan for three class periods in Grades 9–12 (discoveryeducation.ca/teachers/free-lesson-plans/understanding-stereotypes.cfm)
- What impact does a particular stereotype have on the individual and group that is the target of that stereotype? (study.com/academy/lesson/stereotype-threat-definition-examples-theories.html)
- Minstrel Shows: Spreading Stereotypes Through Song and Dance. Using the narrative, primary sources and document-based questions at minstrelsyinamericanhistory.weebly.com, complete the activity at the end of the site.
- The Assumption Game: this activity explores how we make assumptions about people based on racial/cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (bsu.edu/learningfromhate/teaching.htm)
- “Kiddie Klan” exercise: forty-minute activity for high school students and adults (bsu.edu/learningfromhate/t_kiddie.htm)
Chapter 7

Pearleen Oliver: Pioneer in the Fight to End Racial Discrimination

Most Canadians know very little about the struggle to end racial discrimination in Canada. This chapter focuses on the efforts of Pearleen Oliver, one of Canada’s most important pioneers in the fight to end racial segregation during the twentieth century. Among her many accomplishments, Pearleen is perhaps best known for her fight to end the color bar that prevented Blacks from training and practicing the profession of nursing in Canada. She joins the ranks of other prominent pioneers of her generation who fight to end racial discrimination in Canada.

This chapter is based in part on an oral interview conducted by Catherine Arseneau in 1991. The oral interview is an important primary source of historical evidence and historians use this as an aid to constructing knowledge of the past. However, like all other primary and secondary sources of evidence, the oral interview may not always reflect an entirely objective rendering of past events. As a lesson in historical methodology, teachers might want use this chapter to explore with their students the strengths and weaknesses of first-hand historical accounts, especially with regard to the role of memory and bias, as well as the techniques in conducting oral interviews.

Selected Questions and Activities

• What are the main distinctions between history and the past? (canadianmysteries.ca/en/3515.php)
• The Sound of History: Conduct an Oral Interview (canadashistory.ca/Education/Lesson-Plans/Lesson-Plans/High/The-Sound-of-History-Conducting-an-Oral-Interview); (loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/using-history/)
• Construct an historical profile of a prominent twentieth-century Canadian civil rights leader. (teachingafricancanadianhistory.weebly.com/blog/category/human-rights-in-canada)
• According to Pearleen Oliver, how did Canada’s entry into WWII add to the fight for racial equality in Canada?
• If you were a Black veteran of WWII, how would you feel about dealing with racial discrimination in Canada? Compare your impressions with the actions of Hugh Burnett (heritagetrust.on.ca/CorporateSite/media/oht/PDFs/Hugh-Burnett-NUA-ENG.pdf)
Teacher Online Resources


- Canadian Human Rights Toolkit from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (humanrights.ca/search/site/ctfdb)

- Human Rights Resources: The Alberta Teachers’ Association (teachers.ab.ca/For%20Members/Professional%20Development/Diversity%20and%20Human%20Rights/Resources/Pages/Resources.aspx#canadian-museum-of-human-rights-activities-for-the-classroom)

- The Historical Thinking Project Resources (historicalthinking.ca/classroom-material)
References


