**BHM 2024 Theme: Culture/Diversity**

**Sylvia Hamilton: Canadian filmmaker, writer, poet, and artist.**

**Sylvia Hamilton** [**ONS**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_Nova_Scotia) **(Order of Nova Scotia)** is a Canadian filmmaker, writer, poet, and artist. Based in [Nova Scotia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nova_Scotia), her work explores the lives and experiences of people of African descent. Her special focus is on [African Nova Scotians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Nova_Scotians), and especially women. In particular, her work takes the form of documentary films, writing, public presentations, teaching, mentoring, extensive volunteer work and community involvement. She has uncovered stories of struggles and contributions of [African Canadians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Canadians) and introduced them to mainstream audiences. Through her work, she exposes the roots and the presence of systemic racism in Canada. She aims to provide opportunities for Black and Indigenous youth through education and empowerment.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-Weeren-1)

**Personal life**

Hamilton grew up in [Beechville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beechville,_Nova_Scotia" \o "Beechville, Nova Scotia), a community founded by the [Black Refugees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Refugee_(War_of_1812)) from the [War of 1812](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_1812), located west of Halifax, Nova Scotia.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-Weeren-1) She was the second youngest child of six to Gerald and Marie Hamilton. Gerald was a labourer and Marie was a teacher in segregated schools.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-Weeren-1) As a child in Beechville, Hamilton attended a segregated all-Black primary school and then switched to a non-segregated high school outside of her community.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-Eradication_Erasure-2) In this non-segregated school, Hamilton experienced what she called a “very alien environment.”[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-Weeren-1) For example, the history of Black people was absent from school textbooks throughout her years in high school and university. Hamilton went elsewhere to find a supportive Black community and found it in the African Baptist church. It was in this encouraging setting she was able to learn and cultivate public speaking skills, which she later used to spread her own experiences and those of others. She was the first person from Beechville to graduate from high school.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-Weeren-1) She earned post-secondary degrees, namely a BA from [Acadia University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acadia_University), an MA from [Dalhousie University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalhousie_University) and has been awarded three honorary degrees from [Saint Mary’s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Mary%27s_University_(Halifax)), Dalhousie and Acadia Universities.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-3)

**Career**

She is an independent filmmaker who produces and directs films through her company Maroon Films. She is a professor at the [University of King’s College’s School](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_King%27s_College) of Journalism.

Throughout her life she has served as a volunteer on many boards and committees including the advisory board for Dalhousie University’s Transition Year Program (TYP) and itsIB&M (Indigenous Black and Mik’Maq) Law School Program both of which serve First Nations and African Canadian students. She was a member of the Dalhousie Art Gallery Advisory Board. In 1975, Hamilton joined Halifax’s Reel Life Film and Video Collective. She worked for the secretary of state in race relations.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-4) Hamilton is the co-creator of the New Initiatives in Film (NIF) Program that was based the [National Film Board of Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Film_Board_of_Canada)’s Studio D; it was a program providing opportunities for women of colour and First Nations female filmmakers to create films.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-Sylvia_Hamilton-5)

She was a [Trudeau Foundation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Elliott_Trudeau_Foundation) Mentor in 2008,7 held a Distinguished Chair (Nancy's Chair) in Women’s Studies at Mount St Vincent University,[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-6) was Chair of the Women in Media Foundation,[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton#cite_note-Sylvia_Hamilton-5) the James Robinson Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies and currently holds the Rogers Chair in Communications at the University of King’s College School of Journalism. **(read more):**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Hamilton>