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Florence Nightingale, Mary Seacole, and Clara Maass: Healers, Scientists, and Nurses

Florence Nightingale was born into a life of wealth and privilege. Her mother was an outspoken abolitionist. Her father was known as a progressive and a strong advocate for education and for women ó particularly in regard to his own daughters. Florence and her sister received the best quality education available, with an emphasis on mathematics and Greek.

In a family wealthy enough to enjoy many trips abroad, Florence had been named for the city where she was born. When she traveled, Florence observed the healthier conditions in hospitals that were run by religious communities of women. On a trip to Egypt with family friends in 1849, she was deeply inspired by the example of two Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul whom she came to know.

Her family did not welcome the news when she told them that she wanted to be a nurse. In fact, they were shocked and horrified. In Britain at that time, nursing was done by untrained and socially marginal women with no other source of income, who were often considered to be more-or-less retired prostitutes. This was no environment for a proper young lady!

But Florence was resolved, and despite their dismay, her family did not prevent her from going to Kaiserswerth, in Germany, to study nursing with a Lutheran order of deaconesses. After her return to London, she became the unpaid superintendent of an ñestablishment for gentlewomen during illness.ö

In her work, Florence dedicated attention to improving sanitary conditions in hospitals; defining professional standards for nursing practice; and applying the latest scientific findings and medical research to hospital management. Before Florence began her work, hospitals were festering places where the desperately sick came to die ó patients rarely came home from the hospital. Florence and the women she trained to be nurses were able to send many patients home. Their reputation as healers drew the respect of the British Secretary of War, Sidney Herbert. When British forces entered the Crimean War in 1854, he requested that Florence and 38 of her nursing staff travel to the Crimea, to improve the desperate conditions in the huge British military hospital at Scutari.

British military policy would not permit Florence Nightingale to formally accept the application for service from **Mary Seacole**, who asked to go along. A widowed Jamaican healer, known for her ability to treat cholera, she formulated and sold her own medicines and herbal remedies, which she had learned about and researched during years of extensive travel throughout the Caribbean region. As a successful entrepreneur, when she was officially denied the opportunity to serve, Mary Seacole paid her own way to the Crimea, and became a valued colleague at the front. She was especially celebrated as a field nurse, exhibiting exceptional bravery during the Battle of Sebastopol, leading two mules loaded with supplies around the battlefield, and was known for her effectiveness as a hands-on, bedside nurse. .

Mary Seacole is considered a very significant role model and shero for black nurses. She is sometimes called the "Black Nightingale," which is what the soldiers on the battlefield called her. It is unfortunate that the media did not see fit to tell her story as widely as they told about Florence; but there were articles about her in Punch and the London Times; she was invited to meet with Queen Victoria; and her autobiography, the Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands, published in 1855, was very popular, giving her a comfortable retirement. In more recent years, with growing awareness of the significance of black history and women's history, many historians have helped to revive her memory and rescue it from the racism of what is remembered and recalled.



Period photograph of Mary Seacole
Born 1805 (date uncertain) Died May 14, 1881

The arrival of the nurses in the military camp was not welcomed. Officials in charge of the hospital understood that this was a reflection on their poor performance and corruption. Corruption and breakdowns in the long supply line from Britain resulted in shortages of every necessity, contamination of supplies, and malnutrition for the troops.

Florence and her staff of nursing volunteers were subjected to all sorts of sabotage and harassment. She established a rule, that she, herself, would be the only woman to take night duty in the wards, because it was not safe. After eight o'clock in the evening, orderlies would replace the nurses, for their safety. While this protected them from personal assault, it could not protect them from contracting the diseases around them. Three of the nurses and eight doctors in the hospital died from typhus and cholera. Florence herself became terribly ill.

Florence earned the love, respect, and admiration of the soldiers in her care. Some told of how she looked like an angel to them, as she carried a glowing candle between the rows of cots on night rounds through the wards. They called her the "Lady With a Lamp." She is most famous for her courage in this terrible situation.

Ultimately, the Crimean War set the stage for World War One. In the years after the Crimean War, it became known as "Britain in Blunderland." It began partly on religious pretexts, relating to the Sultan's bargaining back and forth between Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox countries, for jurisdiction over the Christian pilgrimage sites in Jerusalem. Britain became locked into a "quagmire" of colonial conflict, economic competition, and attempts at containment, involving Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the Turkish Ottoman Empire.

One of the most famous and tragic blunders was the disastrous Battle of Balaclava, which later became the subject of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem: "The Charge of the Light Brigade." This and many other disasters resulted from inexperience, unclear orders, and unquestioned orders. The rank-and-file soldiers were bearing the brunt of furious battles, with little hope of a way out.

Technologies like the telegraph meant that battlefield reports by journalists were reaching the newspapers back home in England with much more immediacy, and public anger about the conditions the troops were being forced to endure was on the rise. Resistance to the war increased as the incompetence, neglect, and disorganization with which it was being conducted grew more and more evident, and the wasting of Britain's fine troops became undeniable.

The story of Florence Nightingale and the nurses was irresistible for reporters. Longfellow wrote a poem about her ministry of healing, titled "Santa Filomena." This is the name of a popular Italian saint from the times of the Roman persecutions, whose shrine was credited with many miracles of healing. Florence Nightingale was becoming a popular figure in England and the United States. But this fame could do nothing to immediately alleviate the horror of Scutari.

Sanitary conditions were such that more soldiers were dying from preventable illnesses than from the violence. Florence set out to convince the British military authorities of the need for dramatic reforms in the hospitals. There were limits to what she could do about deaths on the battlefield, even with the courage and expertise of Mary Seacole to rely on; but Florence knew she could prevent many needless deaths from infectious disease. But she needed evidence in order to convince the military establishment that they must take her call for reforms seriously.

Best known as the founder of the modern nursing profession, Florence Nightingale is also remembered as an accomplished mathematician. In the hospital at Scutari, she pioneered in the field of statistical analysis, collecting and assimilating data that helped to track, predict, and prevent the incidence of non-battlefield deaths from disease and infection. Florence Nightingale invented the polar-area diagram, a type of sophisticated pie chart that is able to express a variety of phenomena in relationship and interaction with each other.

Following the Battle of Sebastopol in the winter of 1855, the hospital fatality rate climbed to 42%. After six months of the nurses' labor, the fatality rate had dropped to 2%.

The marked improvement in the recovery rate for injured soldiers, and the evidence that she compiled did prove convincing to military officials, and Florence Nightingale came home to England a national hero, though she denied public honors for herself. Continuing her campaign for reform in civilian hospitals, she developed a Model Hospital Statistical Form to help hospitals collect and analyze information, in order to identify problems before they became fatal.

For most of the remainder of her long life, she lived quietly. The effects of the fevers she survived in the Crimea had long-term consequences for her health and energy. Nevertheless, she became a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society and the American Statistical Association. She continued to consult with military medical authorities working for reforms and improvements in many conflicts, including advising the Union Army Medical Corps during the American Civil War, and with Clara Barton in the founding of the Red Cross. The great mathematician Karl Pearson, who was a profound influence on Albert Einstein, recognized Florence Nightingale as a prophetess in the development of the field of applied statistics. She became the recipient of many medals and honors, but continued to turn down much of the recognition that came her way. She wanted to draw attention instead to the importance of the nursing profession.



Clara Louise Maass was born on June 28th, 1876, in East Orange, New Jersey. She was the eldest daughter of German Lutheran immigrants, Hedwig and Robert Maass. During her childhood, she took care of her nine younger siblings, then worked as a mother's helper, and later worked in an orphanage.

Clara Maass became one of the first graduates of Newark German Hospital's Christina Trefz Training School for Nurses in 1895. She was 19 years old. By 1898, at the age of 22, she had been promoted to head nurse at Newark German Hospital where she was known for her hard work and dedication to her profession.

She strove to live up to the model of Florence Nightingale and the pioneering generation of women in nursing professions in the generation before.

The decades after the Civil War in the United States had been a time of massive industrialization and expansion. The U.S. was emerging as a new power on the world stage, beginning to see itself as a new kind of empire, and bumping up against the colonial territory of old empires, like Spain. This was pulling the United States into a deeper involvement in Cuba, where a power vacuum had formed out of civil war between Spanish loyalists to the colonial regime, and insurgents who wanted Cuban independence.

In the U.S., economic conditions following a terrible depression and nationwide labor unrest, and the energy building up -- decades after the Civil War -- to unify North and South against a common enemy, fueled the impulse to go to war.

A strong resistance to war might have prevailed. Those who were pressing for war were in the minority. Then, on February 15th, 1898, the Battleship Maine exploded in Havana Harbor, killing 266 men, with an inconclusive investigation as to the cause. Spain, or Cuban colonial agents of Spain, were suspected.

The newly corporatized and commercialized big newspapers, lead by the tycoon, William Randolph Hearst, were marketing "yellow journalism," hyped up with scandal, sensation, and fear-mongering. Photographs of the wreckage in Havana Harbor, and the slogan: "Remember the Maine!" were all over the papers. A memorial plaque made from part of the melted and recast iron hull of the ship was installed at Jersey City Hall.

The Spanish-American War marked the first use of modern propaganda techniques to draw the American people into a war overseas. Historians in the post-Viet Nam era point

suspiciously to the many aspects of the Maine that bear similar marks as the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the Bay of Pigs, and other covert "special operations."

At any rate, the Maine incident provided an effective pretext to ramp up the industrial war machine, and the United States launched on a history of empire building that ultimately led through Viet Nam into the quagmire of Iraq and the problem of Guantanamo.

But the young people who were responding to the call for service could not have known what the consequences of the war would be like. In April 1898, Clara volunteered as a nurse for the United States Army. The Army Nurse Corps did not yet exist; nurses were signed on as contractors. She served with the Seventh U. S. Army Corps from October 1, 1898 to February 5, 1899 in Jacksonville, Florida, Savannah, Georgia, and Santiago, Cuba. She was discharged in 1899, but then volunteered again with the Eighth U.S. Army Corps in the Philippines from November 1899 to the middle of the year 1900.

During her army service, she saw few battle injuries, instead caring mostly for soldiers suffering from infectious diseases like typhoid, malaria, dengue and yellow fever. She contracted dengue in Manila and was sent home.

The quality of her service led to her being summoned to work with the U.S. Army's Yellow Fever Commission in October of 1900. Cuba was ravaged by yellow fever, and thousands of soldiers and civilians had died from it. Headed by Major Walter Reed, the Commission was established during the post-war occupation of Cuba in order to investigate yellow fever. One of the commission's goals was to determine how the disease was spread: was it by mosquito bites or by contact with contaminated objects?

The Commission recruited human subjects because they did not know of any animals that could contract yellow fever. In the first recorded instance of informed consent in human experiments, volunteers were told that participation in the studies might cause their deaths. As an incentive, the volunteers were paid one hundred dollars, which was a large amount at the time, with an additional \$100 if the volunteer became ill.

In March 1901, Clara Maass volunteered to be bitten by a *Culex fasciata* mosquito (now called *Aedes aegypti*) that had been allowed to feed on yellow fever patients. She contracted a mild case of the disease, from which she quickly recovered. By this time, the researchers were certain that mosquitoes were the route of transmission, but lacked the scientific evidence to prove it, because some volunteers who were bitten remained healthy.

On August 14, 1901, Clara allowed herself to be bitten by infected mosquitoes once more. The researchers were hoping to show that her earlier case of yellow fever was sufficient to immunize her against the disease. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Once again, she became ill with yellow fever on August 18th. On August 24th, yellow fever took her life. Her death roused public sentiment and put an end to yellow fever experiments on humans. Clara Maass was buried in Colon Cemetery in Havana with

military honors. In 1902, her body was moved to Fairmount Cemetery, Newark, New Jersey.



In 1951, the 50th anniversary of her death, Cuba issued a postage stamp in her honor. In 1976, the 100th anniversary of her birth, Maass was honored with a 13¢ United States commemorative stamp. The caption on the stamp reads: "She gave her life." Also in 1976, the American Nurses Association inducted her into its Nursing Hall of Fame.

Along with Florence Nightingale, Lutherans honor Clara Maas on August 13th as a "Renewer of Society." This commemoration in August invites the church to give thanks for all those who practice the arts of healing, and who give of themselves with the kind of bravery, grace and faithfulness exemplified by these two women, by the stories of St. Filomena and the other women of the early church, by the life and example of Mary Seacole, and by so many other courageous and compassionate nurses and people of faith.

A fund-raiser "Christmas Seals" type of stamp, featuring the image of Clara Maas framed in the laurels of a hero. The stamp reads: "Nurse Clara Maass, For Science and Humanity, Lutheran Memorial Hospital, Newark, NJ, Christmas, 1949."



In Remembrance of Her

By the time she passed away at the age of ninety, on August 13, 1910, **Florence Nightingale** had opened a vitally important profession to women and had inspired and influenced the lives of millions of people. Her legacy endures as an inspiration to medical professionals all over the world; and the relevance of her prophetic call for continuous reform in health care systems and health care delivery carries tremendous contemporary resonance for our era.

This portrait of Florence Nightingale depicts her in a long tradition: portraits of women who are quietly reading. Dating back to illuminated manuscripts of the Medieval period, such portraits were strong statements about the importance of educating women ó it was very rare for women to be literate in the Middle Ages. Often these depictions are titled with the name of Mary Magdalene; or Mary of Bethany, whom Jesus described as

choosing the ðbetter partö of study and contemplation; or Mary, the Mother of Jesus, reading the Scriptures or from a prayer book

This image of a woman reading grew more prominent after the Reformation, when reading the Scripture became emphasized for all the faithful ó including women. By the Nineteenth century, this image also evoked Martha, the sister of Mary and Lazarus; the model of stewardship, hospitality, and household management, as women were expanding and redefining their roles in society with a new quality of self-respect. Right into our times, international aid workers in developing countries report that educating women ó teaching and encouraging them to read -- is the most directly tangible factor in creating visible economic improvement and community well-being in impoverished societies, a principle expressed in the organizing motto: **“Educate a woman and you educate a Nation.”**



Portrait of Florence Nightingale

Illustration from Eminent Women of the Age, 1868.

Collection of Jone Johnson Lewis, http://womenshistory.about.com/cs/quotes/a/qu_nightingale.htm

Two Quotations from the Writings of Florence Nightingale:

“And so is the world put back by the death of every one who has to sacrifice the development of his or her peculiar gifts (which were meant, not for selfish gratification, but for the improvement of that world) to conventionality.” (1852)

“For what is Mysticism? Is it not the attempt to draw near to God, not by rites or ceremonies, but by inward disposition? Is it not merely a hard word for 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within'? Heaven is neither a place nor a time.” (1873)

A Prayer for Health Care Providers:

“Merciful God, Your healing power is everywhere about us. Strengthen those who work among the sick; give them courage and confidence in all they do. Encourage them when their efforts seem futile or when death prevails. Increase their trust in your power even to overcome death and pain and crying. May they be thankful for every sign of health you give, and humble before the mystery of your healing grace; through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.”

And for Recovery from sickness:

“Almighty and Merciful God, you are the only source of health and healing; you alone can bring calmness and peace. Grant to us, your children, an awareness of your presence and a strong confidence in you. In our pain, our weariness, and our anxiety, surround us with your care, protect us by your loving might, and permit us once more to enjoy health and strength and peace; through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.”

From Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p.85.

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