



Trailblazing Women: Pauline Henriques



TRAILBLAZERS: World War One's Inspirational Women

Location: Brighton

Occupation: Actress, Social-Worker

Why are they a Trailblazer?

Pauline arrived in Britain from Jamaica in 1919, aged 5. Passionate about the theatre she joined a drama course at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art and found work as an actress and broadcaster with BBC Radio. She acted in plays by Caribbean writers and took part in the long-running series 'Caribbean Voices', which showcased the work of Caribbean writers. Her stage work included acting in Kenneth Tynan's 'Othello' in 1950 and creating the Negro Theatre Company which put on their own productions. Frustrated with the lack of opportunities for black women in theatre and on TV, Pauline decided to go into social work. Working for the London Council of Social Work, one of her first jobs was to counsel adolescents. She found that she had a lot of compassion for young, unmarried, pregnant women who, at a time when pregnancy 'out of wedlock' was still a taboo, would often find themselves homeless and without support. For 40 years Pauline worked in this field, first with the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, and then with the Brook Advisory Centres. In 1966 Pauline became Britain's first black woman magistrate and in 1969 she was awarded the OBE. Pauline is inspiring because she had the courage to change careers halfway through her life when she saw that acting wasn't working out. In becoming a social-worker, she chose a career that would be useful and helpful to others and she worked to improve the situations of young, unmarried pregnant women, who did not earn much sympathy from society at the time.

What impact have they made on their community?

Pauline was frustrated to find that roles for black women on stage and TV were hard to find. Creating her own production company, the 'Negro Theatre Company' gave job opportunities to other BAME performers and helped to diversify theatre going in the 1940s and '50s. As a social worker working with young pregnant women Pauline played

a huge role in offering support and practical health to a vulnerable and marginalised group. Her insistence in using counselling with young women changed the culture of the Brook Advisory Centre and made it an easier and more helpful place to access for its users. In old age, Pauline harked back to her theatrical talents to run a play-writing group for other senior citizens, giving members of the community the opportunity to learn new skills, explore creativity and increase wellbeing.

What connections are there between Pauline and the Trailblazers of World War One?

Although some of Marie Stopes' (1880 – 1958) views have now been discredited, like Pauline Henriques, she understood the problems faced by young, unmarried mothers. Her first book 'Married Love', published in 1918, covered sex and contraception and, although widely condemned, sold thousands of copies. In 1921, Marie Stopes opened Britain's first family planning clinic in Holloway, north London. In 1925, the clinic moved to central London and others opened across the country. By 1930, other family planning organisations had been set up and they joined forces with Stopes to form the National Birth Control Council (later the Family Planning Association). Marie Stopes was a lifelong campaigner for better access to birth control for women.

How do they inspire your class to be Trailblazers of the future?

Pauline is inspiring because she had the courage to change careers. In becoming a social-worker, she chose to help others. She worked to improve the situations of young, unmarried pregnant women.



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