[JURIST] The Nova Scotian government officially pardoned [ceremony materials] and issued an apology to Canadian civil rights icon Viola Desmond in a ceremony Thursday attended by Premier Darrell Dexter and Minister of Justice Landry Ross [official profiles]. Desmond, an African-Canadian woman who died in 1965, was fined $20 and jailed overnight in 1946 on charges that stemmed from her refusal to leave an area of a theater reserved for white patrons.

Dexter apologized [CBC report] to Desmond's family, including her sister Wanda Robson who was at the ceremony, and all African Nova Scotians for the government's actions against Desmond. Dexter stated:

The arrest, detention and conviction of Viola Desmond is an example in our history where the law was used to perpetuate racism and racial segregation - this is contrary to the values of Canadian society. We recognize today that the act for which Viola Desmond was arrested, was an act of courage, not an offence.

Robson said her parents would be proud to know that Desmond had become a Canadian hero and urged people to learn from the incident to prevent similar situations. This marked the first posthumous "free pardon" in Canadian history, recognizing that Desmond was innocent and her conviction was in error.

Last year, Birmingham, Alabama Mayor Barry Langford pardoned about 2,500 people [JURIST report] arrested for non-violent civil rights protests in the city during the 1960's. In April 2006, Alabama Governor Bob Riley [official website] authorized pardons [JURIST report] for Rosa Parks [TIME profile], the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. [King Center profile], and other civil rights activists convicted of violating Jim Crow laws [Britannica backgrounder] in the state. Parks helped trigger the civil rights movement across the US after she was arrested in Montgomery, AL, in 1955 for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. Parks died in 2005 [JURIST report] at the age of 92.