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SECTION J

WRITEFULLY YOURS

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HER CAREER STORY

Unlike Florence who worked in the security of Scutari many miles from the frontline, Mrs. Secacole was frequently seen on the battlefield tending the wounded. She was also known for the charitable aspects of her work.

IN CELEBRATION of Black History Month I would like to focus on our heritage and look at some of the careers of people from our history. Some of my favourite role models are Marcus Garvey, Mary Seacole, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Madam C.J. Walker and Paul Robeson. When we look at the achievements of these people we should never look at our careers and say, "I cannot."

Mary Seacole made an exceptional contribution to the society in which she lived and consequently she deserves the honour of mention in our history books but somehow she rarely even merits a footnote.

By comparison, her contemporary, Florence Nightingale received national acclaim for her work and her name is known throughout the English speaking world. Both women found their vocation in the nursing profession but while the European woman's strength lay in administration the Caribbean/West Indian displayed the skill of a surgeon and was noted for her healing hands.

FORGOTTEN HEROINE

History still pays tribute to the 'Lady of the Lamp' Florence Nightingale but 'Mother

Seacole' has become the forgotten heroine of that period.

This is her story.

In order to truly understand Mary Seacole's achievements, her work must be measured against the time in which she lived and the restrictions under which she had to operate. She was born before Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807 and she was married and widowed before the Emancipation Act was affected.

When she was risking her life for Queen and country on the battlefield of the Crimea many of her fellow West Indians were still enslaved in all, but name.

LYNCH MOBS

At the time of her death in 1881 black people in South America were still not free and Afro-Americans in the north, after less than 20 years of freedom were suffering at the hands of lynch mobs.

Mary Seacole was born and

raised in Kingston. Her mother, a free Black woman owned a hotel called Blundell Hall where British sailors and soldiers stationed in the nearby camp of Up Park or the military station at Newcastle were entertained.

By the late 40s she had travelled all over the Caribbean region, notably to Nassau, Haiti, Cuba and Panama. Her reputation as a 'doctrees' became greater than her mother's. Diseases such as cholera, yellow fever, malaria and small pox frequently attacked islanders. The first national test of Mary's healing skills came during the Kingston cholera epidemic of 1850. Her husband was Horatio Seacole.

The desire to travel came from the stories she grew up hearing from the soldiers.

History books tell us that Mary was Florence Nightingale's assistant, but while the woman with the lamp had not accepted Mary's assistance, it was Mary

Secole's own determination that got her to the Crimea. At the age of 50 Mary formed a business and raised the necessary capital to travel a three thousand mile journey.

She arrived at the Crimea as a sutler, (a person who sells provisions, liquor to the troops) not as a nurse. 'If you cannot go through the front door side-step and slip in through the side door', may have been her thinking.

TENDED THE WOUNDED

Unlike Florence who worked in the security of Scutari many miles from the frontline, Mrs. Secacole was frequently seen on the battlefield tending the wounded. She was also known for the charitable aspects of her work.

An average work day for the doctress begins at 7:00 a.m. and ends at 9:00 p.m. When the war ended abruptly in 1855, she returned to London with little fanfare for her achievements and hard work. She died in London May 1881.

When your career paths seems challenging remember this quote:

"Your crown has been paid for all you have to do is wear it"

There is nothing that you want to achieve that is not doable. Others before us with less resources, education and money have succeeded.

In celebration of Black History month – hail to all nurses



FILE

A portrait of Jamaica's Mary Seacole, daughter of a Scottish sailor and coloured mother, born near St. Elizabeth in the 1800s.