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A New Voice in the Courtroom

A bang resounded through the courtroom as the Supreme of Canada's first Indigenous justice struck her gavel. Michelle O'Bonsawin's nomination to Canada's highest court is a huge milestone for diversity, because in the Supreme Court's nearly 150 year history, she is the first justice to come from an Indigenous background.

With this milestone came many challenges for Michelle O'Bonsawin. She once stated, "I come from a very small rural area where I was told, 'Michelle, you're not likely going to be a lawyer because you come from this small town in Northern Ontario.'" On top of this background, she would have inevitably faced the discrimination seen by many Indigenous people, especially Indigenous women, in the legal system. Despite all this, O'Bonsawin worked hard, and through her perseverance and determination she achieved incredible things.

Michelle O'Bonsawin is making history as she goes farther than many Indigenous judges before her were able to go. She was the first Indigenous judge on the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, on which she served for five years. This is an accomplishment unto itself; making it to the level of provincial court is no small feat. She didn't stop there though. On September 1, 2022, she was appointed to the Supreme Court, making her its first Indigenous judge. Aside from her outstanding career as a judge, Michelle O'Bonsawin made a difference as a professor at the University of Ottawa, where she taught the course "Les autochtones et le droit" part-time. It is significant to have a judge with this thorough an understanding of Indigenous law seated on such a high court.

Hopefully the echoes of Madame O'Bonsawin's gavel will continue to be heard in the future as she paves the way for Indigenous judges in future generations.