

NOTE TO READERS

The excerpts and annotations provided below allow teachers to focus on specific parts of the “Paving the Way” article that might be more enriching and grade level appropriate for their students, while also providing important historical context. However, teachers are welcome to use their discretion and provide students with the entire article for the activity.

It is important for students and teachers to understand that the article “Paving the Way” includes historical language that is outdated and is now recognized as racist, discriminatory, harmful, and/or inappropriate. Though this terminology would not be appropriate in today’s context, it provides important insights into the lived experiences, societal norms, and policies of the time. Changing this language would alter the original information and remove its historical context.

ABOUT THE WRITER: GABRIEL M. MILHET

Gabriel M. Milhet is an African Nova Scotian writer with extensive background knowledge in Black Canadian history. He has been a part various historical preservation activities focused on Black histories in Atlantic Canada. Milhet thought the story of B.A. Husbands was important to tell because:

“Husbands’ appeal captures the understandable frustration in the Black community at the time, while formally challenging a system that consistently shut Black citizens out of public life. Through advocacy like this, Husbands and the League created the foundation for future demands for respect and dignity.”

Discussion Guide: "Paving the Way"

Source: Gabriel M. Milhet, "[Paving the Way](#)," *Canada's History*, Spring 2026.

Grade level: High school

Time required: One to two classes (60-90 minutes)

Essential question: How can community members work together to advocate for their needs?

Curriculum connections: This activity explores community organizing through the lens of B. A. Husbands' activism in Black communities in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It connects with broader themes of community, activism, collective care, anti-Black racism, segregation, identity, and citizenship.

ONTARIO | CHC2D Grade 10 Canadian History since World War I | CHV2O Grade 10 Civics and Citizenship

QUEBEC | History of Quebec and Canada Secondary III and IV | History and Citizenship Education Secondary I

BRITISH COLUMBIA | Social Justice 12 | Social Studies 10 - Canada and the World: 1914 to the Present

NEW BRUNSWICK | Canadian History 121/2/3

Historical thinking concepts: Continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical significance

Discussion questions:

- What concerns did Husbands and the Black community have about their lives in Halifax?
- What was the significance of the "Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League?" How did they advocate for their needs?
- What were short term and long term the outcomes of Husbands' and the Black communities' collective actions? How effective were Husbands' actions to bring about change?
- What connections can you make to the article and your own communities? What's similar or different?
- What questions do you still have? What perspectives are missing?

Activity:

Introduce the topic by starting a class discussion about community. Note students' ideas on chart paper or Google Slides. Invite students to share their contributions using the guiding questions below:

- What is a community?
- What types of communities are you a part of?
- What does it mean to be a part of a community? How do you act as a community member?
- What are your responsibilities and privileges as a member of a community?
- Who are you in community with? What roles do community members play?

Separate the class into small groups of 3-4 students. Have students read the excerpt of "Paving the Way" by Gabriel M. Milhet. Have students choose a notetaker. While reading, encourage students to make note of words or phrases they're unfamiliar with.

Have students consider the discussion questions below. Give each group one discussion question to focus on:

- What concerns did Husbands and the Black community have about their lives in Halifax?
- What was the significance of the "Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League?" How did they advocate for their needs?
- What were the outcomes of Husbands' and the Black communities' collective actions?
- What connections can you make to the article and your own communities? What's similar or different?
- What questions do you still have? What perspectives are missing?

After reading, have students share their responses to the discussion questions in their small groups. Bring the class together. Create a "word bank" of phrases or terms students were unfamiliar with to explore later. Have each group share their responses to one of the five discussion questions with the class.

Reflection:

Students write a paragraph or create a short video/audio recording response to the essential question: **How can community members work together to advocate for their needs?** Students should be encouraged to make connections between the article and their communities/experiences.

Extension / additional reading:

Using the “word bank” you compiled with the class, choose words or phrases you’d like to explore together. Exploration can include looking up unfamiliar terminology or researching key phrases the class is interested in learning more about, grounded in historical context.

Additional resource:

The Canadian Encyclopedia – [B.A. Husbands](#)

Annotations: "Paving the Way"

Source: Gabriel M. Milhet, "[Paving the Way](#)," *Canada's History*, Spring 2026.

| Excerpt | Annotation |
|---|--|
| <p>Beresford Augustus (popularly known as B.A.) Husbands, was a Barbadian expat who spent the better part of seven decades formally challenging the many grievances faced by Black Nova Scotians. Before the rise of the well-known civil rights movements in Canada – often associated with the 1950s and '60s – Husbands led the HCCIL. Founded in June 1930, the league was designed as an "Organization to further the interest of Canadians who are members of the Colored Race" and was dedicated "to the welfare of underprivileged colored children." Aimed at uniting the Black community in support of common social and political goals, it advocated with considerable success for better employment and educational and vocational opportunities for Black Nova Scotians.</p> <p>Husbands was the man for the moment. Arriving in Halifax at the turn of the century, he integrated into the African Nova Scotian community, attending Joseph Howe School and marrying Iris Lucas of nearby Lucasville in 1903. He worked for H.R. Silver, an affluent merchant, before joining the Intercolonial Railway as a porter. By 1930, though, Husbands had built businesses: an advertising agency, a retail store, an employment bureau, a West Indian products import company and a largescale real estate business.</p> | <p>B.A. Husbands was the president of Halifax Colored Citizens Improvement League (HCCIL). At the time, Black people/ people of African descent were referred to as "colored." This terminology would be offensive and harmful if used in today's context.</p> |

| Excerpt | Annotation |
|--|--|
| <p>He also served as an inaugural executive council member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association's Halifax branch and as chairman of the Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church trustee board. Through it all, Husbands used his unique position between two Black worlds to push for collective advancement. Today, few remember Husbands' name, and even fewer know how deeply his league shaped Black civic life in Halifax. However, from 1930 until his death in 1968, Husbands helped pave the way for community self-determination.</p> | <p>The "Universal Negro Improvement Association" was an international organization founded by Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican activist focused on Black liberation. During this time, "negro" was used to describe people of African descent, though it is a discriminatory word in today's context.</p> |

| Excerpt | Annotation |
|--|--|
| <p>...residents of Africville – a close-knit Black community in Halifax long deprived of basic services, such as running water, sewage and paved roads – organized a petition to have street lights installed in their community. Despite being signed by a significant number of community members, the petition was ignored by both the public works committee and the city engineer. Refusing to be dismissed, a delegation led by B.A. Husbands brought the issue directly to Ald. Walter O’Toole, who pledged his support. The duo then met with the city engineer, who, according to the Evening Mail, sympathized with the villagers’ request.</p> <p>The league and the fight for equality</p> <p>From the United Club arose the HCCIL, formally established at the Halifax Board of Trade rooms in June 1930. More than the typical non-profit, it became, under Husbands’ guidance, Nova Scotia’s first sustained experiment in Black civic politics.</p> <p>In his book <i>The Nova Scotia Black Experience Through the Centuries</i>, a comprehensive account of Black presence in the province, local historian Bridglal Pachai describes Husbands as “the father of incipient Black politics in Nova Scotia,” noting that before 1938, no other secular leader had appeared. In those early years, the league and its president were virtually synonymous – “as a sort of one-person show.” Through Husbands, the league pursued equality as a set of tangible demands: cultural recognition, equal access to vocational and educational opportunities, and the right to live in dignity.</p> | <p>During the 20th century, Black people in Nova Scotia were treated unjustly. They did not have access to the same resources, education, and opportunities as their white counterparts. Some places were segregated, meaning they were specifically reserved only for white people. We’ll explore the Africville community and Viola Desmond’s activism to give added historical context about what life was like for Black people in Nova Scotia at the time.</p> <p>Black people lived in communities, like Africville, where they did not have their basic needs met, like electricity or running water. The residents of Africville advocated for better living conditions, but the city of Halifax ignored them. Africville was destroyed by the city of Halifax in the late 1960s to make way for other developments, and its residents were forced to relocate. You can learn more about Africville in the <i>History Bits</i> episode, “Remembering Africville.”</p> <p>Halifax was not the only city in Nova Scotia where Black people faced racism and injustice. In 1946, Viola Desmond went to see a movie in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. Based on the theatre’s policy, Black people were expected to sit in the balcony. She purchased a ticket and sat on the main floor, which she didn’t know the theatre reserved for white people only. When she refused to leave the main floor seating and exchange her ticket for the balcony, she was forcefully removed from the theatre and arrested. She was charged with tax evasion for having failed to pay the tax on the ticket for the main floor.</p> <p>Even though Desmond lost her case fighting against this injustice, it was a pivotal moment in the fight against racial segregation. Racial segregation created barriers for Black people because they were prevented from accessing the same schools, stores or opportunities as white people. You can learn more in the video “Viola Desmond: An Unlikely Crusader.”</p> <p>During this time, B.A. Husbands’ advocacy was groundbreaking because he used his leadership roles to organize the Black community to fight for their rights as well as start local initiatives in Halifax to support them.</p> |

| Excerpt | Annotation |
|--|---|
| <p>To achieve those goals, the league organized its general membership into subcommittees and project designations – comprising the Halifax North Cultural and Recreation Youth Centre, Colored Men’s Conservative Social and Athletic Club, the Women’s Auxiliary Committee and the Recreation and Entertainment Committee – which allowed executive members to better advocate for the local Black community. Deeply troubled by the high unemployment rates among Black youth and the lack of representation in city governance, for example, Husbands wrote to city council criticizing the lack of opportunities, using his title as president of the Colored Men’s Conservative Social and Athletic Club: “I would draw attention to the fact that there is no representative of the colored race in any of the local civic departments. We have in the colored community many people who have recently graduated with distinction from high schools with the aim in view to secure employment. Their efforts in this direction have been unsuccessful. We feel that when any vacancies arise in the offices in city hall or elsewhere under the supervision of the city, our people should be given an opportunity to apply for same, and trust that our appeal will be given most careful consideration. Our young people do not wish to continue to exist on relief. They want employment.”</p> | <p>“Colored Men’s Conservative Social and Athletic Club” provided a space for Black men to gather about their shared interests and participate in social advocacy. At the time, Black people/people of African descent were referred to as “colored.” This terminology would be offensive and harmful if used in today’s context.</p> |

| Excerpt | Annotation |
|--|---|
| <p>After these initial actions, Husbands and the league maintained a strict emphasis on the importance of Black education across the province. After league members convened at Gerrish Street Hall to denounce the racist imagery in <i>Little Black Sambo</i>, Husbands lent his full support to Pearleen Oliver in her campaign to desegregate the nursing profession, aligning the league with her call for equal access to professional training for Black people. Only two months later, their pressure ushered in change: Premier MacMillan pledged to remove the story from future editions of the curriculum, and two Black women – Ruth Bailey and Gwennyth Barton – were admitted into a Canadian nursing program for the first time.</p> | <p>At the time, Black people in Halifax faced systemic barriers and inequality in the education system. <i>The Story of Little Black Sambo</i> was a storybook assigned to children in Grade 2 classrooms across Halifax. The story was written for the amusement of white readers and included a range of racist tropes that didn't show Black people in a positive light.</p> <p>Pearleen Oliver was a church leader and community activist who founded the "Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People." In January 1944, she spoke at the Gerrish Street Hall in Halifax's North End and denounced the use of <i>The Story of Little Black Sambo</i> in schools. She was also a strong proponent of ending exclusionary policies that prevented Black people from accessing nursing schools. Her advocacy was instrumental in desegregating nursing schools in Nova Scotia.</p> |